

B'NAI B'RITH

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Transcript of Remarks
VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
at B'NAI B'RITH RECEPTION for
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Thank you very much. I just whispered that it is so good to be introduced by a rabbi. [Laughter.] The introductions are lyrical and poetic, and no one can doubt their veracity [Laughter]; and I do want to thank you.

I particularly want to pay a word of respect, of tribute and of sincere admiration and friendship to a great United States Senator who is here with us tonight -- Senator Javits, one of my dear friends. I've never had any differences with this Senator, except a minor party difference. [Applause.] But since I have learned to put the man and the country and principle above a party, I just think the world of Jack Javits -- and he knows I do. [Applause.]

I was delighted to see some of my other colleagues in Government who are here. When I entered the room Congressman Resnick was one of the first to greet me -- I suppose he's had to leave us; then Congressman Widnall; but then everything was made right when my dear and beloved friend whom I met long before I came to the Senate -- he was at the door of the Senate when I arrived in 1949 and now he is one of the stalwarts, one of the brave and good men, in the House of Representatives -- Claude Pepper. Claude, good to see you. [Applause.]

I want to thank President Janoff for permitting me to join you tonight, and indeed Bernie Simon for his helpfulness in these moments that we've had together. There are so many here whom I should like to single out for a note of comment, but I imagine you'd just let me specialize a little bit on a dear friend from Minnesota, Leo Frisch. Leo, it's good to see you. [Applause.] He's been one of my long-time good friends, close associates and ever faithful and loyal supporters. He forgives me all of my sins -- at least in his columns [Laughter] -- and that means a great deal. But more importantly, he's a tremendous citizen and a great leader in our community.

I've seen others here, such as Victor Bienstock of the J.T.A. and our good friend Milt Friedman who is their Washington correspondent; Si Kenen; and, of course, the ladies of B'nai B'rith and the men of B'nai B'rith. And I just want to say this: that I've attended more B'nai B'rith meetings than even Rabbi Kaufman! The only regret I have is that the folks didn't have a Bar Mitzvah for me. Somehow or other that just didn't seem to work into things out in South Dakota. But I've been attending a number of those too!

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It has been like a family reunion for me this evening. I've been visiting with many of you from the cities across our Nation, and I dare say there's not a city represented here that I haven't visited. In each of these cities I've been with you, and we've had the chance to be together at a dinner, or a gathering, or a meeting. You poor souls, many of you had to listen to me time after time, and your tolerance and your understanding and forgiveness exceeded anything that is human. I want to assure you of my gratitude.

You've had a busy day and a rewarding day. I know that the editors have been with the President of the United States. That's always an experience in one's lifetime. If ever the time comes in my life that I do not get a sort of goose pimples, the chill and the thrill of driving up Capitol Hill and seeing the dome of the Capitol -- on that day I want somebody to walk up to me and say: "Look, you've been here too long. It's time for you to get out." If ever it happens that I see the Lincoln Memorial and fail to feel a sense of inspiration and awe, then I know that the spirit is dead even if the body moves.

Believe me, every time I set foot in the White House, walk into the President's office, and see the President of the United States -- and I mean the President of the United States, whoever that President might be -- and fail to sense a spirit of respect and of admiration and, yes, of awe -- on that day I will feel that my time has been overdrawn on this earth. The office of the Presidency is so significant, so majestic, so important, that each of us who has the opportunity of coming close to it by touch, or voice, or presence, cannot help but be somewhat overwhelmed. I often think of what President Johnson has said to members of his Cabinet -- and by the way the Vice President does have a chance to sit in at the Cabinet meeting; I'll talk to you a bit about that Vice Presidency office in a moment -- the President has said so many times that it's not difficult for the President to do what is right; that he hasn't known a President who failed to do what he thought was right. The difficult task is to know what is right, and to feel strongly and confidently that the decision you make or that the decisions you are required to make are always right.

I imagine that that is an impossibility. That's why, on occasion, I have said that while we cherish in this Nation -- and we must always do so as an article of faith -- the right of debate, the right to dissent, the right to be different, the right to discuss, we also have to recognize that when you are an officer of the Government these democratic rights of discussion, debate and dissent have another "d" attached to them -- decision. Because finally the talk has to stop. As President Truman used to say, You can't pass the buck, so to speak, beyond this desk. When the buck gets there -- when decision has to be made -- the final place is the President's desk.

I mention this to you because so many of us feel that we know better what ought to be done. And maybe that's true. As a matter of fact, during the sixteen years that I spent in the United States Senate, I had many ideas which I thought were much better than those that were being adopted. That is one of the duties and purposes of a member of Congress. But when you get to the position of where you are a Cabinet officer or, indeed, when you are a President -- and there is no higher authority at least in the political sphere on this earth -- then, it isn't only dissent, discussion and debate -- which we surely have in our councils of Government. But the hour comes, the moment comes, when somebody has to decide. That moment of decision is a difficult one.

Fortunately, in our society, decisions are not irrevocable. We constantly reevaluate. We take a new look day after day, and new decisions are made. This is why we need the ferment of ideas -- why we need the crossfire of discussion and debate and controversy in our free society.

I don't know of any people in the world who believe in this more seriously and sincerely than the people to whom I am speaking right now. You have been champions of the cause of freedom: intellectual freedom, academic freedom, political freedom -- all of the freedoms that make life meaningful.

I said a moment ago that I wanted to say a word about the Vice Presidency. This is a wonderful office. And yet it is an office with many difficulties; sometimes it is a bit awkward. Constitutionally, it has one primary duty -- to preside over the Senate. The Vice President is the presiding officer of the Senate. He is, of course, Vice President. Our Constitution provides that there should be, in modern parlance, a man in reserve. Therefore, the Vice President, whoever he is, seeks to inform himself about Government in minute detail, and I can assure you that I spend a good deal of time at it.

The Congress of the United States has also seen fit to impose responsibilities upon the Vice President for which I am personally grateful. He is chairman of the Space Council. You can imagine how I felt today about the spectacular success of the soft landing on the moon -- the precision of it; the scientific, industrial perfection of it. Our program of space research and space activities, nationally and internationally, is coordinated under the Space Council over which the Vice President of the United States presides.

The Vice President is in a sense an educator too. He's a regent of the Smithsonian Institution. I always wanted to be close to a university -- ever since I was a teacher at one. Now I find myself a member of the Board of Regents which, I think, sort of gives me an entree to the intellectual community.

The Vice President is a member of the Cabinet and of the National Security Council. These are matters provided for by law -- by men like Senator Javits, Claude Pepper and others.

Many of you during the years have written that the President ought to have someone around who could relieve him of a few of the minor duties, and that is one of the privileges of the Vice President -- to visit with people, to receive foreign dignitaries, to carry out some of the assignments that are given to him by the President.

I'm going to shorten it by telling you that I like my work. I like the job that I have. [Applause.] And I admire very much the man whom I work for. I like him, and have for the years I served in the Senate. It's a wonderful thing to have a relationship in Government that is more than just official because we spend so much time at this job of government -- there is so much work that we have. Members of the Senate, for example, feel a spirit of comradeship, of brotherhood. They feel a sense of friendship. Members of the House are the same way. And I, as a former Senator, feel very close to my old colleagues in the Senate, and in the House of Representatives. In the Executive branch I have a warm, friendly, almost family relationship with the First Family. Mrs. Humphrey and I have had it for years. It works well.

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I think I should tell you quite candidly that this Administration is one that likes to talk things out -- and I guess maybe I was sort of qualified to be Vice President because I like to talk things out too! [Laughter.] It isn't always sweetness and light. But we work together. We are good friends with mutual trust and faith, and when we get into these meetings we do hammer out decisions. And I've never, in all of my life, met any man who is more willing to listen to your point of view -- in fact, probe you and prod you into expressing your point of view -- than the Chief Executive of this country.

I want to say this to the editors who are here because so often the office of the Presidency is almost lost in terms of the detailed information that one needs to know about it: Your President seeks the counsel and the guidance of his officers, and of people on the outside. There are people in this room who have been in the White House and expressed quite freely their point of view. That's the way we must have it.

Now, I want to say a word or two more about the folks whom I have before me -- about all of you. I have been to Israel Bond drives, to UJA meetings. I have been to B'nai B'rith meetings, as I said, by the dozens, and I go because I like the people whom I see and whom I meet. I like my folks back home in Minnesota-- the friends and the neighbors I have who belong to these great organizations and who worship in our synagogues. I know of no people who are more philanthropic, more generous than those whom you represent -- the people to whom your newspapers, your publications go -- the members of the Jewish community. You have, in a sense, taught others how to give and how to share. I think this is because the only way that a people ever learns how to be compassionate is to suffer. The only way that a people ever learns how to really, really, seek knowledge, is to have that opportunity denied them. Then the hunger for it is overwhelming. And it is to the eternal credit, particularly, of the Jewish mother that she has wanted her son, or her daughter -- particularly her son -- to be a scholar and to be a leader. So I pay tribute to you. And I think I'm talking to people who understand what the Great Society is all about.

And, by the way, I'm quite an enthusiastic supporter of the Great Society. I sat this afternoon for an hour with the leader of the Conservative Party in Great Britain, Mr. Edward Heath, and he said: "Look, I want to talk to you about the Great Society. I haven't heard too much about it since I've been in Washington." And I let him have it! I just opened up! [Laughter.] Because I think that of all the wonderful things happening in our country in our time -- and there are unbelievable, fabulous things happening: landing on the moon, the walk in space, the miracles of medicine; one could just list them out almost forever -- the most wonderful thing is what's happening to people.

We've made such progress in everything we believe in. In human dignity, in civil rights, in the extension of opportunity to more and more people. This is what is really important -- not as much the breakthrough in science and medical technology as the breakthrough in human relations. Leo could tell you what breakthroughs we made in our home town of Minneapolis. It's a far different city today, not only in terms of its physical appearance, not only in terms of its industry, but in its attitudes about people.

The breakthroughs that are being made today in education -- unbelievable things are happening. I was in Philadelphia the other day. I visited many of the schools in what they call the slum areas, and what did I find? I found the top high school students giving of themselves freely -- their free time -- tutoring

youngsters from the minority groups, in this instance the Negro families, tutoring them to help catch up in mathematics, in language, in literature, in civics, in humanities. Dozens and dozens, hundreds of gifted young men and women of college age and seniors in high school giving of themselves. This is what you really call brotherhood in action. This is what you really call human relations.

Look at what's happened in this city of Washington in twenty years. In twenty years? -- look at what's happened in ten years! This is a different city. Look at what's happened throughout the world. And I want to say as one who has championed the cause of civil rights all of my public life that it never could have happened without you. And I want to thank you. I know of what I speak. I saw my friend Herman Edelsberg here tonight. We worked in the vineyards of civil rights for years. And when I speak of what has happened in this legislative area of civil rights, let me tell you I know how the job was done. It wasn't just a few. It was many. Many of you were on the front lines -- and I want to thank you and urge you to continue your work.

Now, finally, let me say this: The greatest problems that face us are not domestic -- even though they are great and we have serious problems at home. But I think we are capable of meeting most of them. We have tremendous resources to bring to bear upon the problems of disease, illiteracy and poverty, and we're going to make steady progress. Not miracle cures but steady progress.

The real problem is whether or not we can preserve peace in this world. Or better to put it, whether or not we can avert nuclear war. And to put it in the positive, whether or not we can help build societies and social structures that live in tranquility and with respect for one another. This is the ultimate of statesmanship -- and this is a difficult assignment.

We have never really had full peace. But we're closer to it now, I think, than we have been for a long time. The United Nations has been strengthened. World organizations in the field of finance are growing and developing. Your Government is strongly supporting the Conventions on human rights and Genocide. You know how long it took us to get that kind of active support, even in America. Ambassador Goldberg has been down before our committees in Congress testifying in behalf of the President. And, by the way, somebody asked me a question the other day, one of those tough ones: "Well, Mr. Vice President, why is it that the United States doesn't do more about the United Nations?" I said: "Let me tell you something. The test about what we think of the United Nations is the kind of people we send there. When you have an Eleanor Roosevelt, and when you have an Adlai Stevenson, and when you have an Arthur Goldberg, you have the best that this Nation has to offer." We don't send the best to a place that we do not consider of high importance, of great importance to this Nation. The finest testimonial we can give the world as to our faith in the Charter of the U.N. and the work of the United Nations is the kind of people we send there. It has its limitations; yet we seek to build it.

Now, many of you are worried as I am about war, death and the troubles that we face in Southeast Asia. Many of you are equally worried about the rumblings and the trouble that appear in the Middle East. I have long been concerned about that -- not just because of my interest in the welfare and the success and the independence and the security of the State of Israel. This is no new speech to you; you've heard me say this -- well, since 1948. I've never changed and I don't intend to, because this is a tremendous development for good in the world -- the development of the State of Israel.

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But I am concerned wherever I see efforts being made to undermine self-determination -- to undermine an experience in democratic living. I was concerned when I saw, for example, the troubles that the country of India faced. I've been in India. By the way, when I was there the last time I recommended that they get a little technical assistance and guidance about their agriculture from the State of Israel. I said the Israelis know more about some of these problems than we do, particularly in the arid lands.

I'm concerned about what's happening in the Middle East whether or not its related to what's happening in Southeast Asia. What do I mean by that? I mean that a militant type of Communist action is at work in Southeast Asia. It isn't the only force, don't misunderstand me; I am not trying to simplify it. But it is at work out of Peking and Hanoi, and there is a militant type of Communist action at work in the Middle East, much of it directed from Peking. Now, our Government seeks no war with any country. We do not seek to confront any nation with massive power. We do not seek to overthrow regimes. We have no desire for conquest. But we are concerned about an aggressive militancy on the part of a totalitarian power that seeks to spread; that seeks to conquer; that seeks to undermine; that uses the new techniques of what it calls the wars of liberation.

When I hear about a national liberation movement -- what is called the Palestinian National Liberation Movement -- and I read and know that Communist China seeks to infiltrate, seeks to assist, seeks to generate more and more trouble in that particular movement, I say it is not unrelated to some of the problems we face and that the people of South Viet Nam face in Southeast Asia.

These are not disconnected -- no more than the conference that took place in Havana not long ago in which there was openly laid out a program under Chinese Communist influence of aggression in Latin America -- and said so. It was not unrelated to some of the doctrine that had been enunciated out of Peking. Now, I am not an alarmist. I don't happen to believe that the world is going to fall apart. I don't happen to believe that any nation in this world, or any combination thereof, is strong enough to defeat our Nation. I don't happen to believe that we are going to correct the problems of this world by military force. There are times when power and force have to be used, but basically the problems of the world are economic, political and social, and therefore what we have sought to do so much -- to help build nations, to help people help themselves -- is really the answer, the long-term answer. And we have to pursue it with our foreign aid programs, with our United Nations efforts, with our diplomacy, with the World Bank, with many other things.

But let us not fool ourselves. There are militant forces at work. There are militant forces at work in the Middle East that seek to expand, that seek to undermine. Some of these militant forces of today do not even come from the Middle East; they come from the Far East. So let us be on guard. The main thing I am saying is: Let the American people know what's happening. Once the American people know, and once the world knows, I think then the capability of our people and of the free society to meet this threat is manifestly evident.

Well, all this is more serious than I intended to be. I came here primarily in the spirit of joy and fellowship. But I don't think that one can ignore the facts of life. We have had to make some difficult decisions, dear friends, and I want to say that we have not made a decision on the basis of just self-interest. We have not made a decision on the basis that we had to do it because somebody else had started it -- by that I mean, that we had to follow through in Viet Nam because

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it had been a long-term proposition. We are trying to demonstrate as a free people that aggression is an unacceptable form of human conduct in the nuclear age; that aggression for the sake of aggression, that aggression as a way and a means of accomplishing your political objectives, is too dangerous for modern society; that there are other ways and means for nations and peoples to find answers to their problems.

One of the reasons that this Nation has recently extended, if not aid, at least the facilities -- planes and tanks -- to the State of Israel is not because we want an arms race -- we deplore the arms race; it's tragic that they have to spend their money for this -- but because there are aggressive forces at work and free people must be able to defend themselves. Remember that John Stuart Mills, in discussing the subject of non-intervention, said in substance -- and I can only paraphrase it -- that if the nation that seeks to do wrong can intervene and the nation that seeks to do right feels it is wrong to intervene and therefore fails to resist the intervention, then the doctrine of non-intervention spells destruction for the good and for those who seek to live.

Your great country loves peace. No people are more hungry for it and no people would rather give of their resources for the building of life. I want my America to be a Nation that gives life and not takes it. I want this America to be known for its scholars, not its soldiers. I want this country to be known for the power of generosity, not its weapons; and I want this Nation to be known for its people and not just its power. I think that we can have it that way too if we just reason together, in the words of Isaiah. Thank you. [Applause.]



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