

Mansfield Hails Proposals As a 'Long Step Forward'

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By JOHN W. FINNEY JAN 27 1972

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 — Senator Mike Mansfield, a leading critic of the Administration's policies on Vietnam, applauded President Nixon's peace proposals today as a "long step forward" that he hoped could lead to a negotiated settlement of the war.

For the White House, the reaction was of particular significance, for Mr. Mansfield the Senate majority leader, has spearheaded Congressional efforts to impose a troop-withdrawal policy upon the Administration.

From the Congressional reaction to the President's speech last night, it was apparent that Mr. Nixon had temporarily blunted, if not silenced, Congressional criticism of his Vietnam policy.

Among some critics of the Administration, such as Senators J. W. Fulbright, Edward M. Kennedy and Alan Cranston, there were complaints that the President's eight-point proposal was unrealistic and stood

no chance of acceptance by North Vietnam and the Vietcong.

There was also a suspicion in some quarters, openly expressed by Senator Cranston, that the President was "preparing the American people for an escalation of the war."

In general, however, the critics who have largely set the tone for the Vietnam debate in the Senate endorsed the basic approach in the President's proposal, while expressing reservations about details and remaining skeptical that it would be acceptable to the other side.

Senators Edmund S. Muskie and Hubert H. Humphrey, the leading rivals for the Democratic Presidential nomination, both welcomed the President's initiative as moving toward their position of linking troop withdrawals to release of prisoners of war.

Similarly, Senator Mansfield

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saw the President and Congress "coming closer together" on his legislative proposal that would set a fixed date for total withdrawal of all American forces from Indochina in return for the release of the prisoners.

Senator Mansfield said he would keep his amendment, adopted three times by the Senate last year but modified at the insistence of the House, "on the front burner because it faces up to the most important element in the situation—the withdrawal of all troops by a time certain."

Sees 'Concessions' by U.S.

At the same time, Senator Mansfield said the President's proposal was "an advance over previous positions," containing "concessions that could lay the groundwork for the start of negotiations for the first time." Along with others, Senator Mansfield expressed concern that the President's offer on troop withdrawals in return for release of prisoners of war was too closely linked to a political settlement in South Vietnam.

However, on the basis of a White House briefing for Congressional leaders last night, Senator Mansfield said it was his understanding that the Administration was flexible on this point and willing to consider separately the military and political aspects of its proposal.

The majority leader urged the Administration to give foremost consideration to the military aspects, such as a terminal date for troop withdrawals, release of the prisoners and a cease-fire, because "the political settlement relative to South Vietnam is secondary in comparison."

At the same time, the Montana Democrat, who has considerable personal credentials among Asian leaders, urged North Vietnam to give "the most serious consideration" to the President's proposal.

'Constructive,' Humphrey Says

Senator Humphrey said that Mr. Nixon "on balance had presented a constructive proposal" that "offers a platform for negotiations if North Vietnam wants to negotiate."

Senator Muskie said the President's proposal was "a welcome initiative" and urged "the other side to respond positively."

At the same time, Senator Muskie saw two potential "sticking points" in the President's proposal.

One was the proposal for new

elections in South Vietnam, which he said raised the question whether the Vietcong would think their political rights were sufficiently protected.

The other was the proposed cease-fire throughout Indochina, which he said could lead to a stalemate in negotiations by tying United States withdrawal from South Vietnam to a settlement of military activities in Cambodia and Laos.

Politically, such Republicans as Senator Hugh Scott, the minority leader, and Senator Robert Dole, chairman of the Republican National Committee, were convinced that the President, as they put it, had "defused the Vietnam issue."

The White House was obviously intent on obtaining maximum political gain from the President's speech. Before the speech yesterday, according to Republican sources, the White House called Republican Senators advising them to be prepared with statements applauding the President's proposals.

One Republican strategy that appeared to be emerging to keep the Democratic opposition silenced and on the defensive was the political theme that the President's proposal should satisfy all except those who advocate "surrender."

After a White House meeting of Republican legislative leaders, Senator Scott said: "There was general agreement that last night's speech is an answer to reasonable people with reasonable doubts, of course, it would never be an answer to people who demand total surrender."

In a similar vein, Senator Dole told reporters, "Any other alternative is surrender, and I don't think any Democratic candidate is going to advocate that." And Senator Barry Goldwater issued a statement saying, "Any Democrat who fails to support the current initiative to end the war is either committed to the total surrender of all America's strategic interests in Indochina or is more interested in gaining political advantage than in ending the tragic hostilities."

Some of the harshest criticism of the President came from Senator Kennedy, who said Mr. Nixon's speech was "less a new initiative than it is a confession of failure."

"We do not need an eight-point plan to end the war," the Senator declared. "All we need is a one-point plan—a complete withdrawal of American ground, sea and air forces by a date certain, in exchange for a return of our prisoners."

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