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Senator Hubert H. Humphrey
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EXCERPTS FROM SPEECH BY
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NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION,
NATIONAL EMERGENCY CIVIL RIGHTS MOBILIZATION, WASHINGTON, JAN. 15, 1950.

Civil rights in America is on the march. This meeting is proof of that fact, because you who represent millions of Americans all over the United States are demonstrating by your presence the wish of the American people to enact into law the principles of brotherhood and human equality which democracy stands for.

All over this land the people of America, in their churches, in their trade unions, in their fraternal organizations, in their farm coops, through their city and state FEPC laws and anti-discrimination laws, are telling the Congress of the United States: "Enact civil rights legislation." They are telling the nations of the world: "We, the people of America, believe in the democratic principles we profess. We, the people of America, call upon our Congress to carry out the will of the electorate." The responsibility of American government is to legislate for the people, not to consolidate the entrenched power of the minority by political manipulation of parliamentary rules.

The most vital issue facing the American Congress today is that of civil rights. The preservation of human rights is the paramount issue of our generation. The extension and the guarantee of human rights and civil rights is the core of our struggle with the totalitarian forces. The denial of human liberty, the betrayal of democratic ideals,

is the sin and the crime of Communism and other totalitarian doctrines. This great nation of ours has poured out billions of dollars of the people's money in a struggle against the aggression of Communist ideology. We are sapping the economic strength of our economy to maintain a powerful military establishment because of the threat of Communist aggression. We live in a psychosis of fear because of the evil and ruthlessness of the totalitarian power.

How blind can we be? Are we incapable of seeing that neither Communism nor Fascism can be stopped by the mere demonstration of military power and financial resources? Our secret weapon in this great struggle is the fulfillment of the democratic ideal of human equality. This ideal is embodied in political form in the civil rights proposals which are now before the Congress of the United States.

The issue of civil rights penetrates our foreign policy and adulterates our domestic policy. It penetrates our foreign policy because by our failure to guarantee basic civil liberties to all peoples, regardless of race, color or creed, we are denying acceptance of the principles of human equality.

The underprivileged long-exploited peoples of Asia and Africa wish to be accepted as free and equal members of the human society. They will place their faith in the nation and the people who accept them and work with them as free and equal peoples. A foreign policy that does not include the issue of human dignity and human equality is one that is doomed to failure. As it has been stated again and again, the struggle we are now engaged in is one for men's minds. Respect, understanding and affection cannot be purchased by loans, gifts or grants. A unity of freedom-loving people cannot be

molded by power and military might. The intangibles of human freedom, equality and individual dignity are the only real forces and weapons on the side of democratic faith.

Our moral standing in the eyes of the world hinges on whether we pass civil rights legislation. The moral and political health of our own economy depends on whether or not we adopt civil rights legislation. We can scarcely call ourselves a democratic nation if we fail to guarantee the right to vote and the right of personal security. We jeopardize our economic strength if we deny people an opportunity for employment because of such factors as race, colour or creed. We weaken our national strength in direct proportion to the number of people that we discriminate against either in the exercise of their political liberties or their economic opportunities. We can no longer afford the luxury and the waste of second class citizenship.

The facts of international politics, the moral obligation of our own political faith, the economic and political needs of our times, call upon the Congress of the United States to fulfill the pledges on civil rights legislation which have been given to the people.

It would seem to the casual observer that the enactment of civil rights legislation would be a routine matter. Our entire history is one filled with the ideals of freedom, individual dignity and brotherhood. The forward movement of our developing democracy has been that of human liberation. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, - all are testimonies

to the will of the people of this nation to liberate ourselves from our sense of guilt and shame. The people of our country have carried a great moral burden for too long a time. We have cried out for democracy in other nations at the same time that we denied democracy at home. This hypocrisy has developed a sense of national moral guilt that calls for an immediate answer. Americans now realize that discrimination is a denial of our creed. We have been a nation plagued with a guilty conscience.

We made an auspicious step toward absolving ourselves of this sense of guilt with the publication of the precedent-breaking report of the President's Committee of Civil Rights, Organized labor, business, all religious groups -- almost all sections of our public life were represented in this report which called -- in ringing words -- for an end to discrimination, the right of all citizens to live free of terror and oppression and to participate fully in the responsibility and benefits of their government. This was a landmark in our march toward the realization of genuine democracy. The next step, and the step we now face, is the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

In 1948 at the Convention of the Democratic Party, the decision was abruptly made. When the delegates were challenged to get out of the shadow of states' rights and to walk forth in the bright sunshine of human rights, they voted to relieve themselves of their guilty consciences. They voted against discrimination and against bigotry. They justified the freedom of free men.

Again on last November the third our faith in the American citizen was tested and affirmed. There can be no doubt now about the American people's passion for liberation. They voted to liberate themselves from their guilt as well as to liberate minority groups from their displacement. The American voter showed to all the world that he had the courage of his convictions.

In spite of that great demonstration in November, a minority in Senate of the United States withstands the national tide. They will fail, because history is against them, the people are against them, the President of the United States is against them, the times are against them. Our President risked his political career to bring the issue of civil rights to the people. He traveled many miles to proclaim his vigorous views on this issue. He has broken all precedent in the degree of his strength and leadership to the end that man's inviolate dignity shall be accorded to all men equally. President Truman has truly shown that he would rather be right than be President.

As a Democrat I call upon my party, to carry out its promises to the people. Those promises were embodied in the platform under four specific proposals:

- (1.) the right of equal treatment in the armed forces;
- (2) legislation to abolish the poll tax;
- (3.) a meaningful and effective anti-lynching bill, and
- (4.) fair employment practices legislation.

I do not underestimate the difficulties that lie before us. Already in the 81st Congress the people of the world have been betrayed by the

"sell-out" of human rights known as the Wherry Compromise which changed the rules of the United States Senate on the matter of curbing a filibuster. It was the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition just a year ago which passed the Wherry Resolution that requires a two-thirds vote of the entire membership of the United States Senate to stop a filibuster. This was indeed a Machiavellian body-blow. It was the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition which made a political issue out of human rights. As a member of the Congress, as one who has been given the honour to serve my nation, I am ashamed and am heartsick that this tragic mistake and sell-out has taken place.

This is no time, however, for acrimonious attack or bitter words. This is the time for a call to reason and a plea for justice. Just because the rules were changed thereby making it extremely difficult to curb a filibuster, so now the obligation is all the more upon us to overcome the difficulties that have been placed in the path of human freedom by delivering the votes needed to break a filibuster and to pass civil rights legislation.

That which has been done by men can be undone. The mistakes of yesterday can and must be corrected by the positive accomplishments of today.

I call upon the Republican Party and upon my own party, the Democratic Party, to come clean on the issue of civil rights. No man has a right to play politics with human lives and human dignity. To exploit the oppressed, to gain power or advantage by political expediency at the expense of human beings is not only a denial of democratic ideals, but is immoral.

The issue of civil rights should be a non-partisan matter.

The passage of civil rights legislation is a bi-partisan obligation. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats can honestly say to the millions of Americans who are suffering under the yoke of discrimination or bigotry that this Congress did not have the votes to pass the civil rights proposals. The Republican Party is committed by platform and by pronouncement to this program. The Democratic Party is equally committed. It will not make much sense to the American people for the leaders of either political party to try to explain their failure by the fact that a handful of opponents stopped action. This is but to say that the process of democracy has been stopped dead by a willful obstinate minority that was vastly outnumbered by the Democratic-Republican majority.

The President of the United States, who stands as the leader not only of this nation but of his party, has given the call to action. He has every right to expect the support of all members of Congress who have declared themselves for this legislation. Tonight I share the platform with a distinguished leader of the Republican Party, my friend and colleague, Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon. I appeal to the Republican membership of the Senate to follow the leadership of Senator Morse and his liberal associates on this vital issue of civil rights. I know of no demonstration on the part of the Congress that would instill more faith in the hearts of our people as to the honesty and the integrity of the democratic processes than a bi-partisan effort to pass civil rights legislation.

Soon we shall come to grips with the issue of fair employment practices legislation. The FEPC bill listed on the Senate calendar as S. 1728 will be brought up for debate on the floor of the Senate within a matter of weeks. This bill has the support of the majority of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. This bill represents a reasonable, moderate and constructive approach to a very serious problem. The principles of fair employment practices legislation are neither new nor untried. The President's Committee on FEPC during the war years has an enviable record of accomplishment. Already ten states have FEPC laws on their statute books. Many of the large cities have pioneered in this all important field of legislation. Roughly speaking, about fifty million people, or more than a third of our country's population, is already covered by state or local FEPC laws. It cannot be too strongly emphasized, however, that the problems of discrimination are nation-wide. In discussing them, no state, section nor community should feel that it is being singled out for criticism. To pass FEPC legislation is not to legislate against any section of the country. The problem of discrimination is present in all sections in some form or other. It is therefore the responsibility of the national government through its Congress to establish a basic standard for human rights and problems of employment.

The passage of FEPC and other civil rights legislation is as I have stated before, jeopardized by the Wherry Resolution. I do

not want to underestimate the difficulties which are placed in our path. However, I am convinced that belief in the Golden Rule can overcome a Senate rule. If we should fail, there is but one alternative an old, true, tried and tested alternative, namely, a free election. I am sure that every member of Congress can understand the meaning of this language. The time for political politeness is over. The clubby atmosphere of the Congress does not carry through to the country. It is not enough just to be a good fellow and to be liked by your colleagues. The American people did not send 531 members of the Congress of the United States to Washington in order to develop our social life. We are here for the purpose of developing, protecting and extending the democratic way of life. That way of life is being dhallenged by bigotry, hypocrisy, intolerance and discrimination right here in America. It will require much more courage to stand up against the anti-democratic forces within America than it does to vote the people's money to fight the Communist forces outside of America. The eyes of the people of the United States are focused on Washington. They say: "Whether you are Democrat or Republican is not the issue. By your deeds shall ye be known."



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