

Sept. 27

SUNSET HIGH SCHOOL
MOCK CONVENTION
Portland, Oregon

Vice President Humphrey. You sound like a bunch of Democrats.

Barry Mesher -- when I said "Barry" the first time, I almost said Goldwater -- explained to us, I understand that he made my nomination. So Barry, I think it's fitting and appropriate that I should say to you and to Sunset High School that I am proud to accept your nomination and your platform as the nominee of your school, your party, for the Office of President. (Applause)

Principal Erickson and your Student Body President-elect, John Croker, I was just trying to find out from John how he got elected so easily. I am having more trouble than he is.

And Barbara Alder, Miss Democrat, all I can say is that if we parade her around a little bit, we will get an awful lot of votes.

The student body of Sunset High School, permit me first of all to tell you that I am truly honored, truly honored when I heard from your mock convention that I was privileged to receive the nomination for the Office of President. Secondly, let me say that this kind of political exercise, this mock political convention is one of the most reassuring things that I have seen amongst our young people.

I have noticed the signs about here and I am looking for the State of Oklahoma. If that sign would come up a little higher, I would appreciate it. Because I want you to know I have with me the genuine, in the flesh, this real he-man United States Senator from Oklahoma, Senator Harris, and his lovely wife. (applause)

I see a sign up there that says "California." I think you should know that we have one of the very charming elected public officials from the State of California that is traveling with us. That is Doris Davis, from Los Angeles. Doris, will you stand up, please. (applause)

I want all of you students at Sunset High to know that my opposition ask supporting Hills Borough. But I am not. I did not dare say anything about Beaverton, because the Mayor is here.

I thought that in the very few moments that we have here together, possibly I could help you just a little bit and then you might have some questions you would like to ask me. And maybe we can have some fun that way. We can go state by state, at least as long as we have the time, and I haven't much time to be with you.

Young people today are no longer looked upon just, as they used to say young people. They are looked upon as a very important part of the citizenry of this country -- for example, a young man who graduated from this school, I understand, has gone on to college in Pennsylvania. He has already approached that point in his life where he will be making decisions as to the future course of his life. I happen to be one that believes that in the light of the many duties that young men and women have today, the voting age in our country for national elections, and I hope state elections, should be lowered to the age of 18. (applause)

Of course, when you start to vote, you may have to start to pay taxes.

I also happen to believe that there is an entirely new attitude in

the country in reference to the inclusion within the regular political process and in the institutions and the offices of government of what we call our youth group, our young people. We need them in the regular political parties. Both political parties can stand a good infusion, a good injection of young idealism. And I noticed as I came in here tonight, this afternoon or evening, I noticed that there were a number of young people that still had on a button that carries the name of a very personal friend of mine with whom I served for many years in the United States Senate and who is a fellow citizen of my own state. I want to take this moment to congratulate and to thank Senator Eugene McCarthy for the good work he has done. (applause) I may say to the young people that the ideals and the goals of the Senator and the ideals and the goals that we cherish are the same and since I am a legitimate and full-fledged candidate for the high office of the President, it is my view that those goals can be better realized by the election of the Democratic candidate for President than by any other, and I hope that you will see that way and talk to your parents about it and your friends and your neighbors.

There is another gentleman who is no longer with us. And yet his work, his ideas, his sense of commitment, his personal involvement with young people were a matter of the life of our nation and of the history of our country. I hope that the young people here at Sunset High and every other high school and college across this land will recognize that the late Robert Kennedy served this country brilliantly and courageously as he sought to arouse your interest in public affairs and in the needs of the deprived people of America and in the needs, indeed, of the needy people throughout the world. (applause)

You know, the good works of men and women do not die with them. Those good works go on. But wherever you see somebody that is in need and you will help them, wherever you see someone that needs a chance to make something out of his or her life and you help them, you are fulfilling the ideals of the two men that I have just mentioned, and you are also fulfilling the goals and the ideals of the man that is talking to you. Because the politics of tomorrow is not the politics of just the organization or the party. It is in truth the politics of citizen participation on the broadest basis and the politics of service. I hope to see in the not too distant future when the high schools of this land will include in their course of study for purposes of credit and grade service to the community as well as study in the classroom. We need thousands and thousands of young men and women today, helping in hospitals, in mental institutions, helping in city hall, in the court house, helping on playgrounds, helping in the slum areas of our cities, helping to organize clubs or social groups for young people that have never had a chance to enjoy a good life. We need the new politics, which is not the politics of pressure and of party and of privilege, but rather the politics of concern and the politics of service. I know of no group in America that can do a better job in getting this message to the American people and the young people, where you have so much to offer.

Then I want to leave one other thought with you: This country today is being beset by a host of difficulties. Some of you may not have experienced them, because fortunately, most of the people in this audience come from neighborhoods and families that are able to provide well for you. The fact of the matter is that many families in this country do not have that same opportunity and we are trying to do something about it, not to take from you, but to add to them. Sharing does not necessarily mean that you lose something, it means that someone else gains and that in your sharing, you may gain, too.

It is a fact that in this country, in the slums in the cities, from the valleys of the rural poor, amongst the black, amongst the Indians, amongst the Puerto Ricans, amongst the Mexican-Americans, the Spanish-surname people, amongst many of these groups, amongst others who are of Anglo-Saxon or European descent, it is a fact that there are people who do not have it as good as you and I.

I have had a very good life: a wonderful home, a fine mother and father, a chance to go on to college, even though I had to make that chance myself. But it has been a wonderful opportunity for me and I feel that if it was good for me, maybe it would be good for somebody else.

All I want from the other guy is what the other guy has been able to make available to me. And I really believe that there is no group of people in the world that are more fair minded, more honest in terms of their intellectual integrity, than our young people. And I want you to constantly keep in mind that you are really no better off than someone else who has less chance. We have so much in this country to do with and yet so much to do.

I had with me yesterday one of the greatest athletes that this nation has ever produced, Mr. Rayfer Johnson. I wonder if we realize that many of our champions of our olympic teams, the champions that are going to win the gold medals for us in Mexico City this year, that many of them are the children, the sons and daughters, of people that never had the chance that you and I have.

I wonder if we realize how America would look without these men and women that have come from the families of the poor. I wonder how much we realize what would happen to our art and our literature, to our music and our drama? Actually out of the suffering and pain of the slum has come some of the most beautiful creation that we know in terms of culture.

So there is so much to be discovered. Very shortly, we will have Columbus Day in America and people will parade and they will say, well, we are celebrating the discovery of America. America is discovered everyday. Somebody discovers it: the fellow that never had a job that gets one -- he discovers America. The person that never had a decent home to live in and gets one -- he discovers America. The young person that did not have a good chance for a good education and finally gets a good education or a chance to go to college -- he or she discovers America.

The kid that is sick with what seems to be an incurable disease and they find a cure -- he discovers America. Because America is constant adventure and discovery. You don't need to really celebrate the discoveries of yesterday. What you need to celebrate are the things that you are to discover.

And your generation is going to live far beyond the year 2000. Most of the people that are alive today will be alive when Century 21 comes. What kind of a century will it be? I'll tell you what it will be like just a little bit.

For example, one of the things that we will have, will be transplant of human organs which we today read about will become a matter of medical science of some regularity. We will communicate by communications satellite. I saw a young lady here from the American Field Service from France. I met her as I came in the door. Inside of ten years, we will have regular communications into our schools and colleges through communication satellites with all or most of the countries of the world, so that through television, you will be able to see a classroom in Tokyo and you will be able to

communicate with students in Paris or students in New Delhi or Djakarata, our students, hopefully, in Moscow or Bukarest. And through this communication satellite, we will get to know each other -- Communication opens the mind, opens the heart and makes for an open world. The lack of communication makes for blindness, intellectual and spiritual blindness. It makes for a closed society.

Young men and women in this room will live to see the day when interplanetary travel, at least by rocket if not manned, automated, will be rather normal. You surely will live to see the day when we will have a station on the moon and explore its wonders and learn about it. Somebody has said to me, what difference does it make what's out there in space? My answer is it is your neighborhood. The solar system, the sun and the solar system are your neighborhood.

We need to know more about it. What is the effect of the stars that you see in the sky upon your life? How do we know? What is the effect of the sun upon life itself? We think we know but what more is there to know?

There is such a great adventure ahead of us. I sort of hope and pray that somehow, through vitamins, Geritol, or whatever else it may be, I may make it to the year 2000. I plan to make it and I hope to be there with you, because I am convinced that at that time if we have not destroyed this world through man's madness, we will have the most exciting period of human history.

There has been more change in the last one hundred years than in the preceding 5,000. There are more scientists alive today than in all the recorded history of man. There has been more advance in science and technology in the past 50 years than in the previous 2,000. You are living in the most exciting period of human existence. The question is, what are you going to do with it? This is why I wanted to come to you. Because you see, I have a special interest in you. You are the ones that are going to have to take care of my Medicare and Social Security and I wanted to take a look at you and see if I can rely on you. I think I can. I know I can.

The final observation I would like to leave with you is this: Our democracy needs people who believe in the Democratic spirit. You cannot have a free society without an enlightened citizenry. Thomas Jefferson said you either will be free or ignorant. You have to make a choice. You cannot be free and ignorant.

Now, we have made the choice of being free, which means that we have had to become an educated people. An educated man is not one that has just learned science and technology and mathematics. He is one that has learned to respect his neighbor. An educated man is one of forbearance and tolerance, is one of understanding and reason, is one that is willing to give the other fellow the benefit of the doubt, is one that has learned not only how to split the atom but to split the difference. An educated person is one of good manners, is one who understands that free speech for himself is only to be protected if there is free speech for the other fellow. An educated person can save democracy; an ignorant person can destroy it. An educated person, therefore, must have those qualifications of an educated man: good manners, tolerance, forbearance, understanding, learning, the willingness to listen as well as the willingness to talk. And today I see a few people in our country, and thank goodness, only a few, who have lost faith in freedom, who have lost faith in the processes of democracy. They are the people that break up meetings. They are the people that are ugly and unruly. They are the people that won't let the other fellow talk. They are the people that think they have a monopoly on virtue and righteousness. They are the people who want to destroy. Every free society that has

lost its freedom, lost it because the great overwhelming majority of people did not understand that those who hate freedom have a contagion about them and that they sometimes get their way because other people are unwilling to stand in their way.

I want to call upon you young people to set the example in this election. When you see somebody that denies another man the right to speak, I don't care who he is, what his political party, what he says or how he thinks; if he is denied the right to speak by a government, by a mob, or by an unruly group that decides they are going to shout him down, you stand up and say that you, sir, and you, that group, you are the enemy of freedom and we want you to know it. Point your finger at them and say shame and let them know that they do not represent what this country stands for. (applause) As somebody once said to me, every man and woman has a right to be heard; he does not necessarily have to be taken seriously, but he has a right to be heard.

So in step with good standards today, let's demand from the political candidates for office that they stand before audiences together, to debate, to discuss, to enter into dialogue and even to dissent.

Just a word about dissent. You have that right. You have the right to speak out, to speak against. But you have no right of disorder. Dissent, yes; disorder, no. Democracy requires that you play by the rules of the game. And if you don't like the rules, you can change them through the democratic process. But we can't change anything in this country for the good through violence, through disorder, through disregard for the law. We can do anything we want to do, however, if we work within the law, if need be to change the law and to make this country the kind of country you want. So I am happy to be your nominee. (applause)



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org