

# Speeches and messages: 1974 (1 of 2): [Conserva

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

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SPEECH BY SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE TO THE INTERNATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF GAME, FISH AND CONSERVATION COMMISSIONERS  
64th ANNUAL CONVENTION, SHERATON WAIKIKI HOTEL, HONOLULU  
HAWAII

SEPTEMBER 12, 1974

10:00 A.M.

Today the state bird of Hawaii, the Nene Goose, is no longer on the endangered species list. This fortunate development was the result of the dedicated efforts of many concerned citizens such as yourselves, and to a special appropriations from the United States Congress which amounted to almost one thousand dollars per bird.

I still very vividly remember during a pause in our deliberations, chatting with one of my fellow Senators on the Appropriations Committee who put it to me quite bluntly: "What was so damn important about saving a goose?"

Why should the federal government spend one thousand dollars for a bird that none of his constituents would ever see nor hear? Why should we continue to dole out other precious funds to save the shark, the whale, or a pelican? What good are they really? Could we eat them? Did they provide jobs or shelter? Would anyone really miss them? It saddens me greatly to note that these questions are undoubtedly an accurate reflection of the sentiments of a great many Americans--including some of my colleagues.

As one who sits in the United States Senate, and as one who must pass judgment on these issue, I can assure you that these are the practical day-to-day questions we must face every year. And, to be perfectly frank with you, those of you in this audience who sincerely believe that we must continue our efforts to preserve such endangered species as the "Alala", the "Akepa" or the "Apapane" unfortunately have not yet come forth with very convincing answer to these very fundamental questions. An unpleasant fact of life is that those funds, which were so necessary to the preservation of the Nene Goose were appropriated because they were important to Governor Burns and the Hawaii Congressional delegation and we were willing to bargain hard for them. In order to save the Nene Goose we had to be willing to support another project that was equally important to one of our colleagues, but which in a similar vein was of little interest to our constituents in Hawaii. This may not sound very nice, but I can assure you that is one of the realities in our political system.

And though the reality may strike many of us as being misguided it is not a misguidedness afflicting only the legislator of the 1970's. In fact, we would do well to note exactly how singular is an appropriation like that involving the Nene Goose. Although our history seems to offer many instances in which altruistic men--moved by their awe of nature and concern for endangered species--acted to preserve their natural environment, the fact is that their motivations were almost never as pure as we would like to believe. In 1872, when Yellowstone National Park was created, Congress approved the creation not because they wished to save Yellowstone's splendor, but because they saw its long-term potential as a money-making tourist attraction. Similarly, laws passed earlier in this century to protect various birds and animals have more often been born of mercenary than of beneficent motives. Traditionally, the way to get legislation protecting endangered species has been to convince Congress of the gaming or marketing potential of those species.

I offer you these observations so that you may see that truly altruistic bills like the Endangered Species Act of 1973--which protects game and non-game animals alike with no material gain in mind--are rare and recent inventions. They represent a development which goes against the grain of political history. And if it is to be a sustained development, a great deal of effort must be expended to persuade those traditionalists who can only see the worth of nature in the money that is to be squeezed out of it.

Accordingly, if you want to be truly effective in your efforts to save our precious heritage, you must begin now by making the effort to convince the uninformed and the uninitiated, and not waste your precious efforts with the already baptized. I realize full well that this is no easy task, but it must be done.

Today, I would like to share with you some of my own personal thoughts concerning our steadily declining natural heritage. Every morning, my wife, son and I begin our day out in the back yard feeding the birds and squirrels and noticing what changes have occurred during the night. We walk among the trees, smell the slowly decaying bark, and listen to the sounds of our surroundings. It truly is a beautiful way to start the day.

I hope someday to also be able to stand with my grandson and look once again over Lahaina's blue waters and watch the whales slowly passing by; to hike through Waipio Valley and eat the fresh breadfruit.

This personal involvement with our natural surroundings is one of my most enjoyable links with my cultural and spiritual heritage. It is one of the most meaningful events in my day, and yet, I am very sad to say that for many, these experiences are steadily passing by and may be never again recovered.

Many, if not all, of our society's decisions today are made by very dedicated and very practical minded bureaucrats. These men and women are deeply concerned about how we will provide sufficient jobs, food, and shelter for all members of our society. Their aims are commendable, but I am afraid that in being so task-oriented, so practical minded, that they have lost their appreciation for some of the finer meanings in life. They ask, "How much will this cost? Can we afford this?" And not, "How will we replace the fallen Koatree?" Their perfectly planned communities will be beautiful to behold and may be even pleasant to live in. Yet, I would suggest perhaps a bit dull, Can you imagine living in an environment with perfectly controlled weather conditions, with no storms or rainfalls to worry about. NO adversity. Fully programmed. What would give meaning to our lives?

How nice it would be if we had been able to preserve several types of dinosaurs on a far out island where man had never set foot. What if we could set anchor a couple of thousand yards off shore and share these creatures with our sons and daughters. Hear their cries, watch them interact, smell them. Perhaps such an island must remain a fantasy forever, but our legends tell that when the great gods created the islands of Hawaii their creations were at least as wondrous and exotic as any we might fantasize today. The seas were filled with fish of all sizes, the air with birds of all colors. These legends have great meaning for many of us who have grown up in Hawaii, and perhaps they help us to respect the whole of Hawaii's natural beauty for its own sake. For us the liwi bird is worth saving because it is part of that natural beauty and not because it at one time made good eating or good sport.

Of course, it would be a sad thing if concern for Hawaiian species were restricted to only those who have lived here. But fortunately, people can be made to appreciate our blessings through the work of dedicated advocates like you. Naturally, the task requires a vast amount of energy, but the reward will be considerable, for we will be leaving our children a great gift--a way to appreciate their past in their present.

Hopefully, someday we will be able to leave such a heritage to our children, but only if you as concerned experts, those us in the Congress who care, and all of our constituency work together to give to preserving our natural heritage the highest of priorities.