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Reading Text

Michigan Motel and Resort Association Convention

GrandRapids, Michigan September 25, 1965

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Intro of Introduction
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Thank you for inviting me to share this evening with you.

The generous words of introduction remind me that very often introductions are more memorable than the speeches they precede. For example, I've been told that the Governor of the Virgin Islands^s was once introduced at a political rally with these unforgettable words: "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I present the Virgin of the Governor Islands!"

The political scene has perhaps lost forever the oldtime, table-pounding, three-hour orator. He wore a halo of self-righteousness, made full use of platitudes, generalities and sheer lung power.

He lived a strange and often uncertain life. His trail led him to village bandstands, country stores, dinghy auditoriums. He was at times the victim of ripe tomatoes, rotten eggs, and human tormentors. All this has changed, except for the occasional heckler.

One evening I began my speech by saying, "I'm pleased to see such a dense crowd here tonight." An outspoken critic in the back of the room called out, "Don't be too pleased, Congressman, we ain't all dense."



Quite often, I speak at non-partisan banquets. Democrats, Republicans, and independents are in the audience.

At times I've appeared on the same platform with a speaker from the other political party. On one occasion, the Democrat speaker suggested that in our debate we omit any mudslinging. I told him that was a fine idea and said, "If you refrain from telling any lies about the Republican Party, I promise not to tell the truth about the Democrats."

It is always a pleasure to talk with people in the world of business. You are rugged individualists. Individualism is an American trait.

For example, every year many Americans ignore an Internal Revenue Service warning not to write in a small blank space at the top of the income tax form. Giving the government the cold shoulder, they write this message in the forbidden space..."I'll write any damned place I please!"



We all know that Michigan's history is linked with the great American Indian. The way things have been going in the 1960's we might ask whether the Indian in those days was superior to the white man.

Recalling history, I can only say that when the Indians were running things, they had no taxes, they had no debts, and the women did all the work. How could you improve on that!

Now, that I'm in deep trouble with the ladies here, I can only try to salvage the situation by telling you of a conversation I had with a woman member of the Congress.

She had sat through a speech I made in Washington. Afterwards, she came to the head table and said: "I thoroughly enjoyed your remarks. I don't know why, but whenever I make a speech I seem so nervous---but when you speak, you seem so unconscious!"

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In a serious mood, I will discuss with you the Viet Nam war... the roots of its beginning...its escalation...its meaning to America and the rest of the free world.



This year was still young when the American people were perhaps for the first time shocked into some sense of being at war.

Late February, soldiers--the wounded living, and the dead--- began arriving in the United States aboard huge jet transports--- coming home from a place called Viet Nam.

As the casualty lists mounted...as the heaviest Communist assaults yet against American installations were stepped up...as our military forces in the air struck hard in North Viet Nam...not only Americans, but people everywhere experienced a sudden chill.

There were sudden fears that a so-called brush-fire conflict--- perhaps through miscalculation, could flare into a holocaust that would blot out civilization as we know it.

The Nation and the world soon learned that this is the most curious, baffling, frustrating war the United States has ever had to fight.

As the size and scope of the war expanded, the United States faced four possible courses of action.



We could retreat and withdraw.

We could concentrate our military efforts against Communist guerrillas in South Viet Nam.

We could make an all-out assault against the enemy's heartland in North Viet Nam.

Or, we could strengthen our military efforts---on the land, in the swamps, in the air, and at sea---with the goal of showing the Communist enemy we mean business.

Let us consider each of these alternatives.

By withdrawing from Viet Nam, United States honor and prestige would be struck a devastating blow. Our influence in the form of helping to ward off Communist aggression against the entire mainland of South East Asia would probably be overwhelmed by Red China. Our defense line would be brought back all the way to Pearl Harbor.

The second alternative---that of concentrating on guerrilla war in South Viet Nam--proved ineffective, In fact, it would mean a



tremendous drain on our economy, a great loss of life and military equipment, and a long and drawn-out conflict in swamp and jungle.

The third alternative---an all-out assault on North Viet Nam, including attacks against non-military targets---could, according to some experts, result in massive retaliation by Red China. It could lead to a senseless ground war. And it might mean the kind of casualties to possibly trigger a public outcry in the United States for the use of nuclear weapons.

Our fourth possible alternative---the strengthening of air, sea and land military operations---aimed at proving to the Communist enemy that it would be folly to continue aggression is the plan I personally favor. It is this type of operation I believe will bring North Viet Nam to the conference table under our terms.

And now let us delve more deeply into the Viet Nam war's history. It should be remembered that the involvement of the United States in Viet Nam occurred shortly after the end of World War II. It began with a decision by the Truman Administration to provide economic and military aid.



In 1954, a fragile, delicate peace was achieved by the Geneva agreements. During the Eisenhower Administration Viet Nam was partitioned into a Communist north and a non-Communist south.

Contrary to most expectations, South Viet Nam survived for six years. Defense Secretary Mc Namara has described South Viet Nam's history during this period from 1954 to 1960 as a "success story." The late President John F. Kennedy referred to it as a "near miracle."

The Administration taking office in 1961 faced acute difficulties in the neighboring nation of Laos. While there were sporadic guerrilla attacks in Viet Nam, Communist forces had launched a full-scale offensive in Laos---threatening the government.

After months of fighting and high-level diplomatic foot-shuffling in the State Department, a declaration of neutrality was signed. It is a worthless document. Laos today is ripe for picking by the Communists whenever they choose.

The resoluteness of the United States was tested in Laos. At the time it was revealed as being weak.



The Administration said it would not permit aggression against Laos to succeed...it did permit aggression.

The Administration said it would refuse to negotiate until a cease-fire was in effect...it did negotiate.

The method used by the Administration to deal with the problem of Communist aggression ~~aginstion~~ Laos is reflected in today's Viet Nam situation.

As the military efforts of the United States in Viet Nam have broadened, the pronouncements by President Johnson defining our objective have been progressively watered-down.

The past July 28, the President seemed to disregard the independence of South Viet Nam as an objective.

Declaring that the purposes of the 1954 Geneva agreements are still our own, he asserted that the people of South Viet Nam shall have the right to shape their own destiny in free elections in the south and in all Viet Nam under international supervision.



This statement raises the disquieting possibility of accepting now in Viet Nam the type of election which the United States rejected a decade ago---an election which would be stacked and subverted in advance.

The president now tells the Nation...in his words "this is really war." To what degree miscalculation on the part of the enemy has brought about this state of affairs, no one can be sure.

I emphasize at this point, that I am attempting to give you an objective, factual appraisal of the situation as it is now in Viet Nam, without engaging in political partisanship.

Many times I have stated publicly that I support the President in firmness against Communist aggression in South East Asia or elsewhere.

However, I believe at this time that neither the Congress nor the public is being adequately informed about the Nation's involvement in Viet Nam.

Liason between the Executive and Legislative branches is insufficient considering the crucial nature of the problem in Viet Nam.

Under present circumstances, Congress is being by-passed as far as any effective participation, or decision-making, is concerned.



President Johnson is running the war. I sincerely hope his decisions are right because the situation is serious.

In the tradition of the late Senator Arthur Vandenberg, I believe our best course lies in a bi-partisanship approach to foreign policy.

Bi-partisan does not mean, however, that the opposition political party may not offer proposals to the Administration; nor that the opposition may not criticise Administration actions.

Guided by the single standard of the security and well-being of the Nation, I will continue--with other members of my party--to offer suggestions and to criticise.

Criticism, when well-founded, helps the Nation to steer a surer and steadier course..and to attain its objectives without unnecessary loss or delay.

I urge a national unity in our Nation's determined efforts to combat Communist aggression in Viet Nam and elsewhere.

As President Eisenhower so aptly stated: "more closely than ever before, American freedom is interlocked with the freedom of other people."



Grand Rapids, 9/25/65

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In the task of maintaining unity, the greatest responsibility falls to those who, like ourselves, retain the most freedom and the most strength."

Thank you.

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Excerpts from a speech by Rep. Gerald R. Ford

Michigan Motel and Resort Association Convention, Grand Rapids 9/25/65

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