
On the Covenant of Democracy

An address by
Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey

to the American Society for Public Administration
National Capital Area Chapter
January 15, 1969

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PRESIDENT BARNES: there are so many distinguished administrators here today, that for me as a politician to be talking to the American Society for Public Administration is a rather hazardous pursuit. But I shall venture it. I used to teach a course in public administration; not well, but I taught it. It has no relationship to the facts, but it did fill in the course of study.

After having the privilege of knowing Jim Webb, John Macy, and Bert Harding and Sam Hughes and Dwight Ink and others, I've learned a great deal about public administration. And I'm going to take a moment to say a word about it. And then I want to reflect with you on something that is of historic importance to us, and possibly we can put it in its full and proper perspective.

I have been here in the nation's capital now for 20 years. These 20 years have been rich and rewarding. Some of the dearest friends a man can ever have I have gained as a priceless gift of public life.

I've had the opportunity to serve 16 years in that great deliberative body, the United States Senate, to be a part of the Congress of the United States, to serve as four years as Vice President.

I've had many people ask me which of the jobs I liked the best. It's like trying to ask a man which artist do you like the best, Rembrandt or Picasso or—they all have a different style. The work of the Congress is so different from the work of the Vice Presidency or the Executive branch.

If I can say one sentence that will be helpful today, it would be this: it is not only necessary that there be cooperation and coordination between the branches of the government, but it is absolutely essential that there be respect among the members of the branches of government for each other's pursuit, for each other's responsibilities.

The Congress of the United States—the representatives of the people, the heart of the federal system—deserves your respect.

I am going to do some lectures out at the University of Minnesota and Macalester College. And I plan on being sort of an itinerant professor, too, a visiting professor for a day or two, on other campuses.

I'm going to try to bring to the American people some understanding of what the Congress is all about. If there's any one thing that I have learned in these 20 years, it is that there exists a profession in this city to debunk the Congress of the United States.

The Congress represents the people of the United States. All of the people are not Phi Beta Kappas, all of them are not brilliant. There may even be a demagogue or two among them. There may even be somebody who possesses less than total integrity.

But by and large, over the long run, there is no more competent, able, gifted, body of men and women than the Congress of the United States. I say that after having observed, from two ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, what goes on in this town.

That doesn't mean you can't argue. That doesn't mean they're not wrong occasionally. It doesn't mean they always make wise decisions. Who does? So, I rise today, in this moment, to pay tribute to Capitol Hill.

Then I want to pay tribute to you, because just as Capitol Hill has

been debunked—and there is a great joy in this country in debunking—so the bureaucracy is attacked. They talk about the bureaucrats. Well, let me say that no government could last long without a merit system civil service, which is just another refined way of talking about bureaucrats.

I remember when I used to run for office back home—I'm just reminding myself of it again—I would try to get from the Civil Service Commission the lists of people who were from Minnesota. These local editors would always be attacking the bureaucracy, and they'd be attacking these bureaucrats.

I'd get a list of the names of the people who lived in, for example, Kanabec County or Marshall County or Blue Earth County or Crow Wing County. I'd get a list of all of the so-called bureaucrats who lived there, who came from there.

I'd get a platform right out in front of the editor's office after he had one of those mean, nasty editorials about bureaucrats, and I'd start reading them off. And I'd say, there's Sally Jones, her mother and father are Mr. and Mrs. Cris Jones. The editor thinks your daughter is no good. He's talking about your daughter. Then, I'd go over there and I'd find somebody else. And I'd go another place. I said, now here is Fred Schultz. Now, Fred Schultz is in the Department of Defense and there's been a lead editorial here about those wasteful bureaucrats in the Department of Defense. Now, I want Magnus Schultz to know that the editor is talking about your son, Fred. And the editor is against me and I'm for your son. Now, how are you going to vote?

The truth is we're people. That was pretty effective, too. I got elected lots of times. I like to remember that.

Now, after having defended you, I want to say this word of caution to you and I hope you will take it rightly, as it is meant, as a word of admonition.

Your job is not working for the government. What's the government? You're working for the people. And I know you feel that you have to identify with your immediate supervisor. Well, let me tell you that just as conscience requires you to identify with truth, so your position requires you to identify with the people. And that means service.

One of the reasons that the members of Congress receive the vast volume of mail that they receive, 75 percent of which relates to case work—I know—you know what, this office of mine, as Vice President, we get two or three hundred letters every day, case work.

I can honestly confess here today that I have spent over 50 percent of my time trying to take care of individual needs of people, when I was in the Congress. They should have been taken care of by you or people like you—people who are in the governmental services.

Now, I say this in high regard and respect. I only want to try to get us to do a better job, because the programs that we have today are great, but every one of them will be minimized as to its effectiveness by the human equation of administration.

Many of the great programs that emanate out of the nation's capital lose their potency, lose their vitality, lose their effectiveness as they try to find their way down to the citizen. And that doesn't mean that the

Federal Government shouldn't do it, as some people say, because I think the Federal Government must do what it's doing and more. It means that at the other end of the line, as the flow of funds and programs come through that conduit, you cannot afford to have a corroded and eroded and obsolete structure to receive that input of new funds and new resources.

I've served as the President's liaison with the mayors of the cities of the United States for four years, a wonderful experience. And we have handled in those four years over 3,000 separate requests, from mayors, with this Federal Government to untangle their needs or untangle their projects that have been tied up and lost in the maze of paper work here in Washington, over 3,000.

We've got to do a lot of thinking in the days ahead, about how to make our government, not our Federal Government alone, but our government, federal, state and local, this great federal system, how to make it responsive and responsible, how to make it react quickly, how to make it relevant to the needs of our times.

This federal structure was created at a time that this nation was an agrarian society. It has been very, very slow in catching up with the movement of population, with the change that comes from science and technology.

And you're the ones who can do it. You know more—the American Society for Public Administration—about administration than your critics. And I have always felt that rather than being investigated, have a self investigation. Take a look inside.

You have the beginning of a National Academy of Public Administration. I think this can be a great help that will upgrade the whole system.

Now let me talk to you about this historical occasion that is upon us. And I reflect on it in the presence of you who make government what it is, men and women who've dedicated their lives to the difficult and the often frustrating—but absolutely essential—business of making democracy work.

Now, next Monday, at 12:00 noon, on the steps of the United States Capitol, we will conclude the smoothest and the most efficient period of Presidential transition in American history. And this is no small achievement, even though we living here in Washington almost take it for granted.

So I welcome this opportunity to reflect briefly on what this event says about our country and our system of government, because it says a lot.

Every day, at every hand, we discover new evidences of the powerful forces for change which are loose in this world. And we live in a truly revolutionary time, a period of great restlessness. The established order is challenged in this country, around the world. Many of our most cherished assumptions and beliefs are severely tested in the pressure cooker of contemporary events.

Now, in these circumstances, it is all the more significant that the immense power of the American Presidency, the most powerful office in the world, is once again about to be transferred without difficulty or

challenge.

My fellow Americans, they talk about our violence. They talk about the sick society. They talk about how somehow or another we've lost our way.

I think we ought to stand up and recognize that peacefully, cooperatively, in partnership, despite differences, despite hard-fought elections, despite the closeness of elections, disputed election results, we transfer the immense power of the President.

Now, this process necessarily tests, however implicitly, the nature of our commitment to our constitutional system and the very concept of democratic government. For the people to speak, for the election to be decided and then to encounter obstacles and problems in the transfer of power, would raise the most profound questions about the viability of our democratic enterprise.

This is why I feel it's so imperative that we do something about Electoral College reform. We could have had a constitutional crisis in this country. Ladies and gentlemen, we could have had it, had there been a change of less than 120,000 votes. And then you would have had the problem of the election of the Presidency being cast into the House of Representatives.

You would have had the serious problem of the Electoral College itself; the bargaining, even among electors, could have happened.

So, we need to face up to electoral reform.

For any regime to survive the people must share certain assumptions and values. In a democratic system, these are related to our fundamental notion about the nature of man, the dignity of the individual, the necessity for free expression, the rights and the duties of the majority.

When I see those who challenge this system with abusive tactics and seek to destroy it, I say: what do you have to offer that's better? And the strange thing about most of the revolutionaries of today is they have no alternatives. They're the worst of all kinds of human action.

So, I think that it's fair to say that each generation of Americans must renew this covenant of respect for one another. Sometimes this process of renewal can be tumultuous, as it has been in this past year. Sometimes we wonder aloud whether our system will have the resilience and the vitality demanded by the times. We look abroad and see other political systems falter and collapse. Then we ask whether it can happen here. I suppose it could but it need not, and I don't think it will. And if this makes me a confirmed optimist, I gladly take on that descriptive phrase.

After all the turmoil comes the moment of truth, election day, when our assumptions are put to the test, when each American assumes the awesome responsibility of preserving democracy as a method of ordering and controlling our society.

In 1968, despite the turmoil and the tragedy of this troubled year, we proved to ourselves and to a doubting world that our democratic processes are alive and vital, even as we recognized that many aspects of our political system must be overhauled, modernized and improved.

And once again let me get it off my chest. I've read repeatedly how people were not going to vote. They were disgusted, said the pundits.

Well, Mr. Pundit, let me tell you something.

I'll tell you why a lot of people didn't vote—because they couldn't. And if that same moral outrage of the pundits, telling about why the people weren't going to vote because they saw no choice, if that same energy and thinking had been put into the reformation of the electoral system and the registration system, we could have had from 15 to 20 million more voters that were denied the right to vote, not because they didn't think there was a choice, but because the law wouldn't permit them to vote.

So, when a new President rises to take the oath of this office, this magnificent office, this is more than just one man personally pledging to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. This act, this majestic act, signified that our democratic covenant has been renewed, that our faith in the democratic process is intact, that we are fundamentally a united and free people.

We can say to the whole world that this America, restless and troubled, burdened and at times frustrated; this America with all of its problems which are not unique to this decade or age; this America sends a message to the whole world: democracy works. And let me tell you something—that's quite a message, because it doesn't work too many other places in the world.

Rather than constantly having people send out the message that we don't know what we're doing, that we're debauched, sick, gone, I tell you that on high noon Monday next, there is a great story that can go to the whole of mankind: that this great experiment of democracy, of representative government in the United States, has worked, does live, is working. One President leaves, another comes in. One Vice President leaves, another comes in. Members of Congress leave, others come in. The peaceful transition of power in the most powerful and the richest nation of the world, troubled and perplexed, but also determined to make democracy work.

You see, I've always believed that the inauguration of a President should be a celebration for every American. There is, of course, an extra measure of happiness for those who were chosen by the people. I'm well aware of that. And there is, in all candor, considerable sadness and pain for those who were not chosen.

For all Americans, regardless of their political affiliation, or their views on the issues of the campaign, I say there is reason to celebrate. Once again we have achieved what mankind the world over truly seeks, the chance to decide, peacefully, our destiny through free and open choice of the people. And in a world full of tragedy, juntas and dictators; in a world full of tragedy and dreams, we cannot afford to let these moments of celebration slip by unnoticed.

It's in this spirit then, that I look forward to Monday next. I know that you share this sentiment, and understand the magnitude of what this country has again achieved, in freedom's cause. Once again America has demonstrated that freedom works, and that freedom is as precious as life itself.

Thank you very much.

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American Society for Public Administration
Washington, D. C.
April, 1969

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY

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NAME

AGENCY

**AMERICAN SOCIETY
FOR
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**
NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA CHAPTER
(Name Tag and Lunch Ticket)

Comments, suggestions, new mailing address:

✓ Jim Webb
John Macey
✓ Bert Harding
✓ Sam Hughes
Dwight Link

FOR INFORMATION ON ASPA MEMBERSHIP,
SEE YOUR AGENCY'S REPRESENTATIVE. HIS
NAME IS ON THE BACK OF THE HANDBILL
ANNOUNCING THIS LUNCHEON

000069

Back to the Campus
+ Britannica

Freedom
Capitol to White House

- Cliff Barnes - Presid.
- Dungt Int. - V.P.

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 15, 1969

National
Academy of
Public Administ.

National Academy
of Sciences

Nat. Academy
of Engineering

I am indeed grateful to the Washington Chapter of
the American Society of Public Administration for inviting
me to meet with you in the closing days of my Vice Presidency.

This platform gives me the opportunity to reflect ^{briefly} on
a most historic occasion in our nation's life ^{and} in the
presence of men and women who have dedicated their lives
to the difficult, often frustrating, but absolutely essential
business of making democracy work.

20 yrs
Service
in D.C.

if you are so vitally
important -
the Doers
serve!

- In 8 years - 2 elections
Obviously less than 17. K

-2-

Next Monday at 12 noon on the steps of the United States Capitol we will conclude the smoothest and most efficient period of Presidential transition in American history. This is no small achievement -- even if we almost take it for granted -- and I welcome this opportunity to reflect briefly on what this event says about our country and our system of government.

Every day at every hand we discover new evidences of the powerful forces for change which are loose in the world.

We live in truly revolutionary times -- the established order is challenged and assaulted in this country and around the world.

Many of our most cherished assumptions and beliefs are severely tested in the pressure cooker of contemporary events.

In these circumstances it is all the more significant that the immense power of the American Presidency is once again

2 Elections 1960

1968

-3-

Voter less than 1% -
of less than
majority

about to be transferred without difficulty or challenge.

↳ This process necessarily tests -- however implicitly -- the nature of our commitment to our constitutional system and to the very concept of democratic government. ↳ For the people to speak -- for the election to be decided -- and then to encounter obstacles and problems in the transfer of power would raise the most profound questions about the viability of our democratic enterprise. - Living Constitution!

↳ For any regime to survive the people must share certain assumptions and values. ↳ In a democratic system these are related to our fundamental notions about the nature of man, the dignity of the individual, the necessity for free expression, the rights and duties of the majority.

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Each generation of Americans, moreover, must renew this covenant among themselves. Sometimes this process of renewal can be tumultuous -- as it has been this past year. Sometimes we wonder aloud whether our system will have the resilience and vitality demanded by the times.

We look abroad and see other political systems falter and collapse. We ask whether it can happen here.

Then comes the moment of truth -- Election Day -- when our assumptions are put to the test -- when each American assumes the awesome responsibility of preserving democracy as the method of ordering and controlling our society. In 1968 -- despite the turmoil and tragedy of this troubled year -- we proved to ourselves and to a doubting world that our democratic processes are alive and vital -- even as

- Electoral system
- Regulation

-5-

we recognize that many aspects of our political system
must be overhauled, modernized and improved.

State +
local Govt

So when a new President rises to take the oath of
office, this is more than just one man personally pledging
to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

∟ This act signifies that our democratic covenant has been
renewed -- that our faith in the democratic process is intact --
and that we are fundamentally a united and free people.

∟ I have always believed that the inauguration of a
President should be a celebration for every American. ∟ There is,
of course, an extra measure of happiness for those who were
chosen by the people. ∟ There is, in all candor, considerable
sadness and pain for those who were not chosen. ∟ But for all
Americans -- regardless of their political party affiliation or their

-6-

views on the issues of the campaign -- there is reason to celebrate.

└ Once again we have achieved what mankind the world over truly seeks -- the chance to decide our destiny through free and open choice of the people. └ And in a world full of tragedy and abandoned dreams we cannot afford to let these moments of celebration slip by unnoticed. ♪

└ In this spirit, then, I look forward to Monday next, I know that you share this sentiment and understand the magnitude of what this country has again achieved in freedom's cause.

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January 2, 1969

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Dear Dwight:

Just a note to confirm that I will be delighted to attend the January luncheon meeting of the Washington Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration on Wednesday, January 15, and give brief informal remarks.

My staff will be in touch with you regarding details.

Looking forward to being with you.

Sincerely,

Hubert H. Humphrey

The Honorable Dwight A. Ink
Assistant Secretary
Department of Housing
and Urban Development
Washington, D. C. 20410

✓ John S.



DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20410

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR ADMINISTRATION

IN REPLY REFER TO:

DEC 30 1968

Mr. William Welch
Administrative Assistant
to the Vice President
Room 5123, New Senate
Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Bill:

This will confirm our telephone conversation of last week regarding the Vice President's appearance at the January ASPA luncheon meeting.

The luncheon will be held in the Grand Ballroom of the Presidential Arms Hotel located at 1320 G Street, N.W. Lunch will be served at 12 noon and will be immediately followed by an informal address by the Vice President. The meeting is scheduled to adjourn around 1:30.

Judging from the initial response, we expect a capacity crowd, probably around 700 people. We are indeed gratified that the Vice President has consented to speak to the group and are looking forward to having him with us.

Please feel free to call me if we can be of assistance in facilitating the Vice President's appearance. I can be reached on 755-7240.

Sincerely,

Franklin P. Hall
Special Assistant to the
Assistant Secretary



DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20410

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR ADMINISTRATION

DEC 17 1968

IN REPLY REFER TO:

The Vice President
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Vice President:

On behalf of the members of the Washington Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, I would like to both congratulate and thank you for the strong leadership you have provided during the past years in improving the quality of public administration. Your work in this increasingly important field has earned you the high regard of all our members as well as countless men and women in public service throughout the country.

Since so many of our members have long admired and have worked diligently to advance the cause you so eloquently espoused over the years, the Executive Board has requested me to extend a special invitation for you to speak at our January luncheon meeting. Knowing of your heavy schedule, we have been reluctant to impose upon your time; however, as your departure from Washington now seems imminent, I want to extend a personal invitation to you to address our January meeting. This luncheon is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, January 15, with lunch being served at 12 noon and your presentation beginning around 12:50, at the Presidential Arms Hotel. The Society would, of course, be happy to reschedule this for your convenience.

In the past, our speakers have included Secretaries Weaver and Boyd, Dr. Wernher von Braun, Dr. Paul Douglas, and Mayor Washington. Governor Rockefeller is scheduled to speak at the February meeting. Many have chosen to speak on public administration, however, since so many of our members would like an opportunity to see you before you leave town and wish you well in your new endeavor, any topic which you feel would be appropriate would be of interest to the group.

We would be deeply honored and would greatly appreciate your addressing our luncheon meeting.

With warm personal regards.

Sincerely,

Dwight A. Ink
Assistant Secretary
(Vice President, ASPA-NCAC)



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