

REMARKS BY
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GRADUATION, SENATE PAGE SCHOOL
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One of my obligations as presiding officer of the U.S. Senate is my responsibility for the Senate Pages. Speaker McCormack fulfills a similar function in the House. With all respect to Mr. Dekeyser, I suppose I could say that the speaker and the Vice President are the real principals of the Page School.

You have been exposed to the life of public service here in the Congress. The late Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, used to say that "service" is the most beautiful word in the English language.

Life in the Congress truly is a life of service.

The members of Congress provide a direct link between the national government and the almost 195 million persons who comprise this republic.

This connection is vital in keeping our national government responsive to the needs and opinions of its people.

I have spent a number of years in the Congress. In those years I have learned some lessons.

The first lesson has to do with the process of compromise.

There are 100 members of the United States Senate; 435 members of the House. No two states or regions of the United States have identical interests or prejudices.

One of the jobs of Congress is to reconcile such differences through compromise and accommodation.

The willingness to compromise -- and I have done so more times than I can count -- is the respect we pay to the dignity of those with whom we disagree.

Through reasonable discussion . . . through taking into account the views of many, Congress amends and refines legislative proposals so that, once a law is passed, it reflects the collective judgment of the American people. This is service in the true sense.

These skills and attitudes, I might add, are needed in the world as well.

World order and the rule of law will be secure on this earth only when men have learned to cope with the continuing conflicts of peoples and nations through peaceful processes of legislative bargaining.

A second lesson I have learned in the Congress is the importance of responsible surveillance.

There are roughly 70 separate departments and agencies of the federal government. Some are small; some are large. All are engaged in carrying out the will of the people as expressed through Congress.

These departments and agencies need a continuing critical review by the committees and Houses of Congress. The genius of our founding fathers is nowhere more in evidence than in those sections of the Constitution which provide for checks and balances.

Through its review of the executive budget in the appropriations process . . . through committee investigations . . . through advice and consent on appointments and treaties . . . and through informal discussion, Congress seeks to improve and to support the executive branch of the government.

This exercise in freedom protects and extends freedom. If legislative voices occasionally seem strident, citizens should take stock of what their world would be

if no legislative voices were heard at all.

We know what happens in countries without independent and constructive legislatures.

There is a final lesson I have learned in Congress: the creative joy of politics. Each Congress is devoted in great measure to the development of new public policies designed to promote the general welfare and the national security. Congress is not a battlefield for blind armies that clash by night. It is a place where national objectives are sought . . . where Presidential programs are reviewed . . . where great societies are endlessly debated and implemented.

If, as Emerson once wrote, Congress is a "standing insurrection," it is a standing insurrection against war, poverty, ignorance, injustice, sickness, environmental ugliness, economic and personal insecurity.

Few careers open such remarkable opportunities for translating dreams into reality. A new bill, a creative amendment, a wise appropriation, may mean the difference between health and sickness, jobs and idleness, peace and war for millions of human beings.

Stemming from ancient parliamentary origins, the main job of Congress is to redress grievances, to right wrongs, to make freedom and justice living realities for all. What higher service exists? This is the essence of politics: to translate the concerns and the creative responses of a vast citizenry into effective and humane laws.

I will conclude with a personal note. For almost 20 years, Congress has been my home.

I have during that time been impatient of delays and procedural anachronisms -- and so have my colleagues of the Congress.

But I have seen in the Halls of Congress more idealism . . . more humaneness and compassion . . . more empathy . . . more understanding , more profiles of courage than in any other institution I have ever known. Like many of you today, I find it in my heart to praise and to thank my teachers.

Each of you, however, must also assume a personal responsibility for preserving freedom in these perilous times. And the nature of this responsibility is best illustrated by John Adams' notion of the spirit of public happiness.

It was this spirit, said Adams, that possessed the American colonists and won the revolution even before it was fought -- a spirit which is reflected in delight in participation in public discussion and public action. It is a sense of joy in citizenship, in self-government, in self-control, in self-discipline, and in dedication.

This Congress, I hope, has instilled in each of you this spirit of public happiness. And it will be your dedication to public service in turn -- and the dedication of other Americans -- that will insure the ultimate victory of free men in their struggle against the forces of tyranny and oppression.



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