

REMARKS BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION & LEADERSHIP
AWARD BANQUET

BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA

May 3, 1975

These days we hear much about the public's disaffection with government and elected political leaders. Some of these attitudes had their genesis with the Watergate tragedy. But President Nixon's resignation and the successful prosecution of the major Watergate figures have not produced any marked upswing in the public's confidence.

Yet, the challenge of rebuilding public confidence in our democratic system is still very much with us. And this challenge involves far more than dealing with Watergate.

Consider these figures: A recent survey revealed that only 30 percent of the people believe that government can be trusted to do "what is right" most of the time. This is a drop of 32 percent over the past decade.

Or consider this shocking fact: A national survey of over 23,000 high school student leaders found that in just two years -- from 1972 to 1974 -- the number who rated political leaders as persons of honor and integrity dropped from 60 percent to 12 percent. Eighty-three percent believe that the American court system does not dispense justice equally. And 73 percent believe that punishable crimes are committed in most major political campaigns.

This is a staggering loss of confidence among the future leaders of our country. And it is about time that we faced the long-term dangers these attitudes pose for the maintenance of free democratic institutions in America.

For someone like myself, disclosures like this are especially distressing.

I surely understand that our system has its real shortcomings and that the need for improvement, reform, and sensible change is always before us.

But I also look back on the extraordinary accomplishments of the past three decades in America. I know that for all its faults and shortcomings, American democracy remains the most responsive and just system of government in the world.

I think of the progress we have made in civil rights since the early 1950's -- when blacks faced a solid wall of legally-enforced segregation and discrimination in all walks of life. Public accommodations, jobs, housing, education -- all of these vital areas of human activity were conducted on the proposition of "separate and equal."

Denial of voting rights, coupled with physical violence and intimidation, meant that little could be done by blacks to redress these wrongs.

I look today at blacks holding public office in every state, or routinely traveling in all parts of the country without embarrassment or harassment, or sitting in executive positions in our major businesses in growing numbers, and I see real progress. Not the end of the line, by any means, but solid, meaningful, and hopeful progress.

Or I look at the progress we have made in protecting our environment, or improving our schools, or advancing the frontiers of medical science, and I know that government can respond to human needs.

I also look around me in Congress, and I see a continuing influx of outstanding young men and women who have been elected by the people.

The quality of elected public officials today -- in Congress, in the states, and at the local level -- far surpasses what existed one or two decades ago. Yes, a remarkable generation of public servants is coming of age in America.

Because I see these hopeful signs of the continued vitality of our democratic system, I can only be deeply concerned by the public's growing lack of confidence and rising cynicism. And this concern should be shared by every American who wants to see our system survive -- and who wants future generations of Americans to share fully in the promise of this country.

Part of the answer, of course, is to continue doing everything possible about the injustices and problems that remain. Unless government truly serves the people, government deserves the people's scorn and active opposition.

But there is another side of the equation that, I am convinced, must receive far greater attention.

We must begin taking a new look at how people learn what their government is doing -- how the message of government success or failure is communicated to the people of America.

You know well the importance of effective individual communication. But today I want to talk with you about other forms of communication in relation to government which also should be of great concern to us.

I have long believed that people receive only a partial story -- a story that tells them a lot more about the government's failures than about its successes. And I believe that this failure in communication has a great deal to do with eroding the public's confidence and faith in their democratic institutions.

At this point you might expect me to attack the network television news organizations for their alleged bias and distortion in reporting political news to the people.

There is no argument that television news is the most powerful communications medium in the country. And it can certainly be argued that television news organizations -- network and local -- should do a better, more balanced job in reporting political and governmental affairs.

But I have a hard time simply placing the blame on the doorsteps of TV news organizations.

I say this for one reason: Government, especially the U.S. Congress, has made it extremely difficult for the American people to witness -- through television and radio -- the actions and decisions of their elected leaders. Since the people are rarely permitted to see for themselves what is going on, they are forced to rely exclusively on the brief accounts compiled by broadcast news organizations.

Through the years I have been an outspoken critic of outmoded Congressional rules and traditions. I got that reputation when I first arrived in Washington. And I have been agitating and organizing in support of a more modern Congress to this day.

But I can also tell you that Congress is much more effective, and the members are a lot more competent, than most people believe.

In the past several years Congress has reorganized and updated its rules and procedures to make it a far more responsive and responsible legislative body.

But these facts are among Washington's better kept secrets. Congress has steadfastly prevented this story from reaching the people through a number of practices and traditions designed for the era of the pony express, rather than the age of mass communications in which we live.

For example: I have long advocated that Congress should permit broadcast coverage of floor debate on a daily basis. One reason why people receive such a limited amount of accurate information about Congress is that people never actually see Congress at work.

But there is no reason whatever that Congress couldn't open its doors to microphones and cameras, just as a majority of our state legislatures have done, not to mention city councils, boards of education, and the like.

This year Congress is finally considering a system of broadcast coverage similar to the one that has always existed at the United Nations -- a pool facility operated by the U.N. broadcasting service that provides all broadcasters with a live broadcast feed of all public proceedings. The broadcasters then select newsworthy items for use on regular news shows or specials.

A similar system of continuous videotaping of Congressional floor proceedings and key committee sessions would, over time, make a substantial and positive change in the public's perception of Congress.

Evidence from the states suggests that this perception would be a distinct improvement over what presently exists in the minds of most people -- Congress would be seen as a visible, functioning institution -- one that deals reasonably effectively with public issues -- and where most of the members are intelligent and hard-working.

Regional and local exposure would be given to issues of regional and local interest. National news segments would be featured on network news programs. Only occasionally, during truly historic moments such as the cloture vote that ended the filibuster against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, would the networks carry the broadcasts live.

Public television and educational television would probably broadcast more Congressional proceedings than commercial television. A recent study of high school students in Florida revealed that those who watched daily televised sessions of the state legislature ended up with far higher levels of confidence and trust in public officials than students who did not watch the televised sessions. I suggest this is a most significant finding.

Opening the Senate and House to broadcast coverage is long overdue. Resolutions are now pending in both bodies to permit such coverage on a trial basis. Chances for favorable action this year are surprisingly good.

Such action, by itself, will not produce any miraculous change in public attitudes. But the spirit that motivates these proposals -- that of making the American people more active partners in the job of democratic government -- is surely what will again instill our citizens with pride and confidence in America and in our system of representative democracy.

The people of America want to believe in their government. It is now up to Congress to give them the chance to see, first-hand, the functioning of their national legislature.

If these new means of communication with government are given a chance, I have no doubt that we will have taken a most important step in rebuilding the public confidence on which every democracy depends.

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WITH GOVERNMENT AND ELECTED POLITICAL LEADERS. SOME OF THESE
ATTITUDES HAD THEIR GENESIS WITH THE WATERGATE TRAGEDY, BUT
PRESIDENT NIXON'S RESIGNATION AND THE SUCCESSFUL PROSECUTION
OF THE MAJOR WATERGATE FIGURES HAVE NOT PRODUCED ANY MARKED
UPSWING IN THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE.

YET, THE CHALLENGE OF REBUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN OUR
DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS STILL VERY MUCH WITH US. AND THIS
CHALLENGE INVOLVES FAR MORE THAN DEALING WITH WATERGATE.

CONSIDER THESE FIGURES: A RECENT SURVEY REVEALED THAT ONLY
30 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT GOVERNMENT CAN BE
TRUSTED TO DO "WHAT IS RIGHT" MOST OF THE TIME. THIS IS A
DROP OF 32 PERCENT OVER THE PAST DECADE.

OR CONSIDER THIS SHOCKING FACT: A NATIONAL SURVEY OF OVER

23,000 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT LEADERS FOUND THAT IN JUST TWO

YEARS -- FROM 1972 TO 1974 -- THE NUMBER WHO RATED POLITICAL

LEADERS AS PERSONS OF HONOR AND INTEGRITY DROPPED FROM 60

PERCENT TO 12 PERCENT / ⁸³ EIGHTY-THREE PERCENT BELIEVE THAT THE

AMERICAN COURT SYSTEM DOES NOT DISPENSE JUSTICE EQUALLY;

AND 73 PERCENT BELIEVE THAT PUNISHABLE CRIMES ARE COMMITTED

IN MOST MAJOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS. (Business Corp. } Lack
Lab. union. } Trust!)

THIS IS A STAGGERING LOSS OF CONFIDENCE AMONG THE FUTURE

LEADERS OF OUR COUNTRY AND IT IS ABOUT TIME THAT WE FACED

THE LONG-TERM DANGERS THESE ATTITUDES POSE FOR THE MAINTENANCE

OF FREE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN AMERICA.

Voting Patterns - Drop for about 68% in 1960 to
52% in 1972

Why

-3-

FOR SOMEONE LIKE MYSELF, DISCLOSURES LIKE THIS ARE
ESPECIALLY DISTRESSING.

why samples for Vietnam

AID-failure
foreign news

I SURELY UNDERSTAND THAT OUR SYSTEM HAS ITS REAL SHORT-

COMINGS, ~~AND THAT~~ THE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT, REFORM, AND

SENSIBLE CHANGE IS ALWAYS BEFORE US.

BUT I ALSO LOOK BACK ON THE EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS
OF THE PAST THREE DECADES IN AMERICA. I KNOW THAT FOR ALL ITS
FAULTS AND SHORTCOMINGS, AMERICAN DEMOCRACY REMAINS THE MOST
RESPONSIVE AND JUST SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD.

I THINK OF THE PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE IN CIVIL RIGHTS
SINCE THE EARLY 1950'S -- WHEN BLACKS FACED A SOLID WALL
OF LEGISLATION-ENFORCED SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION IN ALL
WALKS OF LIFE. PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS, JOBS, HOUSING,
EDUCATION -- ALL OF THESE VITAL AREAS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY
WERE CONDUCTED ON THE PROPOSITION OF "SEPARATE AND EQUAL."
[DENIAL OF VOTING RIGHTS, COUPLED WITH PHYSICAL VIOLENCE
AND INTIMIDATION, MEANT THAT LITTLE COULD BE DONE BY BLACKS
TO REDRESS THESE WRONGS.

[I LOOK TODAY AT BLACKS HOLDING PUBLIC OFFICE IN EVERY
STATE, OR ROUTINELY TRAVELING IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY
WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT OR HARASSMENT, OR SITTING IN EXECUTIVE

POSITIONS IN OUR MAJOR BUSINESSES IN GROWING NUMBERS, AND

I SEE REAL PROGRESS, NOT THE END OF THE LINE, BY ANY MEANS,

BUT SOLID, MEANINGFUL, AND HOPEFUL PROGRESS.

OR I LOOK AT THE PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE IN PROTECTING OUR

ENVIRONMENT, OR IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS, OR ADVANCING THE

FRONTIERS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE, AND I KNOW THAT GOVERNMENT

+ Does
CAN RESPOND TO HUMAN NEEDS.

I ALSO LOOK AROUND ME IN CONGRESS, AND I SEE A CONTINUING

INFLUX OF OUTSTANDING YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN

ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE.

L THE QUALITY OF ELECTED PUBLIC OFFICIALS TODAY -- IN
CONGRESS, IN THE STATES, AND AT THE LOCAL LEVEL -- FAR
SURPASSES WHAT EXISTED ONE OR TWO DECADES AGO. YES, A
REMARKABLE GENERATION OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IS COMING OF AGE
IN AMERICA.

L BECAUSE I SEE THESE HOPEFUL SIGNS OF THE CONTINUED
VITALITY OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, I CAN ONLY BE DEEPLY
CONCERNED BY THE PUBLIC'S GROWING LACK OF CONFIDENCE AND
RISING CYNICISM. AND THIS CONCERN SHOULD BE SHARED BY EVERY
AMERICAN WHO WANTS TO SEE OUR SYSTEM SURVIVE -- AND WHO
WANTS FUTURE GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS TO SHARE FULLY IN THE
PROMISE OF THIS COUNTRY.

Attack the Problems - unemployment!

↳ PART OF THE ANSWER, OF COURSE, IS TO CONTINUE DOING

EVERYTHING POSSIBLE ABOUT THE INJUSTICES AND PROBLEMS THAT

REMAIN. ↳ UNLESS GOVERNMENT TRULY SERVES THE PEOPLE, GOVERNMENT

DESERVES THE PEOPLE'S SCORN AND ACTIVE OPPOSITION.

↳ BUT THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE OF THE EQUATION THAT, I AM

CONVINCED, MUST RECEIVE FAR GREATER ATTENTION.

↳ WE MUST BEGIN TAKING A NEW LOOK AT HOW PEOPLE LEARN

WHAT THEIR GOVERNMENT IS DOING -- HOW THE MESSAGE OF

GOVERNMENT SUCCESS OR FAILURE IS COMMUNICATED TO THE PEOPLE

OF AMERICA.

Individual Pol figures have good ratings - the system & institutions not by good.

YOU KNOW WELL THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE INDIVIDUAL

COMMUNICATION BUT TODAY I WANT TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT OTHER

FORMS OF COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO GOVERNMENT WHICH ALSO

SHOULD BE OF GREAT CONCERN TO US.

I HAVE LONG BELIEVED THAT PEOPLE RECEIVE ONLY A PARTIAL

STORY -- A STORY THAT TELLS THEM A LOT MORE ABOUT THE

GOVERNMENT'S FAILURES THAN ABOUT ITS SUCCESSES AND I

BELIEVE THAT THIS FAILURE IN COMMUNICATION HAS A GREAT

DEAL TO DO WITH ERODING THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE AND FAITH

IN THEIR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

AT THIS POINT YOU MIGHT EXPECT ME TO ATTACK THE NETWORK

TELEVISION NEWS ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR ALLEGED BIAS AND

DISTORTION IN REPORTING POLITICAL NEWS TO THE PEOPLE.

Radio
L THERE IS NO ARGUMENT THAT TELEVISION NEWS IS THE MOST
POWERFUL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM IN THE COUNTRY, AND IT CAN
CERTAINLY BE ARGUED THAT TELEVISION NEWS ORGANIZATIONS --
NETWORK AND LOCAL -- SHOULD DO A BETTER, MORE BALANCED JOB
IN REPORTING POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS.

L BUT I HAVE A HARD TIME SIMPLY PLACING THE BLAME ON THE
DOORSTEPS OF *or other* TV NEWS ORGANIZATIONS.

L I SAY THIS FOR ONE REASON: GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY THE
U.S. CONGRESS, HAS MADE IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE TO WITNESS -- THROUGH TELEVISION AND RADIO --
THE ACTIONS AND DECISIONS OF THEIR ELECTED LEADERS.

L SINCE THE PEOPLE ARE RARELY PERMITTED TO SEE FOR THEMSELVES

WHAT IS GOING ON, THEY ARE FORCED TO RELY EXCLUSIVELY

ON THE BRIEF ACCOUNTS COMPILED BY BROADCAST NEWS ORGANIZATIONS.

L THROUGH THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF

OUTMODED CONGRESSIONAL RULES AND TRADITIONS. I GOT THAT

REPUTATION WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON, AND I HAVE

BEEN AGITATING AND ORGANIZING IN SUPPORT OF A MORE MODERN

CONGRESS TO THIS DAY.

(*Organization*) *committees,*
committees

L BUT I CAN ALSO TELL YOU THAT CONGRESS IS MUCH MORE

EFFECTIVE, AND THE MEMBERS ARE A LOT MORE COMPETENT, THAN MOST

PEOPLE BELIEVE.

IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS CONGRESS HAS REORGANIZED AND
UPDATED ITS RULES AND PROCEDURES TO MAKE IT A FAR MORE
RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE LEGISLATIVE BODY,

BUT THESE FACTS ARE AMONG WASHINGTON'S BETTER KEPT SECRETS,
(not the press)
CONGRESS HAS STEADFASTLY PREVENTED THIS STORY FROM REACHING

THE PEOPLE THROUGH A NUMBER OF PRACTICES AND TRADITIONS

DESIGNED FOR THE ERA OF THE PONY EXPRESS, RATHER THAN THE

AGE OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS IN WHICH WE LIVE.

(common
Agree - no
Room)

~~FOR EXAMPLE:~~ I HAVE LONG ADVOCATED THAT CONGRESS SHOULD
PERMIT BROADCAST COVERAGE OF FLOOR DEBATE ON A DAILY BASIS.

ONE REASON WHY PEOPLE RECEIVE SUCH A LIMITED AMOUNT OF
ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT CONGRESS IS THAT PEOPLE NEVER
ACTUALLY SEE CONGRESS AT WORK.

BUT THERE IS NO REASON WHATEVER THAT CONGRESS COULDN'T
OPEN ITS DOORS TO MICROPHONES AND CAMERAS, JUST AS A MAJORITY
OF OUR STATE LEGISLATURES HAVE DONE, NOT TO MENTION CITY
COUNCILS, BOARDS OF EDUCATION, AND THE LIKE.

THIS YEAR CONGRESS IS FINALLY CONSIDERING A SYSTEM OF
BROADCAST COVERAGE SIMILAR TO THE ONE THAT HAS ALWAYS EXISTED
AT THE UNITED NATIONS -- A POOL FACILITY OPERATED BY THE
U.N. BROADCASTING SERVICE THAT PROVIDES ALL BROADCASTERS
WITH A LIVE BROADCAST FEED OF ALL PUBLIC PROCEEDINGS. THE
BROADCASTERS THEN SELECT NEWSWORTHY ITEMS FOR USE ON REGULAR
NEWS SHOWS OR SPECIALS.

↳ A SIMILAR SYSTEM OF CONTINUOUS VIDEOTAPING OF CONGRESSIONAL
FLOOR PROCEEDINGS AND KEY COMMITTEE SESSIONS WOULD, OVER TIME,
MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL AND POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC'S
PERCEPTION OF CONGRESS.

↳ EVIDENCE FROM THE STATES SUGGESTS THAT THIS PERCEPTION
WOULD BE A DISTINCT IMPROVEMENT OVER WHAT PRESENTLY EXISTS
IN THE MINDS OF MOST PEOPLE -- CONGRESS WOULD BE SEEN AS A
VISIBLE, FUNCTIONING INSTITUTION -- ONE THAT DEALS REASONABLY
EFFECTIVELY WITH PUBLIC ISSUES -- AND WHERE MOST OF THE
MEMBERS ARE INTELLIGENT AND HARD-WORKING.

[Rescheduling]

2 REGIONAL AND LOCAL EXPOSURE WOULD BE GIVEN TO ISSUES
OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL INTEREST; NATIONAL NEWS SEGMENTS
WOULD BE FEATURED ON NETWORK NEWS PROGRAMS ONLY OCCASIONALLY,
DURING TRULY HISTORIC MOMENTS SUCH AS THE CLOTURE VOTE THAT
ENDED THE FILIBUSTER AGAINST THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964,
WOULD THE NETWORKS CARRY THE BROADCASTS LIVE,
L PUBLIC TELEVISION ^{Radio} AND EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION ^{Radio} WOULD
PROBABLY BROADCAST MORE CONGRESSIONAL PROCEEDINGS THAN
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION (A RECENT STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN FLORIDA REVEALED THAT THOSE WHO WATCHED DAILY TELEVISED
SESSIONS OF THE STATE LEGISLATURE ENDED UP WITH FAR HIGHER
LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN PUBLIC OFFICIALS THAN

STUDENTS WHO DID NOT WATCH THE TELEVISED SESSIONS. I

SUGGEST THIS IS A MOST SIGNIFICANT FINDING.

L OPENING THE SENATE AND HOUSE TO BROADCAST COVERAGE IS
LONG OVERDUE. L RESOLUTIONS ARE NOW PENDING IN BOTH BODIES TO
PERMIT SUCH COVERAGE ON A TRIAL BASIS, CHANCES FOR FAVORABLE
ACTION THIS YEAR ARE SURPRISINGLY GOOD. !

L SUCH ACTION, BY ITSELF, WILL NOT PRODUCE ANY MIRACULOUS
CHANGE IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES. BUT THE SPIRIT THAT MOTIVATES
THESE PROPOSALS -- THAT OF MAKING THE AMERICAN PEOPLE MORE
ACTIVE PARTNERS IN THE JOB OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT -- IS
SURELY WHAT WILL AGAIN INSTILL OUR CITIZENS WITH PRIDE AND
CONFIDENCE IN AMERICA AND IN OUR SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRACY.

THE PEOPLE OF AMERICA WANT TO BELIEVE IN THEIR GOVERNMENT.

IT IS NOW UP TO CONGRESS TO GIVE THEM THE CHANCE TO SEE,

FIRST-HAND, THE FUNCTIONING OF THEIR NATIONAL LEGISLATURE.

2 IF THESE NEW MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WITH GOVERNMENT ARE
GIVEN A CHANCE, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL HAVE TAKEN A

MOST IMPORTANT STEP IN REBUILDING THE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE ON

WHICH EVERY DEMOCRACY DEPENDS.

Trust confidence



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