

"Myths and Politics,"

North Carolina, April 20, 1966

Preliminary outline for North Carolina speech

I. Introduction

A. If there is any hope for the future of this country, it lies in our ability to capture the enthusiasm of each succeeding generation and to utilize its enthusiasm for the working out of solutions to problems as they arise. This symposium, oldest of its kind, is an attempt to do this. Impact of war-baby boom on U.S. population; unique opportunity for **this** new generation to wield influence early because of weight of numbers. If this is generation of enthusiasm and ideas -- one relatively free from conformity and myth -- this can be an era of great progress. If it lacks such enthusiasm and interest in finding new solutions, opportunity will be missed and the essence of America (which is our capacity to adapt to change) will be lost in the pursuit of an American myth (that everything we are or will ever be was ordained by our forefathers and prescribed by them in certain documents and speeches circa 1776).

Recall the Thurmond Arnold quote about the Gallup Poll and what it reveals concerning the judgment of our educated, upper classes in this century. And his explanation: that the great majority of educational institutions are devoted to teaching their students only the traditions and principles of the past -- not the infinite possibilities for the future.

B. The myths of our political life -- introductory discussion.

1. They exist at all levels. Constituents have one set of myths, politicians themselves have another. For example, a constituent will say, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." He feels this statement has meaning for any proposal to create a new government department or establish a new federal program. But is it true? Is the Ruler of the Universe corrupt? Is the Pope corrupt? Is the Supreme Court corrupt? What possible way do we have to prove the statement correct or apply it to any given proposal? On the political level, a Member of Congress may say "Seniority is the best system for selecting committee chairmen because maturity breeds wisdom." Yet what sort of army would we have if we followed this principle? What sort of business establishment?

2. More basic myths that surround us. For example, that private property rights exist independent of the society in which they are enjoyed and protected. Who decreed that property rights were higher than human rights? Another example: That the law of the economic jungle is what has made this nation prosperous and strong, and that any departure from it will weaken us. Another: the less government we have, the better. Who inscribed that law on what stone tablet?
3. Ridding ourselves of these myths is not easy. A politician who sought to discard all of them wouldn't be around long if he was ever elected in the first place. But a responsible politician must work at elevating public debate and educating himself and his constituency. For all of these myths tend to take us away from the one thing we ought to be doing: **Living our own lives in our own time, making our own decisions based on present alternatives**

II. The first class of myths I have to deal with as a politician may be characterized by the phrase, "The federal government is my enemy."

- A. "The Federal government is trying to control every facet of our lives. Freedom is disappearing." On the contrary, all our basic freedoms are intact. (Pickup from p. 12, Okla. speech.)
- B. "The Federal government is growing at the expense of the states." Cite relative growth of Federal vs. state and local spending, debt and employment. Relate to population growth. Cite the relative decline in Federal clerks and rise of scientists and engineers, reflecting changing demands for government programs (space, medicine, etc.)
- C. "The dollar you send to Washington comes back with a brokerage fee deducted." The truth: Cost of Federal administration of programs is but a fraction of state and local administrative costs.
- D. "Federal aid means federal control." This old refrain turns out to be principally an argument for perpetuation of local customs like racial segregation and white primaries -- hardly worthy of the lofty tone in which it usually is presented.

III. The second class of myths I have to deal with as a politician may be characterized by the phrase, "We're going down the road to socialism."

- A. "Federal welfare programs rob me of what is mine and give it to those who have not earned it and do not deserve it." Cite the times this argument has been presented -- in opposition to Social Security, the income tax, Medicare and (a century ago) free public education. Yet these programs have made America stronger and enriched even those who have been taxed the most. Like Portia's "quality of mercy" they have

enriched both "he who giveth and him who receiveth" (get correct quote). For example, our economy surely is producing more benefits for rich and poor alike as a result of the investment we made in educating GIs after World War II. These are the men who today are streamlining industry, increasing efficiency and lending know-how to our free enterprise system.

1. Cite the figures showing the history of Federal expenditures for welfare programs. The percentage today. Compare with **warfare** expenditures.

B. "Welfare legislation leads to socialism, which leads in turn to communism." Cite the Khrushchev quote.

1. Corollary to this statement would be that problems should be left unsolved if they involve welfare. Recall Harding quote about unemployment.
2. But is this correct? Obviously, the countries in the world solving their social problems are the ones least likely to adopt radical changes such as communism. Scale analogy.
3. Compare U.S. with other countries in adoption of welfare programs and elements of socialism (ownership of production).

C. "Federal taxation has robbed us of our initiative." Cite the number of millionaires to come along since 1948.

D. "Anyone who can't make a living in this country is either lazy or stupid." Rapid changes. What happens to a coal miner in a small mountain town when coal mine shuts down? What bootstrap-pulling operation will make a board chairman out of the son of a sharecropper in rural Mississippi?

E. "Federal meddling leads to steady erosion of the dollar, canceling out the hard-earned gains of free enterprise." Cite history of the dollar in modern times, the "virtues" of deflation, and the net gain in real dollars after taxes in spite of inflation. It just happens we like to think in terms of today's income and yesterday's prices.

F. "No matter what Washington, says.. the natural laws of supply and demand will prevail, and every boom must be followed by a bust.

1. Results of Kennedy-Johnson "new economics."
2. The "balanced budget" myth, surely one of the most firmly-entrenched of all. Again, we have shown in recent years that it isn't necessary or wise to balance the budget in every circumstance.
3. Which leads us to the "Grandchild myth." My Republican grandfather in the 1930s used to tell me how the debts of the New Deal would be heaped on my

shoulders. Is the burden killing me or you? On the contrary, we're better off -- after paying interest on all of our accumulated debt (of which FDR's debt is but a tiny fraction) -- than ever before.

IV. The third class of myths I have to deal with as a politician may be characterized by the phrase, "Wars are inevitable."

- A. A corollary of this myth, of course, is that, since war is inevitable, we ought to choose our own place and time for the next one. It just happens that this argument is identical to one of the leading arguments for suicide.
- B. "In the world today we are totally right (bear in mind this is the same federal government which, in another context, is our enemy), and the other side is totally wrong. " Looking back, were we right in the Spanish-American War? In our dealings with Colombia over the Panama Canal? The War of 1812? World War I? How do we know we are totally right this time?
- C. "Our enemy, the Communist conspirators, are much more clever, devious, consistent and united than we are. We can do nothing right, and they can do nothing wrong." Use material from Cold War newsletter.
- D. "There is no substitute for total victory over (blank)." Cite history of our "final solution syndrome." Point out the significance of braggadocio in an era of nuclear weapons. The Kennedy quote about "500 World War IIs in less than a day.) Possibly a Hans Morgenthau quote about the need to have someone, a recognizable civilization, left behind if heroism is to have any meaning.

V. Fourth class of myths I have to deal with as a politician may be characterized by the phrase, "All growth is good."

- A. History of the American frontier. Tremendous growth of the nation from original 13 states. Wonder that we ever stopped at the Rio Grande and 52° 20", or whatever it was.
- B. Early geographical growth matched by subsequent economic growth. The great "takeoff" of late 19th century and steady growth of 20th.
- C. Chamber of Commerce attitude -- optimism over population projections. But there are danger signals ahead. And we must now come to realize that growth, which may be good for business, may not be so good for the quality of our lives.

D. The population explosion, long a subject of parlor conversations, is now a full-blown crisis elsewhere in the world and a developing problem in this country. We are discovering that our resources are limited. Contrary to old notion that technology would somehow, mysteriously, solve future demands of world population growth., we now have millions of people starving in India and elsewhere. Figures about number of people in world going to bed hungry tonight.

E. Growth creates problems for which there are no automatic solutions. Rural vs. urban problems are but one case here in the U.S. SLU's remarks on returning from Europe -- over there it's too late to save any open spaces. If we imagine there will be automatic solutions, it will soon be too late here also.

VI. Summary

Reston quote. What else?