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REMARKS OF CONGRESSMAN BOB DOLE

I am appearing before you tonight as a politician. Just a few years ago I shared with many of you a detached attitude toward politics. My purpose here is to attempt to prove that regardless of what you think you are involved in politics clear up to your necks -- and your future and your family's future depends directly on how you handle this responsibility is thrust upon you simply because you are an American, privileged to live in the greatest nation on earth today.

Many of you may be saying to yourselves, "Well, I don't have to go into politics if I don't want to." You are wrong. Let me explain just what I mean.

In the first place, neutralism in politics is a vacuum. Many who claim they are neutral are merely creating a political vacuum and deluding themselves for no one is truly neutral. In 384 B.C., Aristotle drew the conclusion, after years of studying his fellow citizens, that "Man is a political animal."

Aristotle's statement was -- and is -- correct. Man is basically a political animal in spite of the complex changes which have been injected into our society.

Let's examine what we call the electorate in our United States and find out what it is composed of. You may find yourself described and, whether or not you have previously realized it, the categories I am going to mention are in existence now and they cover all Americans.

First, there are the two major parties -- Republicans and Democrats. By the two parties, I mean the people who are candidates, office holders and active workers within these parties. Also included are contributors, who substitute their money for actually doing the mechanics of party work during elections.

Second, there are a great many people who call themselves independents. They switch votes between elections, work neither for nor against either party, draw their



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political conclusions from various sources, financial interests, emotion, personal attraction of the candidates, influence by neighbors or friends or from any of the many other factors which motivate people's support at the polls.

Third, there are the non-voters, perhaps the most potent force in American politics today. These are the people who never win elections -- they lose them through inactivity and disinterest. I say this is the most potent force today because it constitutes the inert mass of people who often allow unqualified men to be put into office by tightly organized minorities.

You all are in one of these categories. My purpose here this evening is to convince you that if you are in the second or third category, you should move up to the first and take an active part, either physically, financially, or both, in the campaign this year, whether it's for a local candidate, a State candidate, a Congressional candidate. You should participate, not half-heartedly, but vigorously. Your future is at stake. (perhaps mine!)

First of all, what is our Government? It's a group of officials. How are they selected? Through the two-party system. Our governmental machinery may have its shortcomings, but the democratic process does retrain the supreme power for the people by the system of representation chosen through the two-party system. No other government reflects the will of its populace as does our own. Witness France, where a great nation has had a dozen leaders since the war, and totters through crisis after crisis through lack of leadership.

France's multi-party system can be blamed, because no party truly reflects the will of the majority of its people.

This right of election we enjoy in America is unique in today's world of oppression, dictatorship and seizure of power by juntas and "strong men." George Washington in 1796 said, "The very basis of our political system is the right of



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the people to make and to alter their constitution of government."

So, to carry out this selection of our type of government, we have evolved politics into our own particular forms. Unfortunately, in recent years, politics has taken on a connotation which has deprived us of many potential leaders and avid party workers. Perhaps many of you are in this category.

Politics and politicians, of course, have been under attack for years. An early-day American humorist, Artemus Ward, once said, in recommending himself for a job: "I am not a politician, and my other habits are good." Thus it has gone. Politics has been the subject of jest and ridicule. Political office holders have been scrutinized, analyzed, ostracized, scandalized and, in general, made to feel that perhaps in trying to help steer the course of government they had unwittingly strayed from the straight and narrow and joined Ali Babba or Captain Kidd.

I fear that too many Americans have succumbed, perhaps, drifted, into this general feeling about politics. We have a national shame which transcends our slums, our pockets of unemployment, or any other shortcomings you may care to mention. It's our indifference to the sacred right to choose our leaders, at all levels of government.

We are a statistic-minded nation. Let me give you a few statistics which will demonstrate just how lax we are in exercising our voting franchise. To vote, you have to register. In 1954, for instance, out of 106 million potential voters, only 75 million bothered to even register. This is about 70 per cent.

Then out of that 70 per cent, only 56 per cent voted -- or less than half the eligible voters in this country. When we went up to 62 per cent of the U.S. electorate in 1952, it set a new record. World-wide, we, who consider ourselves the citadel of Democracy, rank 21st in the percentage of population voting. We contrast sharply with Australia, where 95 per cent voted in the last election. Denmark,



Mexico, Austria, all have percentages hitting the high 80's and 90's.

Why have we become so indifferent that four out of ten of our people register no political opinion? Largely, because of the concept I have mentioned before -- a calculated campaign to make politics a dirty word. It's an old political saying that organized minorities win elections. Their work is made easier by stay-at-homes who become their helpers through inaction.

So, I call upon you to shuck whatever shell of misconception, indifference or disinterest in politics you may have been wearing. I invite you to wade in and get your feet wet. You will find it stimulating, and educational. And it will create a sense of satisfaction in having played an active part in your nation's political future.

I know that many Americans are tempted to cloak whatever guilty conscience they may have over political inactivity with the rationalization that "one vote won't make any difference, and I better not commit myself." The stories of one-vote election margins are too numerous to name by instance. But, they have been numerous, in elections of local up to national scope.

What about the class I mentioned as independents -- the switch-hitters in politics? Are they really independent? I believe not, however, many of them are either timorous creatures, afraid to take their place in line and battle for what's right, or worriers, chronically unable to arrive at a decision.

I am reminded of a recent quotation by Raymond Moley in a national magazine, "business and professional men," he wrote, "are altogether too prone to limit their political action to applauding the speeches and writings of others, to heated private denunciations of the opposition and to occasional small contributions to favored organizations and parties. A passion for political anonymity pervades a large majority of our people. Too often it is shrouded in protestations of independence, neutrality or open-mindedness. Essentially, it is based on the fear of losing friends or business, or endangering a job, or a fear of hard work or lack of qualified candidates."

Why should you work definitely for a party? Why is it of value to you?

George Bernard Shaw said in 1933: "You, in American, should trust to that volcanic political instinct which I have seen in you."

That's where the party comes in. It is the instrument to bind together people of various interests. It is in itself the amalgamation of a variety of interests in the community. No party can afford to become the agent of any one group. The necessity to seek a majority in election forces the major parties to shave off some of the extremes of the claims of the different interest groups, and puts some pressure on them to fit together the various claims into an over-all program.

Men are, after all, more than farmers, laborers or businessmen. They are people, complex and deeper than any single role. A businessman can also be a Jaycee, a Methodist, a consumer of cigars, shoes and television, and avid sports fan and participant -- all these things are part of a person, a self, a unique individual. He has a desire for moral good, for community expression. That's why politics should be his responsibility and he should take a critical and active part in the process of his party's organization and functioning.

We are have within us this volcanic political urge which Mr. Shaw referred to. We despise injustice, we detest graft and corruption, we demand law enforcement, and efficient handling of the people's business. That is, we think we do. Too often, we keep this volcanic political energy bottled up and allow it to erupt only when a flagrant abuse of political power is brought to our attention. By a steady, diligent effort, we could well prevent any such need for explosive action. We could, in short, assure constantly the good government we are all in favor of. Your political party is the most effective channel, to utilize this political energy forcefully.



So, to those of you who might be inclined to say that you want to be independents, and that there is no justification for expressing your politics through activity in and for the major party nearest your political position, I suggest this: the political process is more than voting. The caucusing and candidate-selecting features of political life center around a political organization. You should get in on the ground floor, where selection of candidates begins.

Your party needs your critical partisanship. More people should join, should press for consideration of policy questions, should make a party young-minded, active and responsive. Your staying away does not help the party of your choice pick candidates you want to vote for, or campaign on platforms you may want to support. Be a party leader. Don't wait to have a party sway you!

Now let's look at the four of ten in this country who do not vote. It is obvious that they have contributed neither time nor money to the political campaign, as they would surely want to back their investment at the ballot box if they had.

This ostrich group is jamming its head in the political sands.

Its members may believe that politics does not touch them, and go on their merry, oblivious way. But are they above politics? Let me put it this way. When you enter this world, the U.S. Census Bureau clocks you in. From then on, men in politics control much of your life. These men are politicians, elected by you and your neighbors--they determine what taxes we pay and how our tax money is spent. They direct our foreign policy. They decide on whether we should be conscripted for military service. They enact legislation controlling civil rights, labor relations, interstate commerce, minimum wages and hours, unemployment compensation, banking operations, the conduct of insurance companies and the rates charged. They control atomic energy, zoning, health, welfare, police and fire protection, highway construction, traffic regulations, social security, farm subsidies, safety regulations, postal rates, postal pay, license fees of hundreds of varieties, withholding taxes, public schools, boating regulations. Just name an activity



and some branch of our governmental services has a direct interest in, and probably influence on, its conduct.

*Perhaps this is*  
~~I think I have given you~~ enough to demonstrate the depth to which government penetrates our daily lives, and to say without fear of contradiction that the conduct of government, or politics, is everybody's business and everybody is involved.

Yet, four out of ten do not vote. Another vast group in this country vote, but does not help select candidates or work for the candidates they vote for. In short, we get the type of government we deserve.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified people to run for office, due to this apathy which bestirs itself to half an effort in election years and subsides into lethargy in the interim. It is hard to find workers to distribute material, to ring doorbells, to work at the polls on election day and to perform the many tasks which make a political party successful.

How can you help? First, by deciding that you are going to delve into the issues, into the background and qualifications of the candidates, and then that you are going to do something to help elect those you favor and defeat those you oppose. Perhaps you can become a candidate yourself. (*Not for Congress*)

Walt Whitman described participation in the rough and tumble of politics this way: "Political democracy, as it exists and practically works in America, with all its threatening evils, supplies a training school for making first-class men. It is life's gymnasium, not of good only, but of all."

It has always seemed peculiar to me that a man who thinks nothing of charging into a wall of men on the football field, or even those who have performed bravely in battle, can suddenly become mute, reticent and incapable of making a decision when faced with the prospect of participating in a political campaign.

It is not entirely necessary that you participate physically. It is most desirable, of course, but there are many of you who will not have enough spare time



to do neighborhood canvassing, or participate in many of the time-consuming activities. Your financial help, however, can be very valuable to your party.

With television requiring fantastic expenditures, with the need for faster-paced campaigns, more billboards, posters, stickers and the many other costly aspects of a campaign, both parties find themselves strapped for cash.

There is nothing shameful about political money, unless given or accepted improperly. It is needed. It effectively backs the way of life you believe in. It can be your voice in pushing the candidate and party platform of your choice. You are not, in reality making a charitable contribution -- you are investing in your country.

Perhaps not all said here has reached your ears without causing some questions, maybe pangs of conscience, maybe even resentment, though I am hopeful (not selfishly) that some of you, who were teetering on the verge of becoming politically active, will take the plunge. Perhaps some of you who have ignored politics entirely will start reading up on the issues and candidates. You won't be able to stay out if you do.

In closing, I would like to repeat the words of one of our greatest Presidents, whose indomitable spirit, whose ebullience and whose wisdom beyond his years earned the respect and undying devotion of his and following generations. Teddy Roosevelt, laid it on the line for all of us when he said:

"If we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the arduous contests where men must win at the hazard of their lives and all they hold dear, then bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by and will win for themselves domination of the world."

I thank you.

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