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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
ALAN S. BOYD, BEFORE THE ROBERT A. TAFT SEMINAR IN PRACTICAL
POLITICS, WOLFSON STUDENT CENTER, JACKSONVILLE UNIVERSITY,
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA, DECEMBER 19, 1968, 8:00 P. M.

In some ways, I feel rather well qualified to talk tonight about practical politics, having just completed a rather strenuous course in the subject. At least, I assume it was a course. I hear a lot of my Republican friends saying they taught us a lesson. And they have a very rugged grading system --all the marks black and blue.

But classes are held every four years in my school of politics. And the nice thing about it is that none of the teachers have tenure.

I want to thank President Spiro for inviting me here tonight and to congratulate him and the University on the work of the Taft Institute. A basic education in politics is one of the most important programs a university can offer. I have long felt that the public school system's most conspicuous failure is that it seldom goes beyond the level of what we call civics to teach the realities of politics. I feel very strongly that the more people who understand America's political system and who are active in it, the better off we are as a nation.

It seems to me that too many Americans leave secondary school with only a vague understanding of politics; usually, a feeling that it is a dirty business, run by charlatans.

That is hardly surprising when you consider that there are approved courses that go well beyond the birds and the bees but that nobody in authority regards politics as a fit subject for discussion.

And so I am glad to come here and contribute to an effort to correct this; to help speed the day when nobody will see the humor in the story of the mother who wrote a letter to the dean of her son's school at Oxford that said: "Do not bother to teach my son poetry as he has made up his mind to enter politics."

I hope the work of the Taft Institute and similar programs around the nation will get us back into the frame of mind that existed in the very dawn of democracy -- back to the philosophy that led the Athenians to label those who did not or could not participate in public affairs as "idios" --the root word of idiot.

The most useful description of the political process I know is one used by a friend of mine to introduce his new students to his freshman seminar on politics. He goes around the table, asking each person to define politics in a democracy. He gets about what you might expect in the way of answers: the art of the possible; the glue that holds society together; and other cliches.

And he says, no; it is much simpler than that. Politics, he says, is a man, his wife, and their child standing at the kitchen cabinet, deciding whether to have hot cereal or cold cereal for breakfast. There is an issue. There is a campaign. There is a decision, in which the majority prevails. And even the loser gets something to eat.

I'm not trying to tell you that politics at the presidential level is just a bowl of Wheaties. But I am saying it is simply the machinery for making those decisions which people cannot make individually; but must make in common with other Americans.

The power at stake in an election would exist whether or not there was a political process. Politics simply creates an orderly and -- for the most part -- non-violent method for transferring that power. And if more people would ponder the alternatives to politics as a means of transferring power, I am sure they would feel a lot more kindly toward politics, parties, and politicians.

It is difficult to talk very precisely about the relationship between party politics and the executive branch of government. Almost any flat statement can be challenged, and the whole subject is cluttered with exceptions to rules.

It may be said that the only safe statement is that party politics play a smaller role in executive decisions than the party out of power would have people believe. It is a factor, but it is a factor in ways that don't always fit the conventional wisdom.

Party politics are important to voters in much the same way a map is important to a tourist. A map makes it fairly easy for a traveler to get close to his destination before he has to start asking for directions. A party does that for a voter.

A party serves the President in the same way. If his party wins, particularly with a majority in Congress, he knows what he and his party stood for during the campaign is in the right general neighborhood as far as most Americans are concerned.

It is important to the executive in less abstract ways, of course. It serves as a source of funds for campaigns that run into the tens of millions of dollars. It provides a broad base of workers to handle mail, telephone calls and work the precincts.

The party machinery is important in one other important way. It screens the candidates for the voter.

People work for parties for two reasons. They agree generally with what the party stands for. And they want it to win.

As a result, political parties become a sort of boot camp for aspiring politicians. And the drill sergeants -- the party regulars -- are as tough as any in the Marine Corps. The candidate must first impress the party regulars on two counts: He must be right on the issues. He must be able to win. And for those of you who are thinking of exceptions, I can only say that there are exceptions to everything I am going to say from here on.

Senator Eugene McCarthy is an exception, as is Vice-President-Elect Spiro Agnew, although for different reasons.

Senator McCarthy is a symbol of the new politics in America, but he is still a party man at heart. His message to the young people in his campaign -- as I understood it -- was that disorganized dissent was an exercise in futility; that the best way to achieve the goals they had set was to do so within the political party.

This is not the first time in our history that a maverick within a party has caused fundamental changes in that party's philosophy, nor will it be the last.

But a change in a party's philosophy does not change the essential character or purpose of the party itself.

One of the important purposes of the party -- even after Miami and Chicago -- remains the national convention. I find it hard to think seriously of doing away with the convention and replacing it with a primary, as some people are urging. For one thing, the number of people who vote in the party primaries is generally very low -- as low as 12 or 16 percent with an average of about 25 to 35 percent.

For another --no matter how it might look on television -- the party regulars who go to the conventions still have those two characteristics I mentioned before. They believe in their party. And they want to win.

And they look over the selection of candidates very carefully before they commit the party to one of them. The fact that many come to a convention already persuaded makes this no less valid.

The party is important to the executive in another important way. It provides foundation for his dealings with the Congress.

Many people believe President-Elect Richard Nixon will be handicapped by the fact that an opposition party controls both Houses of Congress. But at least he can count on the help of a substantial minority of the Congress. Think of the awesome job he would face if he had to deal with 535 Senators and Representatives all marching to the beat of some private European drum.

The existence of a political party also helps a president to recruit people for service in government at the policy level. He can reasonably expect a man to agree with his philosophy on a number of key issues if the man has been active in his party.

Again, of course, there are exceptions to this rule. President Johnson -- as have many presidents -- has sought out large numbers of Republicans to help manage the executive branch.

In my own Department, for example, only four of the top seven policy jobs are filled by Democrats. Two are Republicans -- one the second-ranking man -- and a third is a career civil-servant. In discussions of some of the basic issues of transportation over the past 18 months, the Republicans on my staff have sided with me about as often as the Democrats have disagreed.

There are times, of course, when the party no longer serves the executive as a map. There are times when an issue arises that is not even on the map.

Those are the issues which make me very nervous when I hear people talking about voting for the man and not the party.

It is impossible to cover every single issue -- past, present and future -- in a political campaign. Most candidates deliberately narrow the issues down to a small and manageable handful. But the executive deals with issues and makes decisions on thousands of problems that never come up in a campaign.

After watching these decisions being made by three Administrations, I still have no way of supporting a claim that party affiliation has a bearing on the way these issues are finally settled by a president.

I cannot recall any time while I was pondering a problem that it entered my mind that I was a Democrat and, therefore, ought to make a Democratic decision.

I have tried to define as best I could the public interest in the problem -- tried to get to the solution that I thought would provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

I suspect this guides all of us in the executive branch. And I can only assume that long adherence to certain political beliefs shapes a man's understanding of the public interest; and that his understanding of public interest is different on many issues if he is a Republican than it would be if he were a Democrat.

And so I can only presume that a candidate's party affiliation is important to the voter in trying to determine in advance how he will act on issues that do not arise during a campaign. I cannot prove it.

In our Department, we have been involved recently in several such areas that appeared in no party platform; that never surfaced in any campaign as issues. But that does not mean they are insignificant matters of public policy.

The question of financing the expansion of the air traffic control system is an example.

President Johnson and I believe this expansion should be paid for primarily by the people who benefit from it --by the airlines, their passengers and by the companies and private pilots who make up general aviation.

This was not a campaign issue. Very few people voted for President Johnson because he was for or against using general tax revenues for radar sets. But there are people in the country who believe very deeply that radar and other airport and airways improvements should be paid for out of general revenues. And the President must make a decision on that point.

In this case, he believes the money can be better spent for education; for air pollution control; for medical care for the children of the poor; for any one of a number of public purposes.

And that has become his program.

The question of the details of building highways in America's cities has never -- so far as I know -- been an issue in a presidential campaign -- certainly not a central issue.

But it is an issue that must be faced. Do we continue to build highways as we have in the past? Or do we seek new approaches to soften the impact of relocation; to look harder for alternatives to new highways; to buy land further in advance of actual need so that the planning can be done more carefully?

At the President's request, the Federal Highway Act was amended this year to permit basic changes in the highway program. And I would have to say that in its new form it is an act that generally follows the Democratic Party's philosophy.

I have dealt in generalities tonight, knowing you have come to expect specifics from men in public office, but there is, as I have said, an exception to every rule.

Again, I congratulate you on this important venture. I wish you continued success. And I remind you that every success you have here contributes new strength to the democratic process and, in turn, to the country.

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