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Branches of Government, October 16, 1981

Vern Riffe

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO
HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS AT SENECA COUNTY ON GOVERNMENTAL DAY
RICKLY CHAPEL, COLLEGE HALL (ADM. BLDG.)
HEIDELBERG COLLEGE, TIFFIN, OHIO
11:45 A.M. FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1981

ALL OF OUR GOVERNMENTS HAVE THE BASIC THREE CO-EQUAL
BRANCHES AS PROVIDED FOR IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE UNITED
STATES AND THE STATE OF OHIO: A

EXECUTIVE --- LEGISLATIVE --- JUDICIAL

THESE BRANCHES MUST WORK INDEPENDENTLY AND INTER-
CONNECTINGLY IF THE PUBLIC IS TO BE WELL SERVED. A

THIS IS TRUE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE STATE LEVEL AND
THE COUNTY AND LOCAL LEVELS. A

IN ADDITION TO THIS, THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE
PRODUCTIVE; JUST AS THE STATE GOVERNMENT MUST WORK WELL WITH
THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENEATH IT. A

CERTAIN ROLES AND SERVICES ARE PRESCRIBED IN LAW FOR THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE STATE GOVERNMENTS. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE BASICALLY A STATE RESPONSIBILITY EVEN THOUGH WE MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO LEAVE MUCH OF THE DETAIL DECISION-MAKING TO LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS.

CERTAIN AREAS OF LAW MAKING SEEM TO FALL TO THE U.S. CONGRESS WHILE MUCH OTHER LAW MAKING MUST BE DONE BY STATE LEGISLATURES AND OFTEN CITY COUNCILS.

THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM HAS A STAIRSTEP STRUCTURE. ONE CAN BEGIN A CASE IN LOCAL CITY COURTS, MOVE THROUGH THE COUNTY COURT LEVEL, TO THE STATE COURTS AND THEN UPWARD TO THE SERIES OF FEDERAL COURTS ALL THE WAY TO THE U.S. SUPREME COURT.

THE INTER-RELATIONSHIPS OCCUR OFTEN WHEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR PROGRAMS SUCH AS

WELFARE AND HIGHWAYS AND LEAVE THE PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT
OF THE PROGRAMS TO THE STATES. THE STATES THEN PUT IN SOME
OF THEIR MONEY AND GET ON WITH THE DISTRIBUTION OF WELFARE
BENEFITS OR THE BUILDING OF ROADS, ETC.

THIS IS WHEN IT IS NECESSARY FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO
LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER AND COOPERATE. THEY MUST UNDERSTAND
THE OTHER SYSTEM AND HOW IT WORKS.

SPECIFICALLY - THE OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE LAST 23 YEARS OF MY SERVICE HAS BEEN IN THE OHIO
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. I AM COMPLETING MY SEVENTH YEAR AS
THE SPEAKER - THAT IS THE LEADER OF THE 99 MEMBER BODY OF
STATE REPRESENTATIVES FROM EACH DISTRICT OF OHIO.

TO GET LAWS CHANGED AND NEW LAWS WRITTEN REQUIRES
CONSENSUS. 1

THE STATE HAS A 99 MEMBER HOUSE, A 33 MEMBER SENATE, AND THE
GOVERNOR. 1 TO GET ANYTHING ACCOMPLISHED, THE FOLLOWING NUMBERS

MUST ALWAYS BE KEPT IN MIND:

50

17

1

IT TAKES THE AGREEMENT OF 50 HOUSE MEMBERS, 17 SENATORS,
AND ONE GOVERNOR, IF ANYTHING IS TO MOVE THROUGH THE STATE HOUSE. /

IN 1977 AND 1978, SOME PEOPLE THOUGHT THAT BECAUSE
DEMOCRATS HAD MAJORITIES OF 62 IN THE HOUSE AND 21 IN THE
SENATE, DEMOCRATS COULD RUN GOVERNMENT FROM THE LEGISLATURE.

TO HECK WITH THE GOVERNOR, SOME FOLKS SAID. / AS LONG AS AT
LEAST 60 HOUSE MEMBERS AND 20 SENATE MEMBERS COULD AGREE ON

THE SAME PIECE OF LEGISLATION. / THE GOVERNOR'S OPINION

WOULDN'T MATTER, BECAUSE HIS VETO COULD BE OVERRIDDEN IF -

AND THE IF WAS WHAT SOME TOOK FOR GRANTED -- 60 DEMOCRATS IN THE

HOUSE AND 20 DEMOCRATS IN THE SENATE STUCK TOGETHER AND VOTED

IN LOCKSTEP. /

I LIKE TO THINK OF MYSELF AS A STRONG LEADER, BUT THERE

IS NO ONE PERSON WHO IS EVER GOING TO DICTATE TO EVEN 2 PERSONS

THAT THEY ARE GOING TO MARCH IN LOCKSTEP ON THIS ISSUE

OR THAT ISSUE. / I CAN'T EVEN GET MY GOOD WIFE TO AGREE WITH
ME ALL THE TIME. /

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DOES NOT EXIST TO RUN GOVERNMENT.

IT EXISTS AS THE FORUM FOR THE DEBATE AND DISCUSSION OF IDEAS

THAT PEOPLE BRING TO IT. / THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS THE ARENA

IN WHICH A MAJORITY CONSENSUS MUST BE FOUND IF THERE IS TO BE

ANY PUBLIC POLICY MADE ON ANY ISSUE AFFECTING OHIO'S 10.6 MILLION

CITIZENS. / NO ONE PERSON'S IDEA IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM IS EVER

SO RIGHT OR SO CLEAR AS TO BE AGREED TO BY THE REQUIRED MAJORITIES

IN THE FORM IT WAS INTRODUCED. COMPROMISE. CONSENSUS. / THAT'S

WHAT IT TAKES. /

UNLIKE THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, WHICH IS TO SAY THE GOVERNOR,

THE NORMAL INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN MOST LIKELY IS UNAWARE OF THE

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NAME OF HIS STATE REPRESENTATIVE. AND CERTAINLY, ALTHOUGH
MY PRIDE AND EGO TELLS ME TO SAY OTHERWISE, THE NORMAL
INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN IS EVEN MORE LIKELY TO BE UNAWARE THAT
THE SPEAKER IS THE HOUSE LEADER, AND THAT VERN RIFFE
(IF THEY CAN PRONOUNCE IT CORRECTLY) IS THE SPEAKER.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT WORK IS WHAT I CALL AN EFFORT
TO FIND A WORKING MAJORITY, OR AN EFFORT TO FIND THE MAJORITY
CONSENSUS. THAT EFFORT DOES NOT HAVE THE SAME MEDIA APPEAL,
AS FOR EXAMPLE, THE GOVERNOR'S STATE-OF-THE-STATE MESSAGE.

TELEVISION BROADCASTS THE GOVERNOR'S STATE-OF-THE-STATE LIVE
AND IN COLOR. WE PACK IN THE MEDIA WHEN JIM RHODES COMES

UPSTAIRS TO LAY OUT HIS PLANS AND LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM FOR OHIO.

NOT SO WHEN THE LEGISLATURE MAKES A PRONOUNCEMENT. AND THAT'S

A KEY TO REMEMBER. THE LEGISLATURE IS A BLURRED BODY. THE

EXECUTIVE IS ONE PERSON - THE GOVERNOR.

TODAY THE MEDIA CONTROLS THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS OF
POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT. EVERY NIGHT MILLIONS OF AMERICANS
WATCH THE NETWORK TELEVISION NEWS. THAT'S REALITY.

THE MEDIA'S DECISION TO IGNORE OR DOWNPLAY SOMETHING
IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT IT DECIDES TO COVER AND HIGHLIGHT. THE
REALITY THAT OHIOANS ARE MORE DEPENDENT ON TELEVISION FOR
THEIR NEWS IS A RECOGNIZED FACT. SO THE INDIVIDUAL WHO CAN
BE INTERVIEWED EASILY, WHO CAN SPEAK WELL AND GIVE THE
22 SECOND RESPONSE WILL BE COVERED.

THE LEGISLATURE IS AN INSTITUTION, IT IS NOT AN EASY
THING TO COVER FOR TELEVISION. TELEVISION LIKES THE
HAPPENING, THE EVENT. THE STORY MUST POP, MUST HAVE APPEAL,
MUST BE FOR THE MOMENT. I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY THE POMP AND
CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE GOVERNOR'S STATE-OF-THE-STATE TURNS ON

NEWS DIRECTORS. I ALSO SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY THE MEDIA HAS A
DIFFICULT TIME CAPTURING FOR MEDIA DISTRIBUTION THE PROCESS OF
FINDING THE MAJORITY CONSENSUS.

IN THE LEGISLATURE, ALL OF OHIO IS REPRESENTED. IT IS
REPRESENTED BY MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE LAWYERS, FARMERS, MINISTERS,
INSURANCE AGENTS, AIRPORT OPERATORS, UNDERTAKERS, RESTAURANT
OWNERS, INDEPENDENT BUSINESSMEN AND TEACHERS. THESE INDIVIDUALS
ARE YOUNG, MIDDLE-AGED AND OLD. MOST ARE MARRIED, MANY HAVE
CHILDREN, SOME ARE GRANDPARENTS. THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED JOYS AND
SUFFERINGS. THEY PAY UTILITY BILLS, FINANCE HOMES AND CARS,
AND BUY GASOLINE AND GROCERIES. THEY ARE ALSO EITHER REPUBLICANS
OR DEMOCRATS.

I'VE NOTICED A GREAT TENDENCY TO SUGGEST THAT IF SOMETHING
IS NON-POLITICAL OR NON-PARTISAN, THAT IS BETTER THAN SOMETHING

THAT IS POLITICAL OR PARTISAN.

I DON'T AGREE. FRANKLY, IN AMERICA, THERE ARE MORE POINTS OF SIMILARITY BETWEEN REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS THAN DIFFERENCES. HOWEVER, WHEN THE VOTER IN OHIO GOES INTO THE VOTING BOOTH IN NOVEMBER HE (OR SHE) IS EITHER GOING TO VOTE FOR A REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT. THERE ARE NO NON-PARTISAN CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG OR BAD ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES. I BELIEVE THAT THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN AMERICA IS THE GLUE THAT HAS KEPT AMERICAN GOVERNMENT STABLE.

POLITICAL PARTIES SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR THE BEGINNING OF FINDING THE MAJORITY CONSENSUS. POLITICAL PARTIES FORM THE FRAMEWORK ON WHICH IS BUILT THE WORKING MAJORITY THAT GETS THINGS MOVING. POLITICAL PARTIES ARE THE ORGANIZATIONS

THAT SELECT THE NOVEMBER CANDIDATES. / IF CITIZENS AREN'T INVOLVED
IN POLITICAL PARTIES, THEY AREN'T INVOLVED IN A MAJOR AND
SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE. /

I AM A POLITICIAN. / I THINK I AM A GOOD ONE. / I WILL
SAY TO ANYONE OR ANY GROUP THAT I AM PROUD TO PRACTICE
THE PROFESSION OF POLITICS. / POLITICS MEANS PEOPLE. /
IT MEANS WORKING ON PUBLIC ISSUES. / IT MEANS FINDING THE
MAJORITY CONSENSUS. /

AS SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, I BELIEVE IN VIGOROUSLY
ASSUMING MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS LEADER. / WHILE I AM A DEMOCRAT,
THAT DOES NOT MEAN I WILL NOT OR CAN NOT WORK WITH REPUBLICANS. /
IN FACT, REPUBLICAN GOVERNOR JIM RHODES AND I, AS WELL AS
OTHER DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS HAVE WORKED SO WELL TOGETHER THAT
WE STARRED IN A RECENT ARTICLE BY A STATE HOUSE REPORTER. / THE
THEME OF THE STORY IS THAT WE WERE IN BED TOGETHER. IMAGINE THAT! /

NOTHING HAPPENS IN THE LEGISLATURE UNLESS SOMEONE MAKES IT HAPPEN, YET NO ONE CAN DO ANYTHING ALONE. IT IS MY PHILOSOPHY TO WORK WITH WHOMEVER IS SERIOUS ABOUT LEGISLATIVE ISSUES, WHETHER THAT PERSON IS A DEMOCRAT OR REPUBLICAN. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT I WILL BACK OFF A FIRST-CLASS POLITICAL OR LEGISLATIVE FIGHT, IF THAT IS WHAT IT TAKES TO FIND THE WORKING MAJORITY.

FINDING THE WORKING MAJORITY IS THE ESSENCE OF GETTING LAWS PASSED IN OHIO. IT IS THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS. IT IS WHAT MY LEADERSHIP AS SPEAKER IS ALL ABOUT. WORKING WITH PEOPLE TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS. IT IS NOT EASY. IT IS NOT AN EASILY OR CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD PROCESS.

SO FINDING THE WORKING MAJORITY IN THE STATE HOUSE MEANS A LOT OF WORK AND PERSUASION OUTSIDE THE STATE HOUSE.

NONE OF US COME TO COLUMBUS WITH THE 100% SOLUTION
FOR ANY PROBLEM. WE COME TO COLUMBUS TO WORK WITH OTHERS
TO FIND THAT MAJORITY CONSENSUS THAT GETS THINGS DONE.
AND THAT'S WHAT ITS ALL ABOUT.
THANKS FOR LETTING ME BE HERE WITH YOU TODAY.