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There is probably not a single one of our great American institutions which does not have some inevitable flaw in it. One of them, which has been bothering me a lot lately, is the flaw in our institution of a free press -- the fact that only bad news is news.

I don't want to suggest that this is a mistake on the part of the press. The inclination of the media to ferret out fraud, misconduct and malfeasance has probably saved this nation more than once. But it is a fact that the by-product is an enveloping atmosphere of negativism which we as a people live and breathe. I think I can be forgiven if I just get

tired of it now and then.

I am a politician and I am proud to be. It is an honorable profession, as vital to the American experiment as a free press. We are not overpaid, we are not crooks, and we are not sex mainiacs. We serve the country well, and I can say on the basis of my recent visit to the English Parliament, we do so with behavior and good manners that are probably the best in the world.

When I sat in the Parliament, during what they call the "Question Hour," the majority leaders had to come forth to defend their legislative program. The opposition set up a howl, booed everything that was said, no matter what it was, and pounded on their desks. I can tell you that such things

do not go on under the dome of the American Capitol. The Members of Congress strive constantly to proceed with dignity and good manners, even in the middle of divided opinions and hot debate. In fact, the best way for a Senator to draw the wholehearted disapproval of his colleagues is to get out of hand on the floor of the Senate. In fact, when a Senator or Congressman does get too rambunctious, it is news -- and it gets reported in the Congressional Quarterly.

Worse misconduct gets reported internationally, of course. This is the way things have to be. Right now, we have one Congressman accused of putting a mistress on the payroll, and we have another one under indictment for allegedly extorting bribes.

Now, I can make no comment on the merit of the cases against those men. But I sure can say they and other cases like them will always be isolated. It grieves me for people to say, in reaction to the Wayne Hays situation, "I'll bet they all do it." No, they all don't!

I was thinking about this on the floor this week.

There I was, with two Senators I really admire -- Senator Mike Mansfield and Senator Philip Hart. Both of them are retiring after this Congress. And both of them are completely admirable men. Phil Hart, in my opinion, must be the fellow the word "gentlemen" was invented for. Nobody could seriously entertain the idea he might be selling the influence of his office, without running the risk of being thought a complete and total crackpot.

Mike Mansfield is such an upright and trustworthy man that the thought just would never occur that he could have someone on his payroll for any purpose but to serve the people. It would be absurd to even think it. Now, let me ask just two questions. If the other members of the Senate are men of questionable ethics, why then, do they universally admire Mike Mansfield and Phil Hart? And if honesty and forthrightness are not the most admired qualities in the Senate, why did the Senate majority elect Mike Mansfield as its leader?

You can tell a group by the leaders it chooses, and I feel safe in pointing to the leadership of the Democratic Party to show what kind of people we are. We are the kind of people who put forward Mike Mansfield, and Edmund Muskie,

and Hubert Humphrey. We are the kind of people who can produce a candidate in Jimmy Carter, whose greatest strength is to strike the chord of honesty and trust in the great majority of Americans.

I don't claim that we as a party or as a people are not going to produce some rotten eggs. But I am certain that if you took the 535 Members of Congress, and 535 preachers or businessmen or farmers, and forced them to open up their lives the way politicians do -- we would come out on top.

I am very conscious, here tonight, of the truth that faith has not been lost in the honorable business of politics. Young people in America have earned the reputation of being super-critical moralists. And yet here you are tonight in

good numbers, still interested in politics, still keeping the faith that the political process is the greatest force for change and justice in this country.

I admit, sometimes here lately it has seemed to me it will just be impossible for any incumbent to get re-elected, so powerful is the anti-Washington feeling among the voters. As a senator, I do the best I can. I vote my convictions, because that is what I think the people of North Carolina sent me to Washington to do. But the criticism generated by special-interest groups is so well-publicized that I begin to wonder to myself if the people at home are beginning to believe it, or if they ever hear anything else.

But then I come down to North Carolina, and I speak

before YDC's across the state, and I realize I should not have been so pessimistic.

I think we need people to bear witness in every precinct in the country, and you are excellent candidates for the job. I wish you would speak out, the next time you hear politics dismissed as a "dirty business." I tell you what's the truth -- it bothers me no end to see the media focusing on one example of abrasiveness and alleged dishonesty, while Mike Mansfield and Phil Hart, who are both epitomies of gentleness and honesty, so quietly into retirement without much notice.

I wish you would speak out, the next time you hear elected officials dismissed as intellectual opportunists

whose interests change like fads, and whose causes are merely those which will get the most votes. I can tell you from my experience in the Senate that the whole organization of the Congress argues against that easy assumption. Each Senator, each Member of the House must spend his career laboring in one or two specialties of law and government, and must do it mostly out of the light of publicity. We get asked, of course, for our opinions on the transitory events of the day -- but our real work is likely to go mostly without press coverage unless something happens to make it news.

I wish you would speak out, the next time you hear someone call all politicians crooks. If you take ten years of American history, and count up all those who have been

touched by scandal in the Senate and the House, I dare say you will run out of cases before you run out of fingers. And once you subtract them, you will have the hundreds of men and women who served in those years, and who went into honorable retirement even though their lives had been opened to endless scrutiny during their public service.

The best example of all, I believe, is your own motivation for involvement in politics. I believe only a few of you are attracted by the idea of power and status. It is more probably the case you are into politics because you still believe in effectiveness and responsibility.

Americans will have responsible and effective government because they have a genius for it which has not left them

for 200 years now. You are demonstrating, by being here tonight and by laboring at the local level for your candidates, that this genius is still being exercised.

But I am convinced we as a people cannot govern ourselves according to the habits of exaggeration and negativism. It is true the government has gotten out of hand, imperfect laws have been passed, the people's money had been wasted. But it would be wrong to exaggerate the size of our mistakes in governing ourselves. Contrary to the present exaggerated notion, Congress is not a bunch of fanatics passing hastily-drawn legislation for the deliberate ruination of freedom and enterprise.

Nobody familiar with how many years it takes to pass

major legislation could think that. Nobody familiar with how debate and amendment restrain the excesses and mistakes of law could think it.

I can report to you tonight that the legislative process is still viable, and still in the hands of honorable and reasonable public servants. The problems of overspending and over-regulation will be moderated, and will eventually give way to other problems.

Let the problems come. We will, as we always have, take them on and lick them. It is my greatest hope, in the Bicentennial era, that Americans will get a little cocky. I hope they will realize what an astounding accomplishment it is to have kept democracy alive in a world which, almost everywhere else, has tried it and given up.

We ought to be quietly proud of that. And I say among friends here tonight that those of us in political life who have played a small part in it, should hold our heads up, and take a special pleasure in the success of our nation.