University of Hawaii at Manoa **Hamilton Library**

eVols Repository **https://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu**

Box SP02 Box SP2, Folder 03

Speeches and messages: 1965-1967: Excerpts of speech by Governor Ronald Reagan

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
Speeches, Speeches and messages, Box SP2, Folder 3
https://hdl.handle.net/10524/71605

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

UHM Library Digital Collections Disclaimer and Copyright Information

742-177

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Sacramento, California
Contact: Paul Beck
445-4571 5.10.68

RELEASE: Sunday, May 12, 1968
A.M.'s

EXCERPTS OF SPEECH BY GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN
Western Governors' Conference
Ilikai Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii
May 11, 1968

Much of our future here in the Pacific will surely be determined by the outcome of the peace talks underway now in Paris between our nation's representatives and those of North Vietnam.

The future is bright if we hold fast to our pledge to keep South Vietnam free. But we face a humiliating retreat from the shores of all the Western Pacific, with a fatal dimming of our dreams and prospects, if we lose at the bargaining table what American fighting men have fought for and preserved with their blood.

It is tempting to measure the Vietnam War as a local affair concerned with abstract issues. To play such a game is to play a very dangerous-Communist game. A game in which South Vietnam is not the goal at all, indeed is only one step toward the goal sought by our opponents in Moscow, Peking and Hanoi. For them, victory is the elimination of American power and influence from the Asian continent and from the islands of the Western Pacific. Those are the stakes they play for in Paris.

And as we learned in Korea, they view negotiations as just another means of winning what they failed to win by force of arms. Thus the idea is to negotiate from strength, not weakness, and this lends credence to the reports they have infiltrated at least 100,000 men into South Vietnam since the first announcement of a bombing pause

In fact, one wonders if that billion dollar electronic fence McNamara ordered built along the demilitarized zone to keep out the Communists shouldn't properly be considered a part of the federal highway program -- there is so much enemy traffic using it as a thoroughfare these days.

Hawaii is one of the farthest outposts of America's defenses. It is the home of many brave units which have fought in Vietnam. And it is a rest and relaxation area for those young men who continue to fight in defense of our freedom.

This makes Honolulu and this occasion a fitting time and place for us Western Republicans to retrace the course of this strange war,

to ask why we are there if it is not in our national interest to be there, and if it is in our national interest, why we are so empty of results.

It is plain that we will not get these answers from Washington, where a man who has tired of the tasks of the presidency has tacitly admitted that he is no longer willing or able to press the battle through to victory. Let us give the President our forbearance and understanding and, above all, arm him in these negotiations with the backing of a resolute and united people.

But unity does not mean that we have to shut our eyes to yesterday's failures or place a blind faith in the wisdom and tenacity of tomorrow's negotiators. As matters stand, the United States has failed in Vietnam.

Not long ago, President Johnson was quoted as saying that he did not propose to be the first American president to lose a war.

Well, he has lost it in political terms, lost it in moral terms, and lost it in the hearts and minds of his countryman. He has lost it everywhere except in the one place where wars are really decided--on the battlefield itself. Yet, he is unable to convince his countrymen of that.

General Harold Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, said recently that there was no justification for the handwringing and breast-beating which so many of our politicians and commentators indulged in after the Communists launched the Tet offensive. Our forces stood fast. So did the South Vietnamese. It was the Communist attackers who took the staggering losses, who broke at the end and pulled back. Why did this message never get through to us? "Why", General Johnson has asked, "why here at home have we suffered a smashing, catastrophic, psychological defeat--/a defeat which we imposed on ourselves?"

Why, with all the power and wealth and human resources at the American command, have we not been able to end this war on reasonable and honorable terms? Could it be that we have listened too closely to the new isolationists, to the voices of defeat and retreat shouting down those who defend our position in Vietnam and our duty to be there?

That was a sensible arrangement. It is the very one we are trying to get back to. Whatever happened to the first one? It is a long story--a story with many different sides. But one reason for the collapse--a reason few in Washington wish to remember--has finally been brought into view by Ambassador Nolting. It is that the overthrow of the Diem government and the assassination of Diem himself were engineered by Vietnamese generals "encouraged by the U.S. government." The policymakers in Washington were led to an action "unjust to an honorable ally and irresponsible to the American people."

With Diem's death vanished the last genuinely unifying personality in all South Vietnam. A Communist journalist quoted a Viet Cong official as saying, "We could not have imagined that the United States would be so stupid as to pull the rug from under Diem."

Three weeks after Diem was assassinated, it fell on President Johnson to ward off the catastrophic consequences of the earlier blunders No less than nine different governments followed one after another in Saigon during the next three years. The choice before the President, as Communist power flowed into the vacuum, was to cut and run or stand and fight.

The President chose to fight, and for this let us hail him as a man of courage. Where we can and should fault him is in becoming caught up, against all military / advice, in a massive land war on the Asian mainland, trying to fight a limited war, cheaply, without the emphasis to win, and without reordering the national priorities.

He never told us, he may not even have realized, how important the test would prove be.

Now the day of reckoning has come. The cost of a limited war has already wildly exceeded what any sensible win strategy would have cost. The general welfare is being menaced by a fresh onset of inflation; interest rates are at their highest levels since reconstruction; the dollar is mistrusted across the face of the earth; our cities are sick with civil strife and riots; and Lyndon Johnson has found it expedient to step down for the simple reason that he has lost his zest for the struggle and wasted the assets for keeping the Great Society going.

There are better roads we might have chosen to an honorable peace. But this does not mean we should now give in to Ho Chi Minh in Paris. On the contrary, we must not give in. Whatever the cost, the United States must honor its pledge to uphold the sovereignty and independence of South Vietnam. And if this cannot be done at the negotiating table, then we must return to the fighting--but determined to use whatever power and technology we have at our command to end the war and make sure the aggression really stops.

On the contrary, if the Communists are sincere in seeking peace, they should be willing to abide by the Geneva agreements of 1954, which ended the French phase of this long war. Those agreements, in which the Soviet Union and Red China concurred, certified the right of South Vietnam, along with Laos and Cambodia, to make its own way within a framework of neutrality. If the Communist partners are now willing to return to that legal basis, then we could all say, fine, and move on to the more creative work that awaits us all in the vast Pacific basin--~~the~~ trade, education, the growing of food, the stamping out of disease, the furthering of industry and communications. But if the enemy is bent on exploiting the talks in order to leave the rest of South East Asia vulnerable to his continuing agression, then let us without delay force him into the open so that no one will be in doubt about what is at stake there and who is at fault.

A young American not many years ago said something about what America stood for; something about Americans wanting the rest of the world to know that we were willing to pay any price, bear any burden, to make what we stand for endure and prevail. There was no uncertain sound to the trumpet of John Kennedy's Inaugural speech. The pity is that those who inherited the power and responsibility from him, including many of his own lieutenants, no longer hear that trumpet or recognize its grand notes.

They have failed miserably. It is time to turn them out.

# # #

(NOTE: Since Governor Reagan speaks from notes, there may be additions to, or changes in, the above. However, Governor Reagan will stand by the above quotes.)