

Speeches and messages: 1974 (1 of 2): Hawaii PTA, 48th annual state convention

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

Speeches, Speeches and messages, Box SP2, Folder 9

<https://hdl.handle.net/10524/71885>

Items in eVols are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

UHM Library Digital Collections Disclaimer and Copyright Information

news from

Senator DANIEL K. INOUYE

topic: SPEECH BY SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUYE AT HAWAII PTA, 48th ANNUAL STATE CONVENTION, Coral Ballroom, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii

date: October 26, 1974

release date: October 26, 1974 8:00 p.m.

Despite the fact that most of you will go to the polls in ten days to cast your vote either for or against me, I am not here tonight to tell you how often I have fought for improved educational aid to the State of Hawaii. I will not talk about Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I will not discuss my views on busing or the teachers' right to strike. My address is more concerned with questions about human values.

About twenty years ago tonight, a PTA audience was listening to an address by a prominent Hawaii speaker when a note was passed to him, momentarily interrupting his talk. The note said, "Call the Police Department." The man, although a bit flustered, kept his composure and finished his address entitled "The Relationship of Parent to Child."

After leaving the podium, he called the police and learned that his son had just been arrested, along with a few other youths, for burglary. The boy had been caught in a supermarket after closing hours. His father was astonished. He couldn't understand why his son, who had been given every material comfort he had ever asked for, should stoop to burglary.

I learned of this incident when I was a volunteer worker at Oahu prison during the mid-1950s. My duties entailed discussing legal rights with new prisoners. I met the speaker's son - a soft spoken, intelligent and alert young man of about 19 - who came up to me after one of my classes to ask a question. He certainly fit no one's conception of a criminal, so I asked him why he was there. "I'm here because I was a burglar."

We became friends of a sort as I took an interest in him. He told me of his parents, who were both successful educators. They lived the good life, had a lovely home, and the material trappings of financial stability.

I visited his mother and father and found them to be gracious, articulate and - on the surface - model parents. They told me of their confusion over their son's actions. They said they had always assumed they had a close relationship with him and that he was happy.

I, too, was confused, until one day the young man told me why he got himself into trouble. He said he wanted friends and the boys he was with the night he was arrested offered him friendship. He said he would have preferred his parents to be his friends but they didn't have time. Their careers seemed more important to them and he felt he was less important. They never had time to listen to his concerns or to applaud his successes or to give him affection and love. They were not aware of his problems because they were not aware of him. He said he was glad in a way that he had been caught by the police because it made his parents take notice of him for a change.

Unfortunately, this sad story is not unique. In many homes the fast pace of life now includes both parents. The increase in working wives and mothers has been significant in the past decade. The demanding work schedules bring both parents home at the end of the day - tired and often irritable. There is little time left for the children. Too often, others have been given the responsibility for raising children including the schools and day-care centers.

The fight to maintain a high standard of living or to improve one's material well-being, especially in the face of ever-increasing inflation, has put intense pressure on parents. The American dream has become a bit of a nightmare for too many who in the search for worldly possessions lose sight of important moral values. Too many times the family becomes less important than the job. Worries about life at one's place of work obscures sensitivity to life at home.

President Ford, in his first speech before the Congress a few days after he took office stated, "If we can make effective an earlier use of the moral and ethical wisdom of the centuries in today's complex society, we will prevent more crime and corruption than all the policemen and prosecutors ... can ever deter. This is a job that must begin at home, not in Washington."

The President couldn't be more correct. Children, by their nature, take whatever moral and ethical wisdom - both personal and professional - from the example set by parents. Morals and ethics - like charity - must begin at home. Our educational institutions cannot do the job alone and by the time any child reaches a correctional institution it may be too late to begin. Unfortunately, this simple truth is too easily forgotten and ignored in our hectic society. Parents oftentimes under

the pressure of events outside the family feel inadequate to the job of moral training or assume it is the responsibility of others.

For example, some have called on government to be responsible for religious instruction. The call for prayers in the schools in effect is a call for government to impose religious training. In my youth I learned that religion was a personal and private thing. Prayer was a very private time for individual contemplation. Perhaps I am mistaken, but I believe that daily spoken non-denominational prayer imposed on children by a teacher would have little or possibly a negative religious value.

Religious faith must be nurtured in the home. It must have a firm foundation in the daily example set by parents, if children are expected to practice religion throughout their young lives. Organized religion has been in a period of decline over the past decade. Yet we have seen **thousands of our young men and women, obviously in a serious search for religious faith and understanding, turn to questionable religious gurus.** The Maharaj Ji - a 17 year old guru, Reverend Moon - the Korean self-proclaimed Christ, and other spiritual "superstars" have gathered followers to them. This phenomena has occurred while followers of more orthodox religions have dwindled. It is a testament to the continual need for spiritual sustenance on the part of our young people. It is also a testament to the failure of many parents in passing on their religious beliefs to their own children.

The rise in crime is another serious and disturbing phenomenon. It is occurring in communities - large and small, rich and poor. There are many explanations for this - all of them with elements of truth. But there can be little question that the dissolution of the family must share the blame.

In the past 30 years, there has been a frightening change in values. In the early part of this century, crime was not a significant factor, even in the ghettos and poorer neighborhoods where economic want was always a ready motivation. Today shoplifting in suburban stores by children of affluent parents and even by parents often occurs. It happens even when the shoplifter has more than sufficient funds in his or her pocket to pay for the item quietly slipped into another pocket.

Cheating has become a way of life for too many of our citizens, even though it may be petty and minimal in its intention and effect. In some **houses strict honesty is required of the children, but rejected by the parents.** When parents ignore the speed limit, ignore no-parking signs, run through yellow and even red lights, or heap verbal abuse on other drivers while transporting their children around town, they are training their children not only to be dangerous drivers, but law violators as well.

When parents pad the damage estimates for an auto accident to get a little more out of the insurance company, or call in sick to the office to slip in an extra morning of golf or shopping, they are teaching their children that lying is acceptable.

As a politician who gained some prominence in the wake of the Watergate scandals, even though my role was on the side of the search for truth, I am especially concerned over the impact of those scandals on young people growing up to be future citizens. The involvement of the President of the United States in criminal activities and the subsequent pardon of that President even for well-intentioned reasons does not teach a fitting moral lesson to our youngsters. The apparent lesson is that there is a double standard of justice - one for the rich and powerful and one for the poor and powerless. Although we cannot erase the sequence of Watergate events, we need not encourage our children to accept public corruption as inevitable.

We must honestly explain the imperfections as well as the perfections of our governmental institutions and the human factor acting within those institutions for ill or good.

Throughout the Watergate affair I have been disturbed to hear it said that these things are done by all politicians. I know that is not true. Any parent who expresses that opinion to a child will be teaching an erroneous and dangerous moral lesson. If the child grows to believe that two wrongs do make a right, he or she may learn a sad lesson in future years when a boss or a policeman reject that excuse for wrongdoing.

Parents should honestly explain what they believe to have gone wrong in our country during recent years at the highest levels of government. I believe that President Ford made a serious mistake in pardoning Richard Nixon when he did. I also believe it was an honest mistake that had not been carefully thought through. This is the explanation I have given my son. It is an explanation that he will come to accept I hope. It is important that our children realize that our President and other leaders, just like their parents, can make honest mistakes. It is equally important for them to learn that elected officials' mistakes have been dishonest on occasion.

We cannot excuse official wrongdoing on the grounds that hidden evil forces in our system force decisions that are dishonest but unavoidable. We must teach our children to develop their own high code of conduct and to live by it.

If our children do not successfully learn to act honestly and ethically, can we blame the teacher? Is it really objectionable television programs that are to blame?

We must recognize that our children will have friends who have differing moral codes than we try to impart. They will see others ignore or defy the law. There will be social pressures on our children to ignore or defy the laws that governments impose and that we as parents impose. Whether or not they withstand these pressures will to a large degree depend on how often they have observed us - their parents - withstand similar pressures. For parents will influence and guide the moral and ethical development of a child to a greater degree than all other forces.

Obviously, none of us are perfect. I make no pretension to moral purity. As humans, our foibles sometimes get the better of us. I do believe, however, that the sincerity of our attempts to lead ethical lives is recognized by our children. Hypocrisy on our part is also quickly recognized.

It does little good to criticize your children for smoking pot, if you are a heavy drinker. Reciting a good night prayer at a child's bedside may have little impact on a child who sees a parent act without charity or compassion toward other humans.

I do not mean to sound preachy. I do mean to raise in each of our minds questions as to how can we best carry out our responsibilities as parents. I am well aware of the demands of time that a busy career makes on a parent. I am proud to be a United States Senator. My work is very rewarding and satisfying on a personal level. My career does, however, keep me away from my wife and son far more often than is my preference. Still, I have learned that it is the quality and the intensity of the time a parent spends with a child, rather than just the quantity. Being a busy professional and a good parent are not mutually exclusive undertakings. It is hard work to combine the two, but the rewards are extraordinary.

Your attendance tonight is a manifestation of your concern for your children's intellectual progress. May I wish you all success in your efforts to bring up educated, responsible and honorable children. The responsibility that has been placed on us in bringing children into an imperfect world to teach them to strive for moral and spiritual perfection is indeed a heavy one. The reward of watching a child grow toward maturity with soundness of character can make it all worthwhile.