

Speeches and messages: 1968 (1 of 2): Hawai‘i State Democratic Convention

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

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*Don Ruler after
7:00 PM*

SPEECH BY SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
Democratic Convention, Hawaii State
May 11, 1968

It is in the cause of popular freedom that I speak to you tonight. We are at a crossroads in our history. We can fail to understand, fail to confront and fail to treat responsibly our national problems only at grave peril. But this is not a moment of despair; it is not a moment of foreboding. It is a time of uncommon opportunity, one which cannot be blighted by dire and gloomy forecasts. Now is the moment when Americans must confront both the challenges and opportunities with energy and commitment.

Today we are engaged in the fight for popular freedom and justice at home. Here on the streets of our great cities there is a battle to be won for peace and for freedom. That battle must be fought to achieve opportunity for all Americans. Do we have the means and the will to win this fight? Can this society as now constituted solve this massive challenge? Streets have been turned to ashes, smoke has hung over many of our cities, and has even shrouded the dome of our Nation's Capitol. There is a voice of despair; an anguished cry from those who feel no hope. There is with some of our youth an impatience, a feeling that all authority, all institutions are part of a grand conspiracy; a conspiracy involving the great impersonal and interlocked institutions of American life -- the universities, the corporations, the military and the government. In protest, students sit-in the dean's offices and even paralyze great universities. There are marches on the Pentagon and on the offices of government officials. There are many who share a conspiratorial view of this society. They are the voices of doom, even of revolution. They see no hope. The dynamism of American life is lost to them.

It is not enough to accept history's soothing condolence that there is nothing new about troubled times. We must recognize and understand that there are those with legitimate grievances and we must distinguish them from the merchants of doom. Each individual must have an opportunity for direct participation in the affairs of his nation, for actual engagement and involvement. Each individual must have an equal opportunity to shape his own destiny and that of his nation. With constructive desire I am in sympathy. I can understand why many young Americans count a civil rights sit-in more relevant than a civil rights decision or a civil rights law passed by the Congress -- they can take part in that sit-in. I can understand why they count the Peace Corps more important than a foreign aid program; because they can be in the Peace Corps.

So we see boycotts and marches and sit-ins and freedom schools. We see complaints about the growing impersonality of the bureaucracy of government and of the universities. Now with the wave of discontent we are seeing frustration and bitterness. This frustration and bitterness can all too easily turn into destructive forces -- destructive of our national fabric.

All of us should remember and ponder the somber judgment of a great historian who, when writing the history of Rome declared: "When anyone able to command the streets for a few hours could impress on his subjects the legal stamp of the sovereign peoples' will -- then Rome had reached not the beginning but the end of popular freedom . . ."

In truth, it seems to some that the struggle is being lost, that we are a sick society, that our nation is destined to fall into anarchy. I cannot accept this and you should not accept it. We are not a nation doomed. We are, rather, coming to grips with the obstacles that impede the achievement of true social justice and opportunity. We are in the midst of change that the system has generated, change which is necessary to a dynamic, great nation. I do not for the moment mean to say that we have conquered all; that we have found for ourselves the best of all possible solutions to any of our problems, either now and for the future. I do say that improvement can come within the framework of our constitution; of our normal democratic processes of election and representation.

I reject the notion that all direct action must be prohibited.

I also reject the notion that anybody has the right to demand unconditional compliance with his desires within or without the law.

I reject the notion that person or property can be seized and destroyed.

I reject the notion that this nation must tolerate stormtrooper activity in the streets.

I reject all of these things because of my belief that the democratic process can best cure whatever ills our society confronts.

More than anything else I reject the notion that any American should hang his head in despair. Those who do so have given up. They are the ones who, in a sense, have become the enemies of their society -- for they do nothing to improve it. They only carp and complain.

We have done much but we must do more. We should glory in working for a better nation. We should roll up our sleeves and each one of us ask again, what can I truly do for my country? What can I do to meet all of my country's challenges? These challenges are not simple. They cannot be met by the Federal Government alone. There is enough for all of us to do, and there is something that each of us can do.

We must all be concerned with economic prosperity and the availability of jobs. We must assure that every child can start school on an equal footing with his classmates and seek as much education as he can absorb and go as far as his talent will take him. Our national

resources for health have grown but this growth has not matched an increasing national aspiration for better health and better medical care for every person. We must work to assure that there is adequate housing for all our citizens, for the very basis of man's condition is his home. It is that home where he can find promise and peace. In the broader sense, society will never be what it can be until we have improved the life in our cities. And the core of this problem is people and the life they lead. We must build not just more housing units but better neighborhoods. We must construct better schools to better educate our children. We must not only raise income, but create beauty and find better ways and means to prevent the poisoning of our environment. And these problems themselves must be understood as they impinge on each person, young and old. Older citizens of our society must be looked upon not as a burden. They must have opportunity to enrich their lives and as a result the lives of all of us. We must make new opportunities for the poor -- job opportunities, education for the young, and the chance to join in cooperative self-help agencies are all needed to improve the lives of the poor. We must not forget that the poor do not all live in the cities. Increased farm productivity has, paradoxically left many rural people with low incomes. This massive upheaval has brought migration to the cities along with wide-spread rural poverty. And there are other problems. The consumer must be assured that he or she gets a fair and honest exchange for his or her hard earned dollar.

These are just a few of the many challenges which must be met -- and are being met -- but we know that they cannot be met through lawlessness or through violence. Neither can the situation be helped through demands for unconditional surrender by organized society. If we are to achieve, if we are to attain social justice, we must agree with President Johnson's observation that "public order is the first job of government." For the past decade the national crime rate has been rising. \$4 billion is lost each year through crime. We have neglected our system of law enforcement and criminal justice. But while we have neglected it in the past, we are not doing so now. The National Crime Commission, established by President Johnson in 1965, has issued a report which was a milestone and has established procedures and practices for Federal, state and local governments. In 1967 over 33,000 indictments were brought, reflecting the largest number of criminal suits in a decade. The number of attorneys in the Organized Crime Section of the Department of Justice has been increased to an all time high. A new Federal Judicial Center has been established to revitalize and modernize the federal court system. There has been assistance to federal and local law enforcement officials. While approaching these problems directly there has been a parallel and unprecedented effort to strike at the sources which breed crime. The fight against crime is essentially a local matter. Our main areas of concern must be police equipment and training, higher salaries for law enforcement personnel, better control of narcotics and drugs, control of juvenile delinquency, improved correctional institutions and better methods of dealing with riots. Those who despair ignore the efforts in these areas.

But law and order is not an end in itself. Law and order provides only the environment, the framework, which makes other programs possible. For instance, we know all too well that segregation and discrimination are both illegal and immoral. We have come to understand that unemployment and poverty are hand-maidens of racism and lead to the blight we find in so many of our urban communities.

In the area of civil rights, the Congress, expressing the will of our people, has acted. We now have on our books five basic and vital pieces of legislation. We have the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965 and 1968. As a direct result of this legislation, Negroes in the South have been able to register. Negro registration has increased 118% since 1964. Negroes are running and being elected to municipal and state offices for the first time since the Reconstruction period. But with these advances has come a rising tide of expectation. Hopes crushed by lack of opportunity are finding a new impatience. And this impatience is not unreasonable, for laws may be changed but the social fabric of a nation is not reweven so rapidly. Until equality is attained, in fact, we will continue to suffer the agony of our social revolution.

The important point we must all appreciate is that our social revolution was born within our system of government. There may have been birth pains, and there will be growth pains, but these presage the maturing of full and meaningful equality among all Americans.

I stand before you with the pride of an American who is concerned about the quality of life of our people. I stand before you and say that this country must have safe streets in our cities -- and we will; that we must have law and order -- and we will. Most of all, we must have social justice -- and we will.

We will have these things because our nation is committed to self-improvement. We are not a sick, uncaring, heartless society neglecting its people. For the past four years our Federal Government has spent twice as much for education than was spent in the previous 100 years. As a direct result, 9 million deprived children, in 18,000 school districts, in all fifty states, are receiving special educational enrichment programs and over 1 million students are now receiving higher education.

Our Medicare and Medicaid programs, enacted in 1965, are providing older Americans with health care -- 19 1/2 million are enrolled in Medicare alone. Federal expenditures in 1968 for federal health programs will be nearly five times what they were in 1960.

Earlier I mentioned the blight of our cities and the urban and rural poverty which contributes to it, but do you realize that four years ago there was no Poverty Program? That the Office of Economic Opportunity was established only in 1964 and received funds for the first time in 1965? At that time 35 million Americans lived in poverty and welfare programs helped the poor to survive but offered no hope of escape. Since 1964 six million people have been lifted from the state of poverty through the assistance of some 40 different programs. The poor now have a better chance to find decent jobs and homes and health care and education for their children. Do you realize that the federal commitment for the conquest is now \$27.7 billion, more than double that of 1964? But even here we have an unfinished agenda. Let there be no mistake about it. Despite the heartening progress that has been made, some 29 million Americans still live in poverty, among whom are 900,000 poor teenagers in danger of becoming dropouts from society. Infant mortality rates for the poor are double that of the national average and in ghettos seven times as high. So, much more is needed and this administration has proposed to meet these needs. They will be met by authorizing increases in the poverty program, by changes in the Housing and Urban Development Act, and through a massive new program spearheaded by the National Alliance of Businessmen. Jobs and training will be provided for 500,000 hard core unemployed over the next three years.

I could go on program by program and problem by problem to show that this country is acting to fulfill its responsibilities. Don't let anyone confuse you about that. Of course, we have problems. But we know what they are. We will find the answers and we will take the necessary action.

All of us have the great opportunity to build a stronger America with full and equal opportunity for all. We can have a nation of citizens with self-respect and self-reliance regardless of race, creed or color.

There are some who would say that we cannot afford all these programs but they are of the same breed as those who said we couldn't afford Social Security in 1935; that we couldn't afford minimum wage legislation in 1938. They were wrong then and they are wrong today. We can afford to build the America we want. What we cannot afford is hungry children, old people denied proper medical care. We cannot afford inadequate schools, poorly housed families, denial of job opportunities. We cannot afford to deny the promise of the American dream. America was not built by the "Cannot-Afford-Its." It was built by those who dared to dream and those willing to back up their dreams with hard work. Sure, we can do more and we will do more. But, my friends, don't be deceived by those who carry the simplistic answers to whatever problems come up at home or abroad. We must recognize the complexity of the problems we confront and we must keep working. I stand with the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said: "I refuse

to believe that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright day of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality". Peace and brotherhood can be ours if we will have the courage, have the strength, have the patience and the wisdom to achieve it. We can achieve it if we act with the boldness that is America.

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