

REMARKS BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

CLOSE UP (YOUTH GROUPS)

Senate Auditorium

November 3, 1971 and November 17, 1971

Right now, you must give your attention to studies, to term papers, and to exams. But I am sure you recognize that the real test score of your abilities and learning will only be recorded as you intelligently discuss the issues of the day, as you devote your talents to the challenges of public service, and as you make your own personal effort to help people denied your advantages, to improve your communities, and to make this a better nation.

It is an absolute certainty that your direct involvement in these difficult tasks is essential today. For at this crucial time in America's history, we must rededicate ourselves to assuring that our government is truly a government of, by, and for the people.

Yes, we have needed reforms in Congress to make this representative body more responsive to the needs and the agenda of human resource priorities demanded by the American people. And, I have been directly involved in the accomplishment of several basic reforms to assure more democratic and efficient procedures in Congress. And you may know that I have been working to accomplish full and equal participation by all in the decisions, the platform, and the work of the Democratic Party.

But the youth of America also have a major opportunity now to play a direct role in helping to assure that government is responsive, responsible, progressive, and efficient. With the adoption of the Constitutional amendment lowering the voting age to 18 in federal elections, some 25.5 million new voters are now able to go to the polls. And I have been working to reform voter registration procedures to assure that they will have the opportunity to effectively exercise this right of citizenship.

But I firmly believe that we must go much further to enable young men and women to be directly involved in the decisions and operations at all levels of government. That is why I introduced the Interns for Political Leadership Act, on which favorable action by Congress is expected to be completed before the end of this year. Under this Act, \$10 million is authorized annually to enable up to 1,000 college students to work in positions of responsibility with elected officials in city and state governments and in Congressional offices.

This program can be of great importance in helping us reach what I see as the basic goal: That youth should be able to work within the political system; that they should use the system; and that they should change the system to make it more responsive to the needs of people for a better life, for a clean environment, and for a world of peace.

As the 1960's were the years of discovery in addressing problems of poverty, of racial discrimination, of inadequate health care and limited opportunities for a good education, of rat-infested city tenements and run-down farmhouses, of cities in crisis, and of pollution of the air we breathe and the water we drink; so the 1970's must be the years of decision and action to solve these problems.

The time has come for getting action. As we learned in the space program, we have the wealth and the tools, and we can do the job if we put our minds and wills to it. And that doesn't mean just government, but each and every citizen in this great land. Especially today, it means the infusion of the commitment of youth to establishing a better world, in the effort to make our national government a government of compassion.

Our greatest need today is for a government that genuinely cares about people.

Our problem today is that while we struggle to become privately wealthy, America has become publicly poor. The fiscal bankruptcy of our cities is only one evidence of this critical situation.

The real tragedy of Vietnam is that we have overlooked our other problems. We've lost our intellectual vigor, our concern for meeting the needs of people. Will we really put our so-called "Vietnam savings" into domestic priorities? Have we even begun to plan for this?

I would define the role of a Senator as one of stimulating the conception of new and imaginative policies and programs vital to the destiny of our nation. Instead of drastic, last-minute responses to crises, and only under intense public pressure -- the posture taken by the present Administration -- we should be planning and marshalling our resources today to meet the problems of tomorrow. We should be making an all-out effort to plan the public and economic development of entire regions of the United States.

We should be drafting a new bill of rights for every American citizen; with programs to make these rights a reality:

- The right to peace;
- The right to a job;
- The right to health;
- The right to a good education that meets the real needs and interests of each person;
- The right to decent housing and good neighborhoods;
- The right to justice and equal opportunity for all Americans;
- And the right to a clean and healthful environment.

But above all, we must assure the right of all groups in America to a government that listens and acts on the concerns of the people. That is why I was deeply concerned by the Administration's decision this year to close down the President's Council on Youth Opportunity, established by the previous Administration. As Vice President, it was my privilege to serve as chairman of this Council. It took a tremendous amount of hard work, but by 1968, the Council could claim a central role in the creation of at least 856,000 summer job opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

But in addition to being a practical source of help, the Council was a central rallying point for all who sought to arouse the nation to the needs and rights of youth.

That is why I have called for the establishment of a National Youth Advisory Council, to bring these needs and rights forcefully to public and governmental attention, and to provide a forum for young men and women to have a strong voice in the growing debate on national priorities.

I have been deeply gratified at being identified with the establishment of the Peace Corps, the Job Corps, and national service programs like VISTA, to directly involve youth in building a better nation and world, and to give many a chance, that would otherwise have been denied, to make something of their lives.

But it is precisely because I do not want to see this vital progress undermined that I have strongly opposed policies that often amount to a reduction of these opportunities, a dismantling of youth-oriented programs, and the paying of lip service to the hopes and aspirations of youth while doing little to meet their real needs.

No Administration dares to be complacent about the fact that teenage unemployment stands at 17.1 percent while almost one-half of the black youth in the depressed areas of our major cities are out of work. This is certainly no time for the executive branch to reduce the number of special federal

summer jobs for youth by 13,000, or to oppose or delay requesting additional funds to expand youth employment opportunities. Nor in the face of skyrocketing costs of obtaining a college education, is this a time to oppose increased appropriations for major new programs of student and college assistance.

These are a few examples to emphasize my basic message to you today. That message is that your concerns, your needs, hopes, and aspirations are at stake in the policies and programs that are either launched or set aside by Government.

And that is why it is so important that you become vitally interested and as fully informed as possible on current national issues, on our political party system, and on the legislative and executive agency channels by which things get done in Washington.

Get involved. Organize for study, discussion, and action. Draft your own agenda of national priorities -- pinpoint the major concerns of youth in your area about our nation and the world. And then go to work -- use the political system by which this agenda can be carried out.

And make no mistake about it: What you say will be given careful attention. It can be ignored only at the political peril of those who would claim to represent you in government. But even more important: You are the voice of the future, calling for the work that must be done today.

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