

REMARKS OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

MID-YEAR CONFERENCE

U.S. NATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Washington, D. C.

March 10, 1976

It is always a pleasure to meet with representatives of the National Student Association. I have been privileged to work with your officers over the years. In fact, one of my key assistants during the Vice Presidential years, Bill Welsh, was the first President of NSA, so I feel a kinship with you.

You have come to Washington to see the government first-hand and to make some points about the way you want things done.

Washington is the place to test your impressions of history against the realities of the present and your hopes for the future.

I understand that your meetings here will focus primarily on techniques of lobbying. As you define the issues which should most concern NSA and develop plans to see them translated into public policy, I want you to remember two important points.

One. This government is not perfect. It is not perfect because it's run by 215 million people, none of whom are perfect.

That's right. Representative democracy is not -- it cannot be -- perfect, and I, for one, don't think it has to be perfect to be successful.

Winston Churchill once said, "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. . . no one pretends that democracy is perfect or allwise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

The word "efficiency" is not found in any of our national documents. But you will find these words: equality, liberty, justice.

The second thing I want you to remember is that you have a right to be here.

The word "lobby" conjures up a bad image in the minds of many of our people. Contrary to the view which exists in some quarters, lobbyists are not back-room heavies who dangle politicians on a puppet string. There are some, of course, who seek to wield undue influence, but they are in the minority, and much of this kind of activity has been exposed and stopped.

No, the vast majority of those who belong to special interest groups are citizens like you and me with special needs, with subjective concerns, and a spokesman to voice these concerns before the Congress, in the White House, and before the Federal agencies.

This not only is acceptable; it is required if this government is to be responsive to the needs of its people.

The Founders, in their great wisdom, created what Daniel Webster called, "The people's government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people."

The Framers of the Constitution left no doubt where the concentration of power was to be in our government.

"We the People," they wrote. Not we the rich, or we the poor, or we the blacks, or we the whites, or we the politicians, or we the corporate executives, but "We the People." There are no words more beautiful in our heritage than these.

Vast power is concentrated in this phrase, "We the People." In it lies an enormous gift, a monumental challenge, and a charge to the citizens of this great land to make their government what it ought to be.

How will we secure the blessings of liberty for all Americans? How will we harness the resources of this land and put them to work for the common good? How will we guide our inefficient democracy toward the goals we share? The answer to all these questions is -- you.

And, my friends, whether you like it or not, the name of the game is politics. Dirty word though it has become to some people, politics is the way to get things done in our system of government.

It is the life-blood of representative democracy.

It is the vehicle of change.

It is the means by which conflicts and competing interests can be resolved peacefully.

It enables us to choose leaders who will represent and protect our rights and interests and remove them when they fail.

The beauty of our political system is its flexibility. And the beauty of the Constitution is the capacity it gives us to bring to fruition those ideals which are expressed so eloquently in it.

Yet at a time when those ideals are most in need of rebirth, we have witnessed a decline in voting and participation in our political system.

In the 1972 election only 55 percent of America's eligible voters went to the polls -- the lowest percentage in a quarter of a century. Some 68 million eligible citizens did not vote.

It is tempting to say that those 68 million people deserved what they got in that election. That may be too harsh. But the people in this country, more than anywhere else in the world, have only themselves to blame when they get sorry leadership.

So did the turnout improve in 1974? The Census Bureau found that only 45 percent of the voting age population actually voted in the Congressional elections of that year.

Saddest of all are the figures for the 18- to 20- year-old group.

For those of us who fought to extend the franchise, it was a tough blow to find that 63.6 percent in this group did not even bother to register in 1974. Of those who did register, almost half did not vote in the election. Only 20.8 percent of eligible 18- to 20- year-olds voted in 1974 -- just slightly more than one out of five.

In the 21- to 24- year-old bracket, a slightly higher percentage -- about one quarter of those eligible -- registered and voted.

We must ask ourselves why, with more opportunity for free voting and freedom of political participation, the United States has the lowest voter turnout of any free country in the world.

This is a national disgrace. But it is more than that. When citizens who can vote don't, they are giving notice, in effect, that their share of the U.S. government is up for sale. Worse, they are giving it away -- to the biggest campaign contributor, the biggest corporations, the loudest voice.

Those who boycott the ballot box are doing so at their own peril.

So if you care about your government, if you care about your own future, get off the sidelines and participate. If you think politics is dirty -- and if you're clean, get in there with your bar of political Ivory Soap and clean it up.

If you want good government, if you want responsive leadership, you will have to put something of yourself into it. If you don't, your credentials for criticism are sadly lacking.

I like to think that each of you is on the way to a personal and collective "rendezvous with destiny," in Franklin Roosevelt's words. Each of you is -- or should be -- struggling with the difficult problems which threaten our national well-being and your own future.

I want to see a commitment on the part of our young people to use that vast reserve of energy and enthusiasm to bring about solutions and new ideas.

Believe me, there is plenty for you to do.

For example, the entire Federal program of aid to higher education is being reviewed by the Administration. And it is up to you to make your voices heard now -- before it's too late.

The President wants to hold the Basic Education Opportunity Grants to the current maximum of \$1,400 a year, without any adjustment for inflation.

He wants to phase out the Direct Student Loan program and cut Federal funding of Work-Study programs from \$390 million to \$250 million in fiscal year 1977.

And he wants to cut out the supplemental opportunity grants altogether. This is the program designed for exceptionally needy students. It would eliminate assistance for almost half a million students in one fell swoop.

The Administration's plans would mean that a total of 1,016,000 students have less chance of getting a college or university education.

This is unconscionable, and it is up to you and me to see that it doesn't happen.

It should concern you that over seven million Americans are out of work. More than that, some 20 million of our citizens were jobless at one time or another in 1975.

It is your concern when 19.9 percent of young people age 16 to 19 are unemployed. And when those 20 to 24 years old suffer an average jobless rate of 12.7 percent.

We have a vast, unfinished agenda including aid to the cities, housing, transportation, day care and care for the elderly.

You, more than any other group of Americans, face the challenge of making tomorrow better.

I have a poster in my office which bears this slogan:

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

This expression appeals to me because it is a reminder that each day can be a new beginning.

In our dynamic democracy there always will be one constant -- the inevitability of change.

The problems and the challenges always will be replaced by new ones, which will require new approaches, new ideas, creative solutions.

If you care about what happens, you must be prepared to get in the middle of the fight. You cannot afford to let someone else make all the decisions. This government is your business. It's everybody's business. I challenge you to get to work.

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U.S. NATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

MARCH 10, 1976

*Pres. Clarissa Gilbert*

IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO MEET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION, I HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH YOUR OFFICERS OVER THE YEARS, IN FACT, ONE OF MY KEY ASSISTANTS DURING THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL YEARS, BILL WELSH, WAS THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF NSA, SO I FEEL A KINSHIP WITH YOU.

YOU HAVE COME TO WASHINGTON TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT FIRST-HAND AND TO MAKE SOME POINTS ABOUT THE WAY YOU WANT THINGS DONE.

WASHINGTON IS THE PLACE TO TEST YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF HISTORY AGAINST THE REALITIES OF THE PRESENT AND YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE.

I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR MEETINGS HERE WILL FOCUS PRIMARILY ON TECHNIQUES OF LOBBYING.

AS YOU DEFINE THE ISSUES WHICH SHOULD MOST CONCERN NSA AND

DEVELOP PLANS TO SEE THEM TRANSLATED INTO PUBLIC POLICY, I

WANT YOU TO REMEMBER TWO IMPORTANT POINTS.

ONE. THIS GOVERNMENT IS NOT PERFECT. IT IS NOT PERFECT  
BECAUSE IT'S RUN BY 215 MILLION PEOPLE, NONE OF WHOM ARE PERFECT.

THAT'S RIGHT. REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IS NOT -- IT CANNOT  
BE -- PERFECT, AND I, FOR ONE, DON'T THINK IT HAS TO BE PERFECT  
TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

WINSTON CHURCHILL ONCE SAID, "MANY FORMS OF GOVERNMENT HAVE  
BEEN TRIED, AND WILL BE TRIED IN THIS WORLD OF SIN AND WOE, . . . NO  
ONE PRETENDS THAT DEMOCRACY IS PERFECT OR ALLWISE. INDEED, IT HAS  
BEEN SAID THAT DEMOCRACY IS THE WORST FORM OF GOVERNMENT EXCEPT  
ALL THOSE OTHER FORMS THAT HAVE BEEN TRIED FROM TIME TO TIME."

THE WORD "EFFICIENCY" IS NOT FOUND IN ANY OF OUR NATIONAL DOCUMENTS, BUT YOU WILL FIND THESE WORDS: EQUALITY, LIBERTY, JUSTICE.

THE SECOND THING I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER IS THAT YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE HERE.

↳ THE WORD "LOBBY" CONJURES UP A BAD IMAGE IN THE MINDS OF MANY OF OUR PEOPLE. CONTRARY TO THE VIEW WHICH EXISTS IN SOME QUARTERS, LOBBYISTS ARE NOT BACK-ROOM HEAVIES WHO DANGLE POLITICIANS ON A PUPPET STRING. THERE ARE SOME, OF COURSE, WHO SEEK TO WIELD UNDUE INFLUENCE, BUT THEY ARE IN THE MINORITY, AND MUCH OF THIS KIND OF ACTIVITY HAS BEEN EXPOSED AND STOPPED,

↳ No, THE VAST MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO BELONG TO SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS ARE CITIZENS LIKE YOU AND ME WITH SPECIAL NEEDS,

WITH SUBJECTIVE CONCERNS, AND A SPOKESMAN TO VOICE THESE CONCERNS BEFORE THE CONGRESS, IN THE WHITE HOUSE, AND BEFORE THE FEDERAL AGENCIES,

L THIS NOT ONLY IS ACCEPTABLE; IT IS REQUIRED IF THIS GOVERNMENT IS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF ITS PEOPLE.

L THE FOUNDERS, IN THEIR GREAT WISDOM, CREATED WHAT DANIEL WEBSTER CALLED, "THE PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT, MADE FOR THE PEOPLE, MADE BY THE PEOPLE, AND ANSWERABLE TO THE PEOPLE."

L THE FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION LEFT NO DOUBT WHERE THE CONCENTRATION OF POWER WAS TO BE IN OUR GOVERNMENT.

L "WE THE PEOPLE," THEY WROTE. NOT WE THE RICH, OR WE THE POOR, OR WE THE BLACKS, OR WE THE WHITES, OR WE THE POLITICIANS, OR WE THE CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, BUT "WE THE PEOPLE." THERE ARE NO WORDS MORE BEAUTIFUL IN OUR HERITAGE THAN THESE.

WAST POWER IS CONCENTRATED IN THIS PHRASE, "WE THE  
PEOPLE." IN IT LIES AN ENORMOUS GIFT, A MONUMENTAL CHALLENGE,  
AND A CHARGE TO THE CITIZENS OF THIS GREAT LAND TO MAKE  
THEIR GOVERNMENT WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE.

HOW WILL WE SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY FOR ALL  
AMERICANS? HOW WILL WE HARNESS THE RESOURCES OF THIS LAND  
AND PUT THEM TO WORK FOR THE COMMON GOOD? HOW WILL WE GUIDE  
OUR INEFFICIENT DEMOCRACY TOWARD THE GOALS WE SHARE? THE  
ANSWER TO ALL THESE QUESTIONS IS -- YOU.

AND, MY FRIENDS, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, THE NAME  
OF THE GAME IS POLITICS. DIRTY WORD THOUGH IT HAS BECOME  
TO SOME PEOPLE, POLITICS IS THE WAY TO GET THINGS DONE IN OUR  
SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

↳ IT IS THE LIFE-BLOOD OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY.

↳ IT IS THE VEHICLE OF CHANGE,

↳ IT IS THE MEANS BY WHICH CONFLICTS AND COMPETING

INTERESTS CAN BE RESOLVED PEACEFULLY.

IT ENABLES US TO CHOOSE LEADERS WHO WILL REPRESENT AND  
PROTECT OUR RIGHTS AND INTERESTS AND REMOVE THEM WHEN THEY FAIL.

~~THE BEAUTY OF OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM IS ITS FLEXIBILITY,  
AND THE BEAUTY OF THE CONSTITUTION IS THE CAPACITY IT GIVES US  
TO BRING TO FRUITION THOSE IDEALS WHICH ARE EXPRESSED SO  
ELOQUENTLY IN IT.~~

↳ YET AT A TIME WHEN THOSE IDEALS ARE MOST IN NEED OF  
REBIRTH, WE HAVE WITNESSED A DECLINE IN VOTING AND PARTICIPATION  
IN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM.

L IN THE 1972 ELECTION ONLY 55 PERCENT OF AMERICA'S ELIGIBLE  
VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS -- THE LOWEST PERCENTAGE IN A QUARTER  
OF A CENTURY. SOME 68 MILLION ELIGIBLE CITIZENS DID NOT VOTE.

L IT IS TEMPTING TO SAY THAT THOSE 68 MILLION PEOPLE DESERVED  
WHAT THEY GOT IN THAT ELECTION. THAT MAY BE TOO HARSH. BUT THE  
PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY, MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD,  
HAVE ONLY THEMSELVES TO BLAME WHEN THEY GET SORRY LEADERSHIP.

L SO DID THE TURNOUT IMPROVE IN 1974? THE CENSUS BUREAU  
FOUND THAT ONLY 45 PERCENT OF THE VOTING AGE POPULATION ACTUALLY  
VOTED IN THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS OF THAT YEAR.

L SADDEST OF ALL ARE THE FIGURES FOR THE 18- TO 20- YEAR-OLD GROUP.

L FOR THOSE OF US WHO FOUGHT TO EXTEND THE FRANCHISE, IT WAS  
A TOUGH BLOW TO FIND THAT 63.6 PERCENT IN THIS GROUP DID NOT  
EVEN BOTHER TO REGISTER IN 1974.

OF THOSE WHO DID REGISTER, ALMOST HALF DID NOT VOTE IN THE

ELECTION ONLY 20.8 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE 18- TO 20- YEAR-OLDS

VOTED IN 1974 -- JUST SLIGHTLY MORE THAN ONE OUT OF FIVE.

IN THE 21- TO 24- YEAR-OLD BRACKET, A SLIGHTLY HIGHER

PERCENTAGE -- ABOUT ONE QUARTER OF THOSE ELIGIBLE -- REGISTERED

AND VOTED.

WE MUST ASK OURSELVES WHY, WITH MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR  
FREE VOTING AND FREEDOM OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, THE UNITED  
STATES HAS THE LOWEST VOTER TURNOUT OF ANY FREE COUNTRY IN THE  
WORLD.

THIS IS A NATIONAL DISGRACE. BUT IT IS MORE THAN THAT.

WHEN CITIZENS WHO CAN VOTE DON'T, THEY ARE GIVING NOTICE, IN

EFFECT, THAT THEIR SHARE OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS UP FOR SALE.

WORSE, THEY ARE GIVING IT AWAY -- TO THE BIGGEST CAMPAIGN  
CONTRIBUTOR, THE BIGGEST CORPORATIONS, THE LOUDEST VOICE,

THOSE WHO BOYCOTT THE BALLOT BOX ARE DOING SO AT THEIR OWN  
PERIL.

SO IF YOU CARE ABOUT YOUR GOVERNMENT, IF YOU CARE ABOUT  
YOUR OWN FUTURE, GET OFF THE SIDELINES AND PARTICIPATE. IF  
YOU THINK POLITICS IS DIRTY -- AND IF YOU'RE CLEAN, GET IN  
THERE WITH YOUR BAR OF POLITICAL IVORY SOAP AND CLEAN IT UP.

IF YOU WANT GOOD GOVERNMENT, IF YOU WANT RESPONSIVE  
LEADERSHIP, YOU WILL HAVE TO PUT SOMETHING OF YOURSELF INTO IT.  
IF YOU DON'T, YOUR CREDENTIALS FOR CRITICISM ARE SADLY LACKING.

I LIKE TO THINK THAT EACH OF YOU IS ON THE WAY TO A  
PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE "RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY," IN FRANKLIN  
ROOSEVELT'S WORDS.

EACH OF YOU IS -- OR SHOULD BE -- STRUGGLING WITH THE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS WHICH THREATEN OUR NATIONAL WELL-BEING AND YOUR OWN FUTURE.

I WANT TO SEE A COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO USE THAT VAST RESERVE OF ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM TO BRING ABOUT SOLUTIONS AND NEW IDEAS.

BELIEVE ME, THERE IS PLENTY FOR YOU TO DO.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE ENTIRE FEDERAL PROGRAM OF AID TO HIGHER EDUCATION IS BEING REVIEWED BY THE ADMINISTRATION. AND IT IS UP TO YOU TO MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD NOW -- BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO HOLD THE BASIC EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY GRANTS TO THE CURRENT MAXIMUM OF \$1,400 A YEAR, WITHOUT ANY ADJUSTMENT FOR INFLATION.

HE WANTS TO PHASE OUT THE DIRECT STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM AND CUT FEDERAL FUNDING OF WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS FROM \$390 MILLION TO \$250 MILLION IN FISCAL YEAR 1977.

AND HE WANTS TO CUT OUT THE SUPPLEMENTAL OPPORTUNITY GRANTS ALTOGETHER. THIS IS THE PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR EXCEPTIONALLY NEEDY STUDENTS. IT WOULD ELIMINATE ASSISTANCE FOR ALMOST HALF A MILLION STUDENTS IN ONE FELL SWOOP.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S PLANS WOULD MEAN THAT A TOTAL OF 1,016,000 STUDENTS HAVE LESS CHANCE OF GETTING A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

THIS IS UNCONSCIONABLE, AND IT IS UP TO YOU AND ME TO SEE THAT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN.

IT SHOULD CONCERN YOU THAT OVER SEVEN MILLION AMERICANS ARE OUT OF WORK. MORE THAN THAT, SOME 20 MILLION OF OUR CITIZENS WERE JOBLESS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER IN 1975.

IT IS YOUR CONCERN WHEN 19.9 PERCENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGE 16 TO 19 ARE UNEMPLOYED. AND WHEN THOSE 20 TO 24 YEARS OLD SUFFER AN AVERAGE JOBLESS RATE OF 12.7 PERCENT.

WE HAVE A VAST, UNFINISHED AGENDA INCLUDING AID TO THE CITIES, HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, DAY CARE AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY.

YOU, MORE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP OF AMERICANS, FACE THE CHALLENGE OF MAKING TOMORROW BETTER.

⌋ I HAVE A POSTER IN MY OFFICE WHICH BEARS THIS SLOGAN:

"TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE."

THIS EXPRESSION APPEALS TO ME BECAUSE IT IS A REMINDER  
THAT EACH DAY CAN BE A NEW BEGINNING.

2 IN OUR DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY THERE ALWAYS WILL BE ONE  
CONSTANT -- THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE,

THE PROBLEMS AND THE CHALLENGES ALWAYS WILL BE REPLACED  
BY NEW ONES, WHICH WILL REQUIRE NEW APPROACHES, NEW IDEAS,  
CREATIVE SOLUTIONS.

IF YOU CARE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS, YOU MUST BE PREPARED  
TO GET IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIGHT. YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO  
LET SOMEONE ELSE MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS. THIS GOVERNMENT  
IS YOUR BUSINESS, IT'S EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS. I CHALLENGE  
YOU TO GET TO WORK.

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