

Chronological: Society of Plastic Institute, Honolulu

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
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news from

Senator DANIEL K. INOUE

topic: SPEECH TO THE SOCIETY OF THE PLASTICS INSTITUTE
Ilikai Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii

date: May 15, 1981 Noon

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I believe that I have spent as much time selecting a subject for today's speech as I have in preparing the speech itself. There is so much to talk about these days.

The Reagan budget -- that alone could be split into at least ten sections, each of which could be the subject of a major address. There are also a variety of non-budget issues -- abortion, gun control, prayer in the schools -- all interesting and all controversial. I could also have spoken on foreign policy under the Reagan Administration, the lifting of the grain embargo, our involvement in El Salvador and the prospects for SALT II.

After much deliberation, I have decided to share with you some of my thoughts on the national Democratic Party -- its present status, its proper role and its future. I have not formally addressed this question since the 1980 election, and I believe that the time has come for me to speak out on this issue.

The outcome of the 1980 Presidential race was no surprise. In fact, I believe that most Congressional leaders were predicting and anticipating the election of Ronald Reagan. There were, however, a few surprises in that race. First, no one anticipated the wide margin. Secondly, although we were prepared to lose a few southern states, we were not prepared to lose every southern state except Georgia. It has become increasingly obvious that the so-called Democratic coalition is a thing of the past. The biggest surprise, however, was the Democratic loss of the Senate. No one, including the Republican leadership of the Senate, anticipated the November results. I know that there are a few Democrats who are still shell-shocked by the results, who still find it difficult to refer to Senator Byrd as the minority leader and who still sometimes call Howard Baker the minority leader.

The loss of the Senate Democratic majority of 1980 was no ordinary loss; it was a major loss. Among those who were defeated were some of the best-known names in the Senate -- the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee Frank Church, the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee Warren Magnuson, the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Birch Bayh, the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee Herman Talmadge, as well as John Culver, Gaylord Nelson and George McGovern. Even on the Republican side there were losses such as Jack Javits in New York.

The first caucus of the new Senate Democratic minority had the atmosphere of a wake. The favorite parlour game in Washington after the November election was figuring out who or what should be blamed or credited for the loss. There were plenty of convenient targets -- Jimmy Carter, NCPAC, the Moral Majority, the Iranian hostage crisis, and so on.

Only a very few had the courage to say that maybe we Democrats were just not reading the pulse of the country correctly. Most are still looking for others to blame, and many now blame the Senate Democratic leadership. The latest subject at Washington cocktail parties is who will replace Robert Byrd as the leader of the Senate Democrats.

There is no question that these are difficult times for Democrats in the Senate. We were not prepared for the new role which has been thrust upon us. And we did not anticipate the personal popularity of the new President, a popularity which has only increased in recent days.

But we Senate Democrats are beginning to respond. In a perhaps plodding manner, similar to an infant taking that first step, we are responding to the challenge. I believe that the tone and style of Robert Byrd's leadership have been appropriate for this period and I commend him for his efforts.

We all know, however, that the big test is yet to come. After all, President Reagan has just been in office for a little over a hundred days. Howard Baker has been majority leader for only four months. And the Democrats have even begun to talk about retaking the Senate in 1982, a prospect I find somewhat overly optimistic.

In our plans to again assume the leadership of the Senate, a major concern has become the raising of sufficient funds to match the Republicans dollar-for-dollar in the next campaign. This we will not be able to do, and it is wishful thinking to imagine that we ever could. We have never done so in the past and we won't in 1982.

The people that we have always sought to represent do not have the financial resources to enable us to compete. And, if we abandon our constituents or principles simply to search for deeper pockets, we will not deserve to be the majority. Our strength has always been people -- willing hands rather than mass mailings, committed individuals rather than political action committees. That strength is still there, if we can demonstrate that we deserve those efforts.

And we will deserve those efforts only if we can demonstrate the capacity to lead from our position in the minority. We are getting a lot of advice these days on that subject -- on how to conduct ourselves as a minority.

Some believe that we should give Ronald Reagan everything he has asked for because he has a mandate from the people. It is my firm conviction, however, that none of us in the Senate were elected to be rubber stamps for any President, whether you are talking about Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt or Eisenhower. No President has ever been or will be infallible. And no President in the past has ever expected Congress to approve 100 percent of his legislative package. That master politician, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was pleased with 75 percent in a Congress controlled by Democrats. Even Dwight Eisenhower with his unsurpassed personal popularity would have been pleased with 75 percent. And those of you who know history know that he never got 75 percent of what he asked for.

Others suggest that we oppose the President at every turn, that we set up roadblocks against the President's programs similar to those which have been set up by some Republicans against Democratic Presidents in the past.

If we follow either of these courses, we deserve to be in the minority for many years to come.

The people of the United States expect us to support President Reagan when his program is the better program, when it is in the best national interest to approve that program. And the people expect us to oppose those programs when they are not in the best interests of the nation. Given the personal popularity of the President, this task will require courage on our part.

Having been a politician for 27 years, I am aware of the dreadful fear that election campaigns can bring to a candidate. I believe that to a politician, the fear of losing an election is often second only to the fear of death.

And it is because of this fear that I have had to sadly watch Democrats, with less than an hour of debate, start to bury programs which have been developed, nurtured and refined for as long as 30 years. We seem prepared to abandon programs to provide special aid to economically depressed areas such as Appalachia, to abandon programs to explore alternate sources of energy and programs to develop the resources of the oceans. We seem ready to severely reduce our commitment to equal justice for all citizens and to severely restrict the government's role as a protector of the consumer. And we do this all with the sweeping assumption that the states will take over and do the job or that the private sector is ready to assume this burden.

Yes, I do believe that there was a mandate given to the Republican President last fall. It was a mandate consisting of the following parts: the country wanted a new President; the country wanted us to adopt some simple rules of housekeeping, like a balanced budget; and the country wanted a strong America, an America strong enough to stay out of war. There may also have been a mandate to form a more conservative view of federal involvement in the nation's affairs, though I must say that I do not believe that the country anointed certain of the right-wing spokesmen who now claim that they, rather than President Reagan, have that mandate.

I do not, however, believe that the mandate included the destruction of the programs that I listed above.

I do not believe that the mandate included risking war in El Salvador.

I do not believe that the mandate included reducing our commitment to health research, or to disease prevention and cure.

I do not believe that the mandate included reducing support for artistic and cultural activities, since it has always been the great civilizations of the world which have given support to such activities.

I do not believe that the mandate included reducing what little our government does to encourage exports by such means as the Export-Import Bank,

I do not believe that the mandate included reducing our already insufficient veterans programs, or that it included reducing the role of government institutions in supporting the housing needs of our citizens.

And I cannot believe that the mandate included the forsaking of the aged, the ill or the young.

The next six months should determine whether the Democrats will become a lasting minority or whether the November 1980 results were simply the push we needed to get our Party's house in order. We have made mistakes, we have not been critical enough of our own programs, and we have ignored the warning signs of programs that have outlived their purpose.

I believe that we Democrats must, however, keep alive the words of my late colleague, Senator Hubert Humphrey, who said, "The morality of this nation will be determined by how well we care for our fellow citizens in the sunrise of life, in the sunset of life, and in all of the shadows of life."

Democrats will assist in the critical review of the federal government that is currently underway, but we shall always insist on the moral commitment that Hubert Humphrey so eloquently described. The United States is the most compassionate, most people-oriented nation in the world. This is our source of pride and it is our source of strength.

I believe that the people of this nation will support us in preserving and maintaining this moral commitment.

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DRAFT SPEECH TO THE SOCIETY OF THE PLASTICS INDUSTRY Institute
Noon, May 15, 1981, Illica Hotel

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