

Speech of Senator Lyndon B. Johnson
Before Fund Raising Dinner, Democratic Advisory Committee of Texas
Whitney, Texas
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FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

Fellow Texans, Fellow Democrats:

We meet here tonight after three years of a Republican Administration. And to Americans, three strikes are out.

In 1952, a lot of Texans -- in fact, a majority -- voted for a Republican Administration. It was supposed to have something to do with an issue called tidelands.

Well, we got a Republican Administration. We think we got at least a part of our tidelands back. And that is the last time the Republicans have looked our way.

They gave our Air Academy to Colorado.

They are trying to give Fort Hood to Louisiana.

They are trying to give Fort Bliss to Oklahoma.

And today the Republican Secretary of the Interior is in Texas to dedicate our Big Bend Park. I hope some of our Eisenhower Democrats are out there to keep him from giving it away to Old Mexico.

Personally, I think we should be grateful to the Old Guard Republicans. They have taught us a lot. And they have made more Democrats in three years than we could make in a lifetime.

Do you remember the fine flush of enthusiasm that swept the country with the "Great Crusade?" Even those of us who had held firm for the Banner of Democracy were impressed. We were going to get:

One hundred per cent of parity

A balanced budget

Tax relief for the little fellow

A strong America

More soil conservation and more rural electrification

A government free of corruption.

It was a fine program -- one of the best ever stolen from the Democrats.

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There was only one mistake from their point of view. It was a program with a heart and the heart is something the Republican Party just did not have.

Most Republicans realized they had a program they didn't want. Once they got in, they returned it to us.

And that is when the voters started returning the government to the Democrats.

It would not be hard to catalogue the misdeeds and failures of the Republican Party. But I am not interested in talking about what the Republicans have not done.

I have never believed that a political party should ask for votes because its opponent has shortcomings.

The American people are tired of wrecking crews. They want builders -- people who construct. They will entrust their affairs to the Party that is constructive. They will turn their backs on the Party that is destructive.

We are here because we are Democrats. But even before we are Democrats, we are Americans. We know that what is bad for America is bad for the Democratic Party. We know what is good for America is good for the Democratic Party.

On that principle, we cannot compromise -- not even with General Motors.

As a political Party, we seek the support of the American people. But we can gain that support only if we try as hard to deserve it as we do to win it.

The Democratic Party has been in existence for at least 150 years. There is no secret about the reason for its vitality.

It is simply that ours is the Party with a heart -- the Party that is concerned with 160 million Americans. It is the Party that holds forth hope for men and women and children who want to march forward -- to make life better for all.

I have never questioned the patriotism or integrity of my friends who subscribe to another political faith. But even the most rock-ribbed Republican will admit that his Party responds a little faster to the fat cats than to the folks.

In the last three years, the American people have had a perfect demonstration of the difference between the two parties. In 1952 they selected a Republican President with a Republican Congress, and in 1954 a Republican President with a Democratic Congress.

I don't believe there are very many Americans who have failed to learn the lesson. They found that the Democratic Party -- whether in the majority or in the minority -- put the country before partisanship. They always thought more about the next generation than they did about the next election.

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I will never forget the first Conference of Democratic Senators after the 1952 election. The Democrats were in the minority and the future looked bleak. It was the same situation that had tempted the Republicans to wild criticism and irresponsibility for twenty years.

But the situation was so bad that my friends urged me not to become Democratic Leader. They said the Democratic Party would be torn with factional strifes and forced into the position of a carping, dissenting and unpopular minority.

I disagreed. When I addressed the Democratic Senators I said:

"I am a Democrat out of conviction -- not out of habit. I believe that the Democratic Party is now -- and always has been -- the Party that is best for America. I believe there are forces holding our Party together greater than the issues over which we may squabble for the moment.

"Working together, I think we can do more than merely preserve the gains of the past twenty years. I think we can go forward with a positive program -- a program that is pro-American and not just anti-Republican. And if we go forward as positive Americans -- and not negative oppositionists -- I am convinced that the time is not too far distant when the Democratic Party will again be in the majority."

That statement was made in my acceptance speech to the Democratic Conference on January 2, 1953.

Two years later, the Senators met again in Conference -- this time to organize the Senate as the majority party.

It is even more important tonight that we be responsible. There is the smell of victory, and it is keen and unmistakable.

Since 1952, the Democratic Party has won every major contest.

The people have entrusted to us both branches of Congress; nine governorships that once belonged to our opponents; seven State Legislatures that we took from the Republicans. Even rock-ribbed Indiana has turned city after city over to Democratic Mayors.

We can lose in 1956 only if we stop to lick our chops while the Republicans divide us or we divide ourselves.

I have never found it within myself to hate my fellow-Democrats -- even when I disagree with them. I would rather spend my time uniting Democrats and inviting them back to the Party than driving them out. If you run off enough or run out enough you can stay in the minority for a long, long time.

Speaking as a Texan, I hope and believe that Texas will send a delegation to the National Convention ready to abide by the decision of the majority and prepared to fight for the election of our nominee.

I do not know who the Democratic Presidential nominee will be in 1956. And, in case any of my fellow Texans are wondering, I repeat what I have stated so often: I am not a candidate of any description for any office in 1956. I am not running for anything except complete recovery of my health.

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As far as I am concerned, the people who make up our Party will select the candidate. And once a majority has spoken, that candidate will have my enthusiastic support.

I will go a step further and predict that he will have the enthusiastic support of the American people. The party that can produce a record of service to the people can also produce a candidate who will appeal to our people.

The Democratic Congress is producing the record, and the delegates to the Democratic Convention will produce the candidate.

My prediction of victory has nothing to do with the Republican candidate. I do not believe that the Republican candidacy matters.

The present President is the best the Republicans have to offer. I do not question his integrity or his patriotism. But, I do question his taste in political parties.

To say he is the best the Republicans have to offer is hardly a compliment. And even the greatest men in our history could not have borne the dead weight of the present Republican Party.

But I want to stress that even though I am confident of winning, the next election is no pushover. It would still be possible for us to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

The American people will weigh very carefully the qualifications of those who seek to guide their destiny. A party that is overly partisan, overly quarrelsome, and obsessed solely with politics, will lose. The party that is the least partisan and the most patriotic will win.

The American people have rejected the extreme of the left and the extreme of the right. They want to proceed along the path of constructive program and responsible legislation. We cannot permit one party to be torn to pieces by those who are more interested in excluding than including people.

In calmer times, fiery debate over fine points might be entertaining. But we have a job to do and the quicker we come to the conclusion that we must all unite against Republicans rather than divide against each other, the quicker we will get that job done.

Good Democrats avoid trivialities. We must concentrate on the substantial.

Love of liberty and devotion to the long-range interests of our beloved America dictate that we warn all pressure groups of whatever blend -- Democratic, Republican, independent, farm, employer or employee -- that the term "public servant" means the servant of the public and not the servant of some organized pressure propaganda outfit. He who truly serves all the public, the public will also serve.

We are meeting tonight in a rural area. I see throughout this room my friends who earn their living from the soil.

Search your hearts and ask yourselves which party shows the most genuine concern about your future and the future of your children.

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The question answers itself.

To this gathering have come average business men from surrounding counties. I ask you to search your hearts and ask yourselves the same question.

Again, it will answer itself.

There are working men in this audience -- people whose toil and sweat have made life easier for all of us. Do any of you need to spend endless hours answering this question?

Of course not!

There may be some of you who will remember my Daddy. He was a public servant and a successful politician. He was successful because he had a short -- but simple -- formula.

"Take care of the people and the election will take care of itself," he told me.

That thought might be expressed more elegantly. But there can be no better advice for the Democratic Party.

The job before us now is not to select a candidate but to complete a program upon which the candidate can run. And the program will be effective only if it is based upon genuine concern for the needs of all Americans.

During the Fall recess I have been in contact with Democratic leaders throughout the Nation, including practically all of the men being considered for the Democratic nomination. I am grateful to them for their kindness in visiting me at the hospital and out at the ranch.

We have spent a great deal of time at the hospital and at the ranch and by correspondence talking about the legislative program for the next session. Out of these talks certain areas evolved which should be high on the agenda. In the last session of Congress, we have a record unequalled in the memory of legislative experts. The Senate passed 1325 bills and, of these 880 received the approval of both branches and of the President.

In the Senate we confirmed nearly 40,000 Presidential nominations and wound up with our calendar of business practically clean. In the next session, we must carry on that record if the needs of our people -- the genuine human needs -- are to be met. It is my intention to ask the Democratic Policy Committee of the Senate to consider the following subjects in the hope that they can be brought before the Senate, considered, and acted upon by the Senate:

Program With A Heart

1. A Social Security Bill reducing the age limit for women and extending coverage to most self-employed groups.
2. A tax revision to benefit the low-income groups -- probably along the line of that previously offered by Senator Walter F. George of Georgia increasing exemptions.

(more)

3. A health program to aid medical research and to include larger grants for hospital construction, at least to the level authorized under the original Hill-Burton Act.
4. A school construction program to meet the needs of our children.
5. A public roads program, probably similar to the Gore Bill. The question of taxes to pay for highway programs is part of the general tax program -- and I hope it can be handled separately.
6. A farm program which will restore 90% of parity supports; extend the benefits to additional products; and possibly include a soil rental program.
7. A natural gas bill which will preserve free enterprise and of course provide legitimate protection to consumers.
8. A housing program designed for America's families who are yearning to build or rent dwellings they can afford.
9. A water resources program with specific consideration to:
 - A higher dam at Hell's Canyon
 - The Frying Pan Arkansas project
 - Niagara development
 - The Upper Colorado Basin project
 - The Washita-Oklahoma project
 - The Ventura California project
 - The Passamoquoddy Tidal Survey project
 - A New England development project
10. A program to relieve critical depressed areas on the basis of Federal and State cooperation, including tax measures to encourage industry; additional public works; supplementary unemployment insurance; and surplus food grants.
11. Amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization laws to insure that they are fair and just.
12. A Constitutional Amendment eliminating the poll tax.
13. Disaster Insurance to protect our people from the ravages of nature.

I want to make it clear that this list is not all-inclusive. Some of the measures -- after due consideration -- may not be passed; others will be modified.

The final form which they will take is not clear. More may be added on the basis of mature consideration of men who will seek to find the best course to serve our people.

This meeting tonight is a moving occasion for me. I can look about this hall and see the faces of old and trusted friends -- men and women who are as close to my heart as my neighbors in the Johnson City hills along the flowing Pedernales.

They are the people who came to my help with their thoughts and their prayers a few weeks ago when there was little to preserve my life except prayer. I will always be grateful.

(more)

I am not, however, now indulging in a purely personal mood for the sake of sentimentality. What I am trying to say is that the spirit which moved you to prayer is the same spirit which has made the Democratic Party strong and great.

It represented human concern for a fellow human who was in distress. It was an effort to bring comfort and strength to a man who was in need.

And it was completely unselfish.

To me, the Democratic Party has always been the party of human concern. It has always been the party of people who seek to bring comfort and strength to those in need.

I am very proud to be a member of that Party. I am very proud of the honor that you are according me tonight.

Like every other human organization, we frequently fail to live up to our ideals. We have our extremes and we have our people who are "just tol'able."

But underlying the whole history of our Party is the fact that Democrats at their worst are better than others at their best. They are not necessarily better as individuals but as members of an organization they share the hope and the dream -- and frequently the weaknesses -- of the American people.

And I pledge you we will always try to do our best.

The motto of my 1924 graduating class at Johnson City High School was: "Give to the world the best that you have, and the best will come back to you."

The Democratic Party would do well to have that as its guiding policy. We will follow that course and we will serve our people and deserve their support.

Program With A Heart

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