

REMARKS BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE AND FLAG PRESENTATION

Buffalo, Minnesota

Courthouse

May 27, 1974

Memorial Day is the time when Americans should reflect and consider those basic truths that provide the foundation for our political system -- a system which so many Americans have courageously fought to protect.

Today, more than ever, we must remember why these young men and women gave their lives in support of their nation throughout the centuries.

The Preamble to the Constitution says it all. It spells out the faith, the aspiration, the purpose of America and its protectors.

Let me read those hallowed words to you:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The first three words are the most important. They establish for all time that America is "We the People."

Not "we the government," not "we the political parties," not "we the rich," not "we the white," but "We the People." This is the central reference, the focal point of American government.

"In order to form a more perfect Union" -- with all of the differences between regions of our country, economic interests, religions and ethnic backgrounds, the Founding Fathers wisely recognized that simply keeping our nation together would require constant effort.

As we approach our bicentennial anniversary in 1976, we must forge the people of this country into a "more perfect union" with each other.

In a nation as diverse as ours, national unity is only possible if tolerance and compromise are recognized as vital democratic principles, and not seen as excuses for the actions of those without principle.

"Establish Justice" -- not simply to enact laws, but to establish justice for all the people. Justice that is blind to wealth, to color, to religion. Justice that treats all men equally. This is the test of a democracy.

"Insure domestic Tranquility" -- this is not apathy or indifference. Tranquility means peace and harmony. It implies a respect for our fellow man and a concern for his well-being.

"Provide for the common defense" -- the Founding Fathers knew that all of the things we valued could only be nurtured if we were secure from the dictates of others.

"Promote the general Welfare" -- the important word here is "promote." It implies that if the well-being of citizens is threatened, you do something about it. It says that government is to be responsible for improving the lives of the people.

And -- "Secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity" -- "the blessings of liberty" is the way it is put.

Today we usually take liberty for granted. But the people who wrote this had just gone through a bloody war to secure their freedom from foreign dominance.

Their courage purchased this "blessing" of liberty for us. And we must never forget that it can be eroded from within as well as attacked from without.

Look again at some key words that are used -- "promote," "insure," "provide," "secure."

These are not passive or timid words. They do not speak of a government that is to be neutral in dealing with the people.

These are the active, confident words of a government that will use its power to enhance the lives of its citizens.

Franklin D. Roosevelt made an observation that has its basis in this attitude about government -- an attitude and approach to which I have always subscribed. He said:

"Governments can err, Presidents do make mistakes, but the immortal Dante tells us that Divine Justice weighs the sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted on a different scale. Better the occasional faults of a government living in the spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference."

It is also worth noting that there is not one word in our Constitution to protect government from the people. But every word is designed to protect the people from the abuse of power by those in government.

These are the fundamentals on which all of American government is based.

But the survival of popular democracy, based on these common purposes, is only assured when there is a partnership between the government and the people that is held together by mutual trust and faith.

Today the shadow of shame, doubt, and mistrust shrouds our entire political process and threatens that vital partnership.

We must restore this faith in self-government -- this faith and trust that give the social contract of popular government its meaning.

One way to cleanse and reform our political process is at the ballot box.

Our political process has become too commercialized. Politicians are sold to the public as if they were products in the market place. And this process has run afoul of the same temptations and pit-falls as commercial advertising.

Today the premium is on "image," not "substance"; on "charisma," not "character"; on "promises" and not "performance"; and on the "sensational" and not the "sensible."

Faced with a growing number of false claims and misleading advertisements in the commercial marketplace, Congress passed "truth in labeling," "truth in advertising," and "truth in lending" laws.

Today we need to start making the same demands for honesty and candor on those who want our votes. We need more "truth in politics."

Our political processes must be cleansed.

We are making progress. Campaign and election reform are coming, and that will help.

Never again will big money play the role in politics that it has in the past.

No campaign in the future will be run as in the past. Integrity has become the most precious asset of the politician.

But cleaning up campaigns is just the beginning.

People are fed up with vague and empty promises.

Our people have not thrown in the towel and given up on achieving our treasured goals of economic and social justice. But they are finished chasing rainbows. They still want politicians with dreams and imagination, but they want more. They want people in government who are effective. The premium today is on results.

Unless our government buckles down and begins to meet the needs of our people, and unless our politicians become more responsible in pursuing the public interest and in leveling with the people, all the campaign and election reform in the world will not restore the people's faith in government -- particularly in the institutions of government which are so much in need of rebuilding.

In these days of national pessimism, the prophetic words of Aldous Huxley -- "I have peered into the future, and it won't work" -- come perhaps too frequently to mind.

But, we have been down before. We have seen hard times. We have gone through wars and depressions, internal dissension and civil strife. Each time we have bounced back a stronger nation.

The only obstacle and only hope for an America and a world that "will work" is you. Each generation must find within itself and for itself the vision it will pursue, the values it will enshrine, and the leadership and conviction that will move our nation toward them.

#

REMARKS BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE AND FLAG PRESENTATION

BUFFALO, MINNESOTA

COURTHOUSE

MAY 27, 1974

MEMORIAL DAY IS THE TIME WHEN AMERICANS SHOULD
REFLECT AND CONSIDER THOSE BASIC TRUTHS THAT PROVIDE THE
FOUNDATION FOR OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM -- A SYSTEM WHICH SO
MANY AMERICANS HAVE COURAGEOUSLY FOUGHT TO PROTECT.

TODAY, MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST REMEMBER WHY THESE
YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES IN SUPPORT OF
THEIR NATION THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES.

TODAY, MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST RETURN TO THE FUNDA-
MENTALS OF OUR GOVERNMENT AND REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF OUR NATION.

THE PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION SAYS IT ALL. IT SPELLS
OUT THE FAITH, THE ASPIRATION, THE PURPOSE OF AMERICA AND
ITS PROTECTORS.

LET ME READ THOSE HALLOWED WORDS TO YOU:

"WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, IN ORDER TO FORM A
MORE PERFECT UNION, ESTABLISH JUSTICE, INSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY,
PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE, PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND
SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY,
DO ORDAIN AND ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA."

THE FIRST THREE WORDS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT. THEY
ESTABLISH FOR ALL TIME THAT AMERICA IS "WE THE PEOPLE."

NOT "WE THE GOVERNMENT," NOT "WE THE POLITICAL PARTIES," NOT
"WE THE RICH," NOT "WE THE WHITE," BUT "WE THE PEOPLE." THIS IS THE
CENTRAL REFERENCE, THE FOCAL POINT OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT.

"IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE PERFECT UNION" -- WITH ALL OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REGIONS OF OUR COUNTRY, ECONOMIC INTERESTS, RELIGIONS AND ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS, THE FOUNDING FATHERS WISELY RECOGNIZED THAT SIMPLY KEEPING OUR NATION TOGETHER WOULD REQUIRE CONSTANT EFFORT.

AS WE APPROACH OUR BICENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY IN 1976, WE MUST FORGE THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY INTO A "MORE PERFECT UNION" WITH EACH OTHER.

IN A NATION AS DIVERSE AS OURS, NATIONAL UNITY IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF TOLERANCE AND COMPROMISE ARE RECOGNIZED AS VITAL DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES, AND NOT SEEN AS EXCUSES FOR THE ACTIONS OF THOSE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE.

"ESTABLISH JUSTICE" -- NOT SIMPLY TO ENACT LAWS, BUT TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE. JUSTICE THAT IS BLIND TO WEALTH, TO COLOR, TO RELIGION. JUSTICE THAT TREATS ALL MEN EQUALLY. THIS IS THE TEST OF A DEMOCRACY.

"INSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY" -- THIS IS NOT APATHY OR INDIFFERENCE. TRANQUILITY MEANS PEACE AND HARMONY. IT IMPLIES A RESPECT FOR OUR FELLOW MAN AND A CONCERN FOR HIS WELL-BEING.

"PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE" -- THE FOUNDING FATHERS KNEW THAT ALL OF THE THINGS WE VALUED COULD ONLY BE NURTURED IF WE WERE SECURE FROM THE DICTATES OF OTHERS.

"PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE" -- THE IMPORTANT WORD HERE IS "PROMOTE." IT IMPLIES THAT IF THE WELL-BEING OF CITIZENS IS THREATENED, YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. IT SAYS THAT GOVERNMENT IS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE,

AND -- "SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY" -- "THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY" IS THE WAY IT IS PUT,

TODAY WE USUALLY TAKE LIBERTY FOR GRANTED. BUT THE PEOPLE WHO WROTE THIS HAD JUST GONE THROUGH A BLOODY WAR TO SECURE THEIR FREEDOM FROM FOREIGN DOMINANCE.

THEIR COURAGE PURCHASED THIS "BLESSING" OF LIBERTY FOR US. AND WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT IT CAN BE ERODED FROM WITHIN AS WELL AS ATTACKED FROM WITHOUT.

LOOK AGAIN AT SOME KEY WORDS THAT ARE USED -- "PROMOTE,"
"INSURE," "PROVIDE," "SECURE,"

THESE ARE NOT PASSIVE OR TIMID WORDS. THEY DO NOT SPEAK OF
A GOVERNMENT THAT IS TO BE NEUTRAL IN DEALING WITH THE PEOPLE.

THESE ARE THE ACTIVE, CONFIDENT WORDS OF A GOVERNMENT
THAT WILL USE ITS POWER TO ENHANCE THE LIVES OF ITS CITIZENS.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT MADE AN OBSERVATION THAT HAS ITS
BASIS IN THIS ATTITUDE ABOUT GOVERNMENT -- AN ATTITUDE AND APPROACH
TO WHICH I HAVE ALWAYS SUBSCRIBED, HE SAID:

"GOVERNMENTS CAN ERR, PRESIDENTS DO MAKE MISTAKES, BUT THE IMMORTAL DANTE TELLS US THAT DIVINE JUSTICE WEIGHS THE SINS OF THE COLD-BLOODED AND THE SINS OF THE WARM-HEARTED ON A DIFFERENT SCALE. BETTER THE OCCASIONAL FAULTS OF A GOVERNMENT LIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY THAN THE CONSISTENT OMISSIONS OF A GOVERNMENT FROZEN IN THE ICE OF ITS OWN INDIFFERENCE."

IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING THAT THERE IS NOT ONE WORD IN OUR CONSTITUTION TO PROTECT GOVERNMENT FROM THE PEOPLE. BUT EVERY WORD IS DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE FROM THE ABUSE OF POWER BY THOSE IN GOVERNMENT.

THESE ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS ON WHICH ALL OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT IS BASED.

BUT THE SURVIVAL OF POPULAR DEMOCRACY, BASED ON THESE
COMMON PURPOSES, IS ONLY ASSURED WHEN THERE IS A PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE THAT IS HELD TOGETHER
BY MUTUAL TRUST AND FAITH.

TODAY THE SHADOW OF SHAME, DOUBT, AND MISTRUST SHROUDS
OUR ENTIRE POLITICAL PROCESS AND THREATENS THAT VITAL PARTNERSHIP.

WE MUST RESTORE THIS FAITH IN SELF-GOVERNMENT --
THIS FAITH AND TRUST THAT GIVE THE SOCIAL CONTRACT OF POPULAR
GOVERNMENT ITS MEANING.

ONE WAY TO CLEANSE AND REFORM OUR POLITICAL PROCESS IS
AT THE BALLOT BOX.

OUR POLITICAL PROCESS HAS BECOME TOO COMMERCIALIZED.

POLITICANS ARE SOLD TO THE PUBLIC AS IF THEY WERE PRODUCTS IN THE MARKET PLACE. AND THIS PROCESS HAS RUN AFOUL OF THE SAME TEMPTATIONS AND PIT-FALLS AS COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING.

TODAY THE PREMIUM IS ON "IMAGE," NOT "SUBSTANCE"; ON "CHARISMA," NOT "CHARACTER"; ON "PROMISES" AND NOT "PERFORMANCE"; AND ON THE "SENSATIONAL" AND NOT THE "SENSIBLE."

FACED WITH A GROWING NUMBER OF FALSE CLAIMS AND MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE COMMERCIAL MARKETPLACE, CONGRESS PASSED "TRUTH IN LABELING," "TRUTH IN ADVERTISING," AND "TRUTH IN LENDING" LAWS.

TODAY WE NEED TO START MAKING THE SAME DEMANDS FOR
HONESTY AND CANDOR ON THOSE WHO WANT OUR VOTES. WE NEED MORE
"TRUTH IN POLITICS,"

OUR POLITICAL PROCESSES MUST BE CLEANSED.

WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS. CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION REFORM
ARE COMING, AND THAT WILL HELP.

NEVER AGAIN WILL BIG MONEY PLAY THE ROLE IN POLITICS THAT
IT HAS IN THE PAST.

NO CAMPAIGN IN THE FUTURE WILL BE RUN AS IN THE PAST.

INTEGRITY HAS BECOME THE MOST PRECIOUS ASSET OF THE POLITICIAN.

BUT CLEANING UP CAMPAIGNS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

PEOPLE ARE FED UP WITH VAGUE AND EMPTY PROMISES.

OUR PEOPLE HAVE NOT THROWN IN THE TOWEL AND GIVEN UP ON
ACHIEVING OUR TREASURED GOALS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

BUT THEY ARE FINISHED CHASING RAINBOWS. THEY STILL WANT

POLITICIANS WITH DREAMS AND IMAGINATION, BUT THEY WANT MORE.

THEY WANT PEOPLE IN GOVERNMENT WHO ARE EFFECTIVE. THE PREMIUM
TODAY IS ON RESULTS.

UNLESS OUR GOVERNMENT BUCKLES DOWN AND BEGINS TO MEET
THE NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE, AND UNLESS OUR POLITICIANS BECOME MORE
RESPONSIBLE IN PURSUING THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND IN LEVELING
WITH THE PEOPLE, ALL THE CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION REFORM IN THE

WORLD WILL NOT RESTORE THE PEOPLE'S FAITH IN GOVERNMENT --

PARTICULARLY IN THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT WHICH ARE SO MUCH
IN NEED OF REBUILDING.

IN THESE DAYS OF NATIONAL PESSIMISM, THE PROPHETIC WORDS
OF ALDOUS HUXLEY -- "I HAVE PEERED INTO THE FUTURE, AND IT WON'T
WORK" -- COME PERHAPS TOO FREQUENTLY TO MIND.

BUT, WE HAVE BEEN DOWN BEFORE. WE HAVE SEEN HARD TIMES.
WE HAVE GONE THROUGH WARS AND DEPRESSIONS, INTERNAL DISSENSION
AND CIVIL STRIFE. EACH TIME WE HAVE BOUNCED BACK A STRONGER NATION.

THE ONLY OBSTACLE AND ONLY HOPE FOR AN AMERICA AND A
WORLD THAT "WILL WORK" IS YOU. EACH GENERATION MUST FIND WITHIN
ITSELF AND FOR ITSELF THE VISION IT WILL PURSUE, THE VALUES IT
WILL ENSHRINE, AND THE LEADERSHIP AND CONVICTION THAT WILL MOVE
OUR NATION TOWARD THEM.



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