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Excerpts From Hatfield's Senate Speech

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18—Following are excerpts from the text of Senator Mark O. Hatfield's floor speech today replying to Vice President Agnew:

Yesterday the Vice President of the United States spoke about an amendment which 24 Senators and I are sponsoring in the Senate—an amendment designed to insure responsible military disengagement from Indochina.

If this amendment proposed what the Vice President claimed, I would be the first to oppose it.

Those who support the amendment, in Congress and the millions of citizens across the country, will not be intimidated by false and inflammatory charges.

The Vice President has chosen to speak about the dangers of American military defeat and has talked about seeing this war through to an end.

Does this mean that he is advocating a new policy in Vietnam—one contrary to the President's previous statements?

On May 14, 1969, President Nixon stated, "We have ruled out attempting to impose a purely military solution on the battlefield."

On April 20, 1970, the President stated that "a political settlement is the heart of the matter."

But now we see a responsible plan for disengagement attacked with innuendo and emotional rhetoric, and hear pledges that "this nation will not go down in humiliating defeat on the battlefield of Southeast Asia."

Those words suggest an attempt to seek a military solution to the conflict, and reflect the past, misguided thinking that has resulted in the tragic prolonging of this war.

I am committed to see the Congress fulfill its constitutional responsibility—regardless of the wishes or the words of the Vice President.

His speech makes this task more difficult, for his words contain information and inferences which are totally incorrect and completely unfounded.

He claimed that "should this amendment become law, and all American military operations in southeast Asia cease by Dec. 31, the immense burden of this war would fall immediately and totally upon South Vietnam."

First, the passage of this amendment would in no way have this effect. It would provide for all military operations necessary to protect our troops in the process of withdrawal.

Second, the amendment would in no way restrict continued military aid even after the date of withdrawal for our troops.

Further, the Vice President infers that our amendment would take risks with the lives of American men. The truth is that it would save American lives.

The central purpose of the amendment is the preservation of human lives — both American and South Vietnamese. As long as American troops remain in Vietnam, as long as we remain committed to staying in South Vietnam indefinitely, Americans and Vietnamese will continue to suffer and die.

The Vice President totally distorted the amendment by characterizing it as "a unilateral, precipitous American abandonment of South Vietnam." By phasing out the withdrawal of American troops over many months, in accordance with President Nixon's stated objectives, the amendment provides every possibility for the protection of American lives, and, in fact, assures lower casualties. In addition, the amendment would provide ample time for the South Vietnamese Government to broaden the base of its support and encourage its leaders to reach a political accommodation with all factions within its borders.

The Vice President also chose to ignore the amendment's provision for an extension of the timetable. If the President decides that conditions prevent the orderly and responsible withdrawal of American troops within the stated timetable, all that is necessary is Congressional action to provide the needed time. Such a proposal can scarcely be termed precipitous.

The Vice President argues that the amendment would destroy the chances for a negotiated settlement, but a fixed timetable could finally enable the stalemated Paris talks to make progress. With the evidence that America is determined to end the war, both Hanoi and Saigon would be forced to confront the political realities to end their own war. By calling the amendment a lethal blow to the Paris peace talks, the Vice President assumes that the talks have ben productive under present conditions. Other than the shape of the table, what has been produced?

By invoking the so-called "blood bath" theory, the Vice President declared that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese "who placed their faith in us will die for that error in judgment." His authorities for such a claim are the Rand Corporation and Douglas Pike, whom he called "the nation's foremost authority on the Vietcong," and who is also a career U.S.I.A. [United States Information Agency] officer. However, the Rand Corporation report which the Vice President referred to also maintains that a new coalition or even an all-Communist government would have decisive political reasons for holding down the level of political reprisals.

It should hardly be necessary to counter the Vice President's description of the amendment as isolationist. We desire neither a rejection of America's international responsibilities nor a retreat into a domestic cocoon. Rather, we desperately need a prudent and humane exercise of American power which will aid people in their search for political institutions of their own choice, which will preserve and improve life rather than destroy it, which will make the world safe rather than endanger it.

The issue in Vietnam is not simply one of victory versus defeat. Only the Vietnamese can win the war; only they can lose it. We cannot give them or impose on them what they do not want or will not do for themselves. That is the agonizing lesson of Vietnam, and the Vice President misleads the American public by ofering them promises which cannot be fulfilled.

On April 26, 1967, I stated in a speech: "What kind of men have we at the helm of government who would deliberately coerce the public into accepting their policies on the threat of being branded traitors?"

My position today has not changed. It is nonpartisan, and applies equally to the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. Now I ask that same question of the Vice President.

The most repressive periods in history have occurred when public debate has been silenced by those who abused positions of political power. This has not been the exclusive domain of demagogues or dictators either on the left or on the right. Nazi Germany, McCarthyism, Hungary and Czechoslovakia all stand as examples of people intimidated into silence and fear.

Full and rational discussions of vital issues, both here in the Congress and across the country, must not, and can not, be curtailed by those who cry "isolationist," "pacifist," "blind impatient politicians," or other such divisive intimidations.

The real threat to our American way of life is within the household of America rather than 10,000 miles away in Indochina.

Replying to Agnew