



**Hubert H. Humphrey
Institute of Public Affairs**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Hubert H. Humphrey 2006 Leadership Awards
May 30, 2006**

**Remarks of Sen. George Mitchell
Recipient of the Public Leadership Award**

Thank you very much. Brian, thank you very much for that very generous introduction. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your warm reception and for your presence here this evening in support of the Humphrey Institute. I've had the pleasure of visiting this great state on many occasions, and am always reminded of the many similarities with my own home state of Maine. It is a special pleasure for me to be here this evening with old friends, like Brian, whom I've had the pleasure of knowing and working with for a long time, with three former United States senators, Fritz Mondale, Dave Durenberger, and Windy Anderson. I thank all of you for your service.

It is also an honor to be presented with this award on the same program with outstanding leaders like Kathleen Blatz, Gary Cunningham and Geri Joseph; my congratulations to each of the three of them for outstanding public service.

By my count, I'm the ninth speaker this evening, so I feel like Zha Zha Gabore's ninth husband on their wedding night: I know what to do, but I'll be darned if I know how to make it interesting for you, but like him, I'm going to try my best.

When Brian called me and asked if I would come here this evening, I asked him what I should talk about and he said it's the Humphrey Institute and you can talk about Hubert. I thought, gee, I knew former Vice President Humphrey, but not really well. I knew who he was; I don't think he knew who I was, and here I am in an audience with Skip Humphrey, with Bart, his son, and with others members of the Humphrey family, with Fritz and Joan and the many of you who knew Hubert much better than I did, and I was first reluctant to come. Then I reflected on my first day in the Senate.

As Brian indicated, I was appointed to the Senate. I was serving in Maine as a United States district judge when my predecessor, Senator Muskie was appointed secretary of state. That was announced on a Wednesday, and the governor of Maine immediately announced that on the following Monday noon he would hold a press conference at the state capital to announce his appointment to complete Senator Muskie's term.

The press was filled with speculation. We had a former governor, a former senator and many other well qualified candidates. My name was never once mentioned and the thought never occurred to me; I had just become a federal judge the year before. So early Sunday evening I went to bed, with the rest of the people of Maine wondering what the governor was going to do the next day.



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About 11:00 the phone rang—it woke me up—it was the governor. He said he would like me to come down to the state capital at noon tomorrow so that I can announce that I'm going to appoint you to complete Senator Muskie's term. I said, gee, Governor, this is a big decision; I would like a little time to think about it. I want to call my family and get their opinion. He said 'I'll give you an hour.' When I protested he said, 'look, it's going to be midnight in an hour, and if you say no, I'm only got twelve hours to find someone else to do it. Don't call me any later than midnight.'

I immediately called my three older brothers. I grew up in a large family in a small town in Maine, and my three older brothers were very famous athletes. I was not. I was not as good as my brother. In fact, I was not as good as anybody else's brother. So growing up in this small town in Maine, I became known as Johnny Mitchell's kid brother, the one who isn't any good. As you might expect, I developed an inferiority complex and a highly competitive attitude towards my brothers.

So when I called them that evening and told them of the governor's offer, at first they didn't believe me, and then they told me in no uncertain terms that I should not accept the offer. As my brother Johnny delicately put it, he said, look, you're a born loser, nobody can understand how you got to be a federal judge, and you couldn't possibly win a statewide election in Maine, so you better stay right where you are, and my other brother said the same thing.

I was so upset and competitive towards them that I immediately called the governor. I said, Governor, I don't need an hour. I accept. I'll be there at noon tomorrow.

I went to the state capital, the announcement was made, I went to the airport and flew to Washington and went up to the Senate. On the flight down, I had envisioned a rather elaborate swearing in ceremony, and I wondered whether CBS, ABC and NBC would all cover it live, or maybe just two of them.

When I got there the majority leader took me in and said, I'll swear you in right now. With nobody looking, I was sworn in. Nobody noticed, even the senators who were standing there on the floor, and then I said to McKerley, what do I do now? He said go back to your office and they will tell you what to do.

So then went to, for the first time, what had been Senator Muskie's office, what was not mine. A young man, a very officious and well organized young guy, met me at the door. He was in charge. He said come on in here. He took me to the senator's office and said there is the senator's chair. I said yes, I see it, and he said, well, you can sit there. I said, well, thank you very much. So I sat down in the senator's chair and he read off a list of instructions to me, and then he said, Senator, we have a very interesting invitation here for you. I said what is it, and he said there are 3000 certified public accountants meeting here in Washington. They just called and asked if you would come down tonight and give the keynote address at their annual conference.



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I said, gosh, that is really amazing. Until just a few hours ago, I myself didn't know I was going to be here. How could they have known and kept this important position open for me? He said it's nothing like that; they've had four last-minute cancellations. You are the only member of the Congress they could think of who might not have anything to do tonight and they want you to come down and speak to them. I said, what do they want me to talk about? He said the tax code. I said you want me to get down and tell 3000 accounts what's in the tax code? This young man looked at me, his voice dripping with sarcasm and said, Senator, with that attitude you'll never get anywhere in politics. He said you are now a United States senator. You will be regularly called upon to publicly address subjects of which you know nothing. He said, you better get started on it right now, tonight.

I went down to tell CPAs what's in the tax code and here I am to tell all the Humphrey family about Hubert. Actually, I'm going to talk about other subjects. I am going to come back to Vice President Humphrey later because I so much admire him. But I want to spend a few minutes talking about a timely subject that greatly concerns me and, I hope, concerns you as well.

Since I left the senate, I've had the opportunity to travel to every continent and have been to many, if not most, of the countries in the world. I have become deeply concerned about America's place in the world and America's role in the world in the 21st century, so I would like to spend what time I have this evening talking about that.

In the 20th century democracy faced three major challenges to its existence, depression, fascism and communism. The signal event of that century was the triumph of democracy and the fall of communism. In much of the world today there is widespread recognition that democratic government and free market economics offer the best hope for improving the lives of people, whether they are in developed, developing or undeveloped countries. But the democracies of the world, and especially our own here in the United States, face serious challenges.

Over the past half-century, trade among nations has grown at an unprecedented rate, and with it has grown economic interdependence. It is now a sometimes painful reality that what happens anywhere in the world, in even the most remote places, can have a profound affect upon our economy and on our way of life. While I'm going to talk about future threats to democracy, I begin by asking you to come back in time with me to the early 1940s, when the United States was swept into the greatest and most destructive conflict in all of human history, World War Two.

After early rapid advances by the Axis powers, the allies stiffened. Three major battles in the critical year of 1942 turned the tide, Midway, North Africa and Stalingrad. Although three years of hard fighting and many, many millions of deaths lay ahead, the outcome was reasonably clear. The British and American governments then wisely recognized the need to plan for the enormous task of reconstruction that would be necessary when the fighting stopped. So with a vision sorely lacking today, they began a cooperative effort that literally changed the world.



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They started with plans for an international trading system that would make less likely the protectionist policies they believed had accelerated the slide into depression and then into war a decade earlier. Their goal was realized in 1948 when 57 nations met in Havana and signed an agreement to create a world trade organization. Although the United States had led the effort and the president signed the treaty, the senate was controlled by Republicans who strongly opposed President Truman on a wide range of issues, and the Senate rejected the treaty.

Truman wouldn't take no for an answer, so he implemented by executive order those provisions of the treaty that he was legally authorized to act on and the general agreement on tariffs and trade, which became known as the GATT, was born. Forty-six years later, in the last legislative act during my tenure as majority leader of the Senate, the Senate ratified an updated version of the treaty, which had been negotiated by Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, and the World Trade Organization was finally established.

The British-American cooperation, which began in late 1942 with that narrow agenda, soon expanded to include many other nations and many other subjects, international institutions, including the United Nations were built to secure peace and stability. NATO was created, the European Union was founded, Germany and Japan were rebuilt, became democratic and resurgent. All this and more helped what started as the North Atlantic Alliance to become, what in my judgment, is the most successful economic, political and military collaboration in history. But recently that alliance has badly frayed, and just as its members face a new threat, and the potential convergence of what I see as five dangerous trends. They are the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the increase in the number of terrorist groups and their decentralization, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the increasing competition for energy security among the developed and developing nations, and the rising tide of hostility throughout the world to the United States.

We led the world into the nuclear age, and we had some success in our efforts to contain these fearsome weapons. Several countries today have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons, but are voluntarily refrained from doing so in reliance on the United States. But the number of countries with nuclear weapons has reached nine, and Iran is trying hard to make it ten. One perverse result of what is called the War on Terror is the increase in the number of terrorist groups and their dispersal. Intelligence agencies and experts in the field tell us that there are many more such groups now than there were just five years ago, and increasingly, they are unlikely to be centrally controlled, making detection, infiltration and prevention far more difficult than it was.

Driven by growth in China and India, oil consumption in Asia exceeded that in North America last year for the first time. That trend will continue and accelerate. Over the past 25 years, China's economy has grown at an annual average of more than 9%, and the government there now projects growth in excess of that amount over the next decade. Meanwhile, India's economy is also rapidly growing, with rising demand in the two most populous countries, with



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political instability in important oil producing areas, continued high prices and intense competition for supplies likely.

Islamic fundamentalism has recurred regularly in the thirteen centuries of Islam's existence, as has internal division and conflict. It is now exacerbated by very rapid population growth in most Muslim countries, stagnant economy, the absence of economic opportunity, and the presence of so many non-democratic régimes. What the countries in Islam most need is the modernization of their economies, the greater and more widespread acquisition of knowledge and skills, economic growth and job creation, essentially, what people need and want, the world over.

There is, of course, no single act, no one policy, which will enable us to successfully meet these challenges, but to me some needs are clear, and most important among them is that we must renew our alliances and we must do much better at living up to our high ideals.

Military force must be used when necessary and appropriate, but by itself it is plainly insufficient because counterterrorism is not a conventional war. It's constantly referred to as the War on Terror, but terror is a tactic, not an enemy. That tactic did not begin on September 11th, although that attack was different in scale and affect, but there are many differences among those who use the tactic of terror. Some have specific political objectives, some do not. Some are coherent political groups with whom dialogue is possible, some are not, and for some like al queda there can be only one response, and that is their total destruction. But it is inaccurate, unhelpful and ultimately self-deluding to simply lump them all together. Even with better and more discerning intelligence and a keener understanding of the challenges, we need the coordinated efforts of many other countries. So the network of alliance among free nations that was developed over the past half century under the leadership of the United States must be renewed and reinvigorated because that is our best defense and our best offense. To do that, our country must return to its most basic principle, and that means for our democracy we must recognize that power and principle are mutually enhancing and must be bound together firmly.

In 1787 a small group of American colonists gathered in Philadelphia in a constitutional convention. Their objectives were independence and self-governance, and they achieved both. The American Declaration of Independence was a powerful statement of the right of free people to govern themselves. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, what we call the Bill of Rights, is to me the most concise and eloquent statement ever written of the right of the individual to be free of oppression by government. Modern concepts of government rest heavily on these two principles. In this dangerous world they can be maintained and defended only if those who hold them are strong and well prepared.

As we enter the 21st century, American power is ascendant in the world. Yet, Americans aren't celebrating, nor is anyone else. To the contrary, poll after poll after poll reports widespread and rising hostility to the United States in every part of the world. So while our power is the greatest it's ever been, our standing in the world is the lowest it's every been.



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Many object to what they believe is the unilateralism of the current administration. For others, the US is always the one to blame simply because of its role in the world. There have been dominant military and economic powers throughout history. That role brings enormous benefit and creates many problems. In this era of instant communication, every grievance, no matter how local, whether real or imagined can be cause for resentment and envy of the dominant power.

In the past several years, beginning as majority leader and continuing since, I've met with leaders from almost every country in Europe, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, from Ireland to Russia. I've asked each of them this question: Now that the Soviet Union no longer exists and Russia has withdrawn its military forces back to its national territory, do you believe that the United States should withdraw its military forces back to its territory? Without exception, every European leader answered with an immediate and emphatic no. Ask yourself, why do some countries want American military forces on their continent, and how can that be reconciled with the widespread hostility to the United States, to which I earlier referred? Obviously, part of the answer lies in power itself; everyone wants to be on the side of the strong. But for too many people, in and out of our country, our power and our principles appear to be diverging, and power increasingly is perceived to be the primary or even the exclusive basis of American influence in the world.

I think there is much more involved. Power is clearly important, but it must always be deployed in a manner consistent with our ideals, because it is ideals that always have been the primary basis of American influence in the world. They are not easily summarized, but surely they include the solvency of the people, the primacy of individual liberty, the rule of law applied equally to every citizen, and opportunity for every member of society. And no one of us must ever forget that because of those ideals the United States was a great nation long before it was a great military or economic power. When there were four million Americans living in thirteen states along the Atlantic seaboard, this was a great nation because it was ennobled at birth by the adoption of the principles set forth in our charter documents. That's what makes us great.

Those principles guided us through the early years of nationhood, though the trial of civil war; the turbulence of the 20th century. They must guide us not in the difficult transition from a bipolar world to that of a sole superpower. If there is to be some degree of peace and stability in the world, people everywhere need hope. There can't be hope without opportunity and that requires economic growth and job creation. That's a powerful argument for democracy, the combination of democratic political institution and free market economic structures that plainly offers the best hope for the billions of people worldwide, who suffer from poverty and despair. But economic growth can not be just a product of democracy, it is necessary for the success of democracy in the first place.

To a man without a job, to a woman who can't feed or care for her children, to a young adult lacking education and skills, debates about democracy rings hollow. They sound irrelevant



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because they worry about coping, about surviving day to day. Democracy means the rule of the people. It must mean opportunity for the people, all of them.

The 21st century may be like the many in the past, a time of war, of famine, of oppression, and of injustice, but it doesn't have to be that way because it also could be a time when the dominate power uses its strength carefully and commits its people to proceed in its power to a great and noble vision, of a world largely at peace, with freedom, education, opportunity and prosperity, extending to more and more people around the world. That is our challenge and we must make it our destiny.

I want to close with two comments, one directed to the students here. This is the university, after all, and another on a personal note.

To the student: life is, in essence, the never-ending search for respect, first and most important, self-respect, and then the respect of others. There is no one way to achieve respect, but for me, none is better or more certain than service to others.

You students will find that necessarily and appropriately you will devote much of your lives to earning income to support yourselves and your family. Many of you will want wealth and status and you will achieve it. But the more of that you achieve the more you will come to realize that there is something more to life than wealth and status. You will find that real fulfillment will come not from those things, not from leisure, not from self-indulgence, but from working with all of your physical and spiritual might for a worthwhile objective that is larger than your self-interest. And my fondest hope for every student is that you are fortunate enough to find such an objective in your life.

Finally a personal note and a comment about Hubert Humphrey. As Brian indicated in the introduction, before I entered the Senate, I had the privilege of serving as a federal judge. In that position I had great power. In fact, it was the only job I've ever had where I had any power. The senate majority leader has only the opportunity to ask senators to do those things they should be doing without being asked. Chairing peace negotiations, you can't tell anyone to do anything, but when I was a federal judge, I regularly gave orders, and I'm please to tell you that they were invariably followed to the letter, and I loved that part of the job.

But what I most enjoyed was when I presided over what are called naturalization ceremonies. They are citizenship ceremonies. A group of people who had gone through all of the required procedures, who had come from every corner of the earth, gathered before me in a federal courtroom in Maine, and there in the final act, I administered to them the oath of allegiance to the United States, and by the power vested in me under our Constitution and law, I made them Americans. It was always a very emotional ceremony for me because my mother was an emigrant, my father the orphan son of immigrants. Neither of my parents had any education. My mother could not read or write; my father worked as a janitor. But because of their efforts, and



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more importantly, because of the openness of American society, I their son was able to become the majority leader of the United States Senate.

After every one of these ceremonies, I invited into my office each of the new Americans, individually and in family groups. I asked them where they came from, how they came, and why they came. Their stories were as different as their countries of origin, but they were all inspiring. Most of us are Americans by an accident of birth; every one of them was an American by an act of free will, often at great risk to themselves.

Though their answers were different, there were some common themes, best summarized by a young Asian man, who when I asked him why he came replied in very slow and halting English. "I came, Judge," he said, "because in America everybody has a chance." Think about the fact that a young man, who had been an American for ten minutes, who could barely speak English was able to sum up the meaning of our country in a single sentence: America is freedom and opportunity.

One of the reasons I wanted to come here is because to me few leaders in our recent history have better understood or more effectively articulated that reality and that promise than Hubert H. Humphrey. He was passionately committed to public service, to the principles and values of our country. He had a dynamism and an optimism that was infectious. In his powerful oratory, in his cheerful approach, he epitomized what made America great, what led some of those original four million colonists clinging to the Atlantic seaboard to make the perilous and risky journey across a huge and untamed continent and created the most powerful nation, the most prosperous nation, and in my judgment, despite its imperfections, the society that is the most free, the most open, and the most just in all of history. Hubert Humphrey inspired me to public service, and I return here this evening, through you, to thank him and the people of Minnesota. Thank you all very much.