

# Speeches and messages: 1973-1974: Campbell High School commencement

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

Speeches, Speeches and messages, Box SP2, Folder 8

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FOR RELEASE: Speech by Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Saturday, June 2, 1973  
5:00 PM, James Campbell High School, Ewa Beach, Hawaii

Ever since the "Watergate" scandal hit the big time and became the subject of such great press and television attention, many people have been expressing their deep concern over what effect it may have on our nation. They have stated their concern that we may be unable to meet our responsibilities at home and abroad because of the crisis in our federal establishment. They have said in despair that our government may be unable to function in this period of crisis.

Everything from the sagging stock market at home to the rise in the price of gold in the international market place has been blamed on Watergate. Although I do not dispute that psychological factors may have some relevance in tracing the ups and downs of individual investment decisions I do dispute that Watergate deserves to be so blamed.

If we take a backward look at our recent history I believe we find reason for greater optimism. The 1960's was the decade of division-- a period of almost unprecedented turmoil.

During those years race was pitted against race--whites against blacks -- in almost every part of our land.

The long hairs were pitted against the short hairs--the intellectuals against the hard hats, the young against the old.

The crowded center city inhabitants were rioting against the rest of the land.

The man in uniform was subjected to scornful assault by his more fortunate brethren on the university campus--ROTC centers were burned and public officials were pelted.

As we moved into the early seventies we still had division over many important issues. Welfare, busing, acid, pot, --these and others seemed paramount issues in our lives.

I would suggest however, that today we are united as seldom before. Watergate has drawn us together. We have found a common ground--a common concern.

Some may argue that Watergate has merely pushed our divisions off the front page--that other disputes still smolder just below the surface. I doubt that.

The greatest division afflicting our society over the past decade has been the war in Southeast Asia. American involvement in that war is now drawing to an end. While bombing still continues over Cambodia, I am confident that this too shall soon be halted.

American troops are no longer dying on Asian battlefields. American prisoners no longer languish in North Vietnamese prison compounds. The war issue has subsided. It no longer divides our people as it did throughout that longest war in our nation's history.

Our other divisions have also subsided. This does not mean that all our problems have been resolved but rather that they are being confronted within a more peaceful framework. The language is less intense. The rhetoric is less inflammatory.

Problems of race still beset us but we no longer fight over whether schools shall be integrated but rather over how much integration and how it shall be achieved. We no longer struggle over the right of all to participate in the economic life of our nation on an equal basis but rather over the means by which that equality can be more fully achieved.

Parents and principals no longer get "up tight" over the length of teenagers' hair or the clothes the young boy or girl chooses to wear or not to wear. We have learned to live with a greater degree of diversity and freedom than many thought possible, just a few short years ago. We have found that a family does not have to be molded in conformity to have the strength of unity.

Ours is a diverse nation, with a diverse people but with a renewed unity of purpose.

In a strange way the crisis which is Watergate has provided us with that renewed unity--a unity which springs from our common concern for the future of our democratic government.

The Chinese characters for "crisis" are two: the one is danger-- the other is opportunity. I believe we can already perceive that opportunity may be the more enduring aspect of this current crisis.

Watergate provides us with the opportunity to halt the drift towards an ever greater reliance on executive power.

Ever since the days of Franklin Roosevelt we have been granting more and more power to one man--the President, and to those who serve him alone. We have been lodging immense powers in the chief executive with but little thought for their possible misuse. We have been building the powers of the presidency, sometimes out of our impatient desire to find quick and easy solutions to old and stubborn problems.

We in the legislative branch, cannot avoid responsibility for our easy assent to the thirst for executive power.

If the problem seemed too complex for easy resolution we said, "let the President decide." If the decisions are likely to prove controversial we said, "let the President take the heat." Some were willing to vote money for every pressure group which came to town while the executive was faced with the responsibility for saying no--or for borrowing to make up the deficit.

One of the gains which I see on the horizon beyond Watergate is a revitalization of the legislative branch of government and a restoration of our historic and constitutional balance of power.

Another problem which may be ripe for solution is in the area of electoral reform. Watergate, and all that it is coming to signify, is not just another election conducted as usual except that the perpetrators got caught. Rather, it is a graphic example of where our loose election laws and practices can lead us. It is crass manipulation of our electoral process.

Nevertheless, all of us in politics have become aware of the

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negation of our vaunted reliance on the ballot box by our increasing reliance on the "money box" as the road to election victory.

The public display of the pernicious role of big money in elections which will emerge through our Watergate hearings in the months ahead may finally galvanize the forces of reform to do something really effective about campaign financing and campaign spending limits. I certainly hope so. The time is long overdue.

And I want to emphasize that democracy, if it is to survive, can not grant to the few who are wealthy unique power over the electoral process or the decisions of government.

I have a faith that this twentieth century tragedy which so besmirched our elections in 1972, will direct our attention back to the basic strengths of our constitution. I believe that we will generate a renewed examination of that historic document. I hope as a consequence that on the 200th anniversary of our birth as a nation, we will have reason to rejoice in the reaffirmation of our faith in that basic document of our government.

We are already realizing a renewed faith in the guarantees of the first amendment--the right of free speech and a free press. While nations abroad look with great interest and some concern at the unfolding drama they now witness, they also marvel at a system in which the most powerful Chief of State, of the most powerful nation on earth, can be brought to accountability by a press beyond his control, a judicial system not subject to his every manipulation and a legislature not prostrate before him.

While I would caution against a press getting carried away with its own self-righteousness, and I express concern over the apparent influence exercised successfully over many in the so-called independent regulatory agencies and over some judicial officers, and while I take no solace from the many ineffective legislative efforts to our excessive executive power, progress is apparent and a renewed faith in the future of constitutional government is justified.

Yet another lesson of Watergate will be to place us on guard against unreasonable claims for government secrecy. With cries of "national security" becoming the ever present but hollow justification for the label of "secret," that label has replaced patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels.

The lessons of Watergate should make us doubly vigilant against all future efforts to establish secret police organizations within our government. The opportunities for their abuse should now be most apparent and the need to keep such forces responsive to the other branches and instruments of government should be clear for all to see.

Our nation's security is distinguishable from the retention of power by those in the White House. Our national security is truly diminished by any tampering with the free exercise of the elective franchise by each citizen in a democracy.

Though these times may appear dark and threatening, they do present us with a rare opportunity. The present is but prologue, not just for you, but for our nation. The unity which is born out of our common concern can be the basis for a reaffirmation of faith in free speech, a free press, and a government of a free people.

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