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Herbert Hoover as an Enduring Model for American Leaders

A Personal Reflection *

SENATOR MARK O. HATFIELD

I would like to thank Professor Lee Nash for inviting me to speak to you today. I want also to thank George Fox College for creating a forum which might be considered revisionist. Today, too few appreciate the degree to which Herbert Hoover is an enduring model for American leaders.

Quite simply, I believe that Herbert Hoover was one of the greatest humanitarian leaders of this century. The qualities he exhibited while heading the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the American Relief Administration, the American Child Health Association, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the President's Famine Emergency Committee, and, of course, while serving as President of the United States were truly those of a compassionate leader. His legacy lives on in the organizations he co-founded, such as CARE and UNICEF, and in the hearts of the descendants of the millions of grateful people who he assisted across the globe. Even in the years before he was elected President, Herbert Hoover was one of the most prominent and best known Americans in the world.

Mr. Hoover not only provided food, he also delivered hope. He embodied the best that America has to offer and in the process inspired countless young people to join his endeavors, endeavors focused especially on the

* This was the luncheon address at Herbert Hoover Symposium X on the George Fox College campus, November 4, 1995

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—famine, pestilence, death and war—to which he often referred.

Few who have left such a legacy have been so maligned in our history; which makes our convening here today so important. As students and teachers of history, it is crucial for us to cut through imagery in order to fully understand and appreciate the facts in Herbert Hoover's life and career and to present this picture of him to future generations. As a true admirer of Herbert Hoover and as one who strives to follow his example as a leader and as a human being, it is an honor for me to participate in this symposium, to explore with you his legacy through the eyes and experiences of those who were so deeply inspired by him.

I am sorry that I cannot be here for each of your sessions, but I look forward to reading all of the papers in the future. You have chosen your subjects well. When we consider the people closest to Herbert Hoover, we invariably talk about Hugh Gibson, Christian Herter, James McLafferty, and many envoys and foreign service officers. There are many others, of course. Today I would like to first comment on two additional members of the "crew"—Maurice Pate and Admiral Lewis Strauss—and then to reflect on Mr. Hoover's impact on my own life in public service.

I include Pate and Strauss because both men have left us testimonials of the impact Herbert Hoover had on their lives and also because both men made enormous contributions to the betterment of humankind. I have no evidence that the two men knew each other well, yet they each shared a strong bond with Herbert Hoover. In fact, both Pate and Strauss, on learning of Mr. Hoover's death, compared him to their own fathers, referring to the great inspiration and constructive influence that Mr. Hoover had on their lives.

Maurice Pate joined the Hoover crew in April 1916, little more than a year after he had graduated from Princeton. He had been attracted to the Commission for Relief in Belgium as a way of making a contribution to the war effort. Through persistence, Pate won an overseas assignment to work with Mr. Hoover himself. It was a demanding and often frustrating job, but one with great spiritual rewards. "Remember whatever you do," Mr. Hoover wrote to Pate at a particularly difficult time, "I am one hundred percent behind you." That brief note of confidence buoyed Pate throughout his career. In fact, Pate would quote the comment more than 45 years later.

Pate had vivid memories of his service in Europe. "Any man working for Mr. Hoover immediately became three men because of the confidence the Chief inspired," he told a reporter from *The New Yorker* in 1961.¹ The two men continued to collaborate in the establishment and expansion of the United Nation's International Children's Emergency Fund, now known as

1. Quoted in Joseph Wechberg, "At the Heart of UNICEF," *The New Yorker* (December 2, 1961). 78.

UNICEF. Pate served as the first executive director of UNICEF from 1947 to 1964 and Mr. Hoover was his unofficial advisor.

There is no doubt that Hoover and Pate complemented each other well. In many ways, they were a masterful combination of a great humanitarian and his star pupil. Not one given to exaggeration, Herbert Hoover once referred to Pate as “the most efficient and dedicated human angel that I have ever known.”² High praise, indeed. I doubt that Herbert Hoover ever referred to any other mortal as an “angel,” with the possible exception of Mrs. Hoover!

And if Pate were an angel, he drew his inspiration from Mr. Hoover himself. “Year by year,” Pate wrote to Mr. Hoover in 1954 about UNICEF, “your continuing moral support has been the single greatest factor of encouragement to me in this work.”³ In fact, Pate gave Mr. Hoover full credit for the idea and the framework of UNICEF. “No man in the world,” wrote Pate in 1962, “has ever understood better the problems and the needs of children, and no man has ever done more in their behalf than Herbert Hoover.”⁴ That Herbert Hoover was an enduring model of leadership for Pate is without question, and Pate’s contributions to the welfare of children around the world were extraordinary.

Like Pate, Lewis Strauss was drawn to Herbert Hoover at a young age. In fact, Mr. Hoover’s humanitarianism so impressed the Strauss family that his picture had a place of prominence in their parlor. It is not surprising, therefore, that young Lewis Strauss would travel to Washington in May 1917 to offer his services to the new United States Food Administrator. “My idea,” Strauss wrote at the time, “is to serve under Hoover if possible, and thus while serving my country, study this great man’s methods.”⁵

Strauss was more successful in his quest than he could ever dream. In a matter of weeks, his hard work had earned him an appointment as Mr. Hoover’s private secretary, and from that vantage point, he absorbed Hoover’s style of leadership. Many years later, Strauss referred to Mr. Hoover as a “man of decision,” to be admired for his determination and his intellect, among other qualities.⁶

But for Strauss, as for Pate and many other members of the “crew,” it was Herbert Hoover’s human compassion that most impressed them. “He

2. “Remarks by Herbert Hoover at the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for the Benefit of the United Nations Children’s Fund,” September 28, 1956, Herbert Hoover Public Statement File, Hoover Presidential Library-Museum.

3. Pate to Hoover, November 1, 1954, Biographical File, Pate Papers, Hoover Library.

4. Pate as quoted in Herbert Hoover, *The American Epic*, (Chicago, 1960-1964), IV, 281-82.

5. Strauss oral history interview quoted in Richard Pfau, *No Sacrifice Too Great: The Life of Lewis L. Strauss* (Charlottesville, VA, 1984), 10.

6. Lewis L. Strauss, “A Man of Decision,” *Men and Decisions* (Garden City, NY, 1962), 7-59.

felt for people who were suffering,” Strauss recalled in one interview. But, as Strauss points out, Mr. Hoover’s compassion was evidenced by deeds rather than words. Perhaps the somber Quaker household in Newberg where Mr. Hoover was reared, where emotions were often suppressed, influenced him even in later years. Whatever the case, his commitment to serving those in need was always clear. “This wasn’t a mawkish feeling,” Strauss said. “He didn’t shed tears over the Belgian babies; he did something about it. Compassion led to action on his part, not to haggling.”⁷ Compassion and action underscored Strauss’s lifelong admiration for Hoover as a leader. Strauss went on to an extraordinary career as an investment banker and later as chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and as acting Secretary of Commerce. But at the core of his being, Strauss was a Hoover man. “We have found ourselves,” Strauss wrote of himself and other members of the “crew,” “somehow committed for life to good works under Hoover’s leadership.”⁸ Pate and Strauss and all the members of the “crew” had a loyalty to Mr. Hoover that is hard to explain today in a world caught up in alliances of convenience. Even in the 1930’s, few leaders had so devoted a following as did Herbert Hoover. Even Franklin Roosevelt had his defectors in Raymond Moley and James Farley among others.

What accounts for that extraordinary loyalty? Its roots lie not only in the personal character of Mr. Hoover, but also in his administrative style. From his earliest days as a manager of mines, Herbert Hoover placed a great deal of trust in his subordinates. He delegated responsibility freely, gave his assistants enough power and resources to do their jobs, and backed them to the limit. These subordinates responded to this administrative style with an unprecedented loyalty.

Yet it would be wrong to imply that Mr. Hoover’s administrative style was idiosyncratic or subjective. Mr. Hoover made decisions based on facts, not emotions. He trusted his crew to assemble the experts on any issue and to develop alternate courses of action. Above all, Mr. Hoover wanted practical solutions to address the situation at hand. “The greatest catastrophe that could come to our country,” Mr. Hoover told the Gridiron Club in 1929, “is that administration policies or legislation or voluntary movements shall be encouraged or enacted on the basis of emotion, not upon facts or reason.”⁹ Mr. Hoover’s assistants knew that if they did their jobs well, the “chief” would back them all the way.

Like Maurice Pate and Lewis Strauss and many other members of the “crew,” I cannot be dispassionate about Herbert Hoover’s impact on my

7. Strauss oral history interview with Raymond Henle, Hoover Library, 14.

8. Quoted in Lewis L. Strauss, “A Birthday Letter to Herbert Hoover,” *Reader’s Digest* (September, 1961).

9. Herbert Hoover, “Address to the Gridiron Club, December 14, 1929,” as printed in *Public Papers of the President: Herbert Hoover*, 1929 (Washington, DC, 1974), 473.

own life and career. I first joined the “Hoover crew,” as it were, at the age of ten when I took my wagon down to the local Republican headquarters and got a big box of “Re-elect Hoover” handbills to distribute around my neighborhood. I must also tell you that I was crushed that Mr. Hoover failed to carry either my neighborhood, the state of Oregon, or the nation in the election of 1932. It was my first taste of political defeat and I can still remember it.¹⁰

But this election loss did not reduce my deep affection for Herbert Hoover. Quite simply, I could identify with him. He was the son of a blacksmith, I was the son of a blacksmith. As a boy living in Salem, I could see the house where Herbert Hoover had lived. That was enough for me, at least at the age of ten. But my identification with Mr. Hoover ran deeper and I remained an unreconstructed Hoover man throughout my school years.

In fact, my appreciation and admiration for Mr. Hoover matured as I grew older. I went off to Stanford for graduate study in political science in part because of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace. Because of my longstanding interest in labor issues, it was logical that I turned to Herbert Hoover’s leadership in establishing federal labor policy as the topic for my Master’s thesis. I focused on his labor policies because his leadership in labor relations was largely unknown and unappreciated at that time. Few were aware, for example, of Hoover’s active leadership as Secretary of Commerce to implement the eight-hour work day. Few knew of his long-standing support of workers in such matters as collective bargaining and sustaining strong trade unions. I had high hopes of rectifying the situation, and, like most graduate students would, I delved eagerly into the treasure trove of data centralized at Stanford. But unlike most graduate students, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to discuss my work in detail with the very subject of my research.

I suppose it was impertinent of me to ask to meet with Mr. Hoover, but he graciously agreed to discuss my thesis with me in his office at Stanford. I still remember the excitement of entering that room more than 48 years ago, but I can’t remember much of what I said. Perhaps the most important result of the meeting was twofold: he granted me permission to use all of his papers, including the Presidential ones and those that had not yet been open to accession, and he showed faith that this young graduate student would produce a useful study.

That meeting was the first of two or three sessions during which he answered my questions about his labor policies. He was as much of a tutor as any professor I had in my graduate study. I was also aided greatly by the archivists who worked with Mr. Hoover. Suda Bane, who had been Mr.

10. My own memories of these and other personal events are recorded in my oral history interview with Raymond Henle and in my correspondence within the post-Presidential files of the Hoover Papers in the Hoover Library.

Hoover's archivist for decades, knew where every piece of paper in the collection was located and was of tremendous help to me.

I stayed in touch with Mr. Hoover after I left Stanford and began teaching at Willamette University and increased our correspondence during my service in Oregon politics. When my travels took me to New York City, I would make an appointment to drop in and spend a few minutes in the Waldorf Towers with Mr. Hoover.

But the highpoint of my contact with him came when Mr. Hoover graciously invited me to be his guest at the Bohemian Grove encampment in the mid-1950's. There, I had an extensive amount of time to talk with him about politics and public service and all manner of subjects including the proper way to eat peaches!

Those days at "Camp Caveman" were important for me because I had the opportunity to see the Chief relate to the members of his "crew." Even at the age of 85, Herbert Hoover continued to teach, to inspire, to advise those around him. I am sure that the men who came back year after year to the Grove did so, in part, for the pleasure of Mr. Hoover's company.

I remember on my Saturday at the Grove, he spoke to the entire camp about his hope for this nation. These "lakeside addresses," as they were called, were Mr. Hoover's way of bringing the "crew" up to date on domestic and international problems and giving them his views. The address was not formal, but presented in warm, human terms that related to the past but foresaw trends that were moving us into the future. Everyone in attendance was inspired by those talks.

Mr. Hoover remained an inspiration to me throughout my career in public service. I continued to visit him at the Waldorf's suite 31A right up to his passing. His death was a great loss to the nation in general and to me personally.

Over the past thirty years, I have turned to Mr. Hoover's writings for guidance on leadership. Unlike many of his successors as President, Herbert Hoover wrote his own speeches and we can be sure that his plain-spoken prose reflected his deeply-held beliefs. Even if his speeches are not often quoted, they do have the ring of great truth and wisdom.

In looking back through his books, particularly *American Individualism*, *The Challenge to Liberty*, *The Problems of Lasting Peace*, and the many speeches gathered in the volumes of *Addresses Upon the American Road*, I found recurring commentary on the characteristics of good leadership, qualities that Herbert Hoover reflected throughout his own life.

Foremost among the qualities that Herbert Hoover thought necessary for good leadership was the pursuit of virtue. "We shall succeed," he told a Stanford audience on that day in 1928 when he accepted the Republican nomination for President, "through the faith, the loyalty, the self-sacrifice,

and the devotion to eternal ideals which live today in every American.”¹¹ A good leader inspires those who would follow by shining example.

In later years, Mr. Hoover added that anyone who aspires to lead others must be a person of honesty and integrity, a person with strong spiritual values and common sense; a person with enterprise and self-reliance; and a person open to change and creativity. Above all these virtues, Mr. Hoover told countless commencement classes, anyone who aspires to lead must have a firm belief in freedom, justice, and dignity of the individual.

Herbert Hoover’s philosophy of leadership is perhaps best summarized in his essay on the “uncommon man,” a message that he first delivered in 1948 to the graduates of Wilmington College in Ohio and repeated several times. “Let us remember,” Herbert Hoover said, “that the great human advances have not been brought about by mediocre men and women. They were brought about by distinctly uncommon people with vital sparks of leadership. . . . For the future of America rests not in mediocrity, but in the constant renewal of leadership in every phase of our national life.”¹²

In Hoover’s view, the guidance of our nation depended upon the transfer of leadership from one generation to the next. The older generation had both a moral and a civic obligation to share their wisdom with the younger generation. “Youth will demand a voice in its own destiny,” Mr. Hoover told the Republican National Convention in June of 1944. “We, the older generation, who have learned something of the great forces in the world, can advise and counsel. The issues are not new and we can distill principles from the past.”¹³ This is sound advice, as relevant today as it was more than fifty years ago.

That Herbert Hoover served as a model for future leaders is evident in an invitation he received from John F. Kennedy less than two months after the new President’s inauguration. “It gives me great pleasure to invite you to serve as honorary chairman of the national advisory committee to the Peace Corps,” President Kennedy wrote. “Your acceptance of this position will rally millions of Americans and people all over the world who remember and respect your own pioneering leadership in this field of human assistance and constructive service.”¹⁴ Although Mr. Hoover felt that at the age of 86 years he could not take on any more responsibilities, he was greatly honored by the President’s proposal.

11. Published in Herbert Hoover, *The New Day: Campaign Speeches of Herbert Hoover* (Stanford, 1928), 44.

12. Published in Herbert Hoover, *Addresses on the American Road, 1947-1948* (Stanford, 1948), 172.

13. Published in Herbert Hoover, *Addresses on the American Road, 1941-1945* (New York, 1946), 255.

14. John F. Kennedy to Herbert Hoover, March 2, 1961, Post-Presidential Files of Herbert Hoover, Hoover Presidential Library.

Young leaders are not born virtuous, of course, which is why Herbert Hoover repeatedly emphasized the central role of education in the leadership process. Great leaders are trained in the home, the church, and the school—the three great educational institutions in this nation. A failure of any one of these institutions to instill these virtues in young people would compromise the entire process. Though Hoover once affectionately defined a boy as “a piece of skin stretched over an appetite,” he held children dear to his heart and never wavered in his attention to their welfare.¹⁵ Herbert Hoover’s deep concern for the next generation of leaders led him to call for a White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1929, only the second such conference in the nation’s history (the first had been called by Teddy Roosevelt). On November 9, 1930, Hoover greeted conference participants in a speech combining whimsy and rare insight into the problems and possibilities of children everywhere. “We approach all problems of children with affection,” said the President. “Theirs is the province of joy and good humor. . . . We envy them the freshness of adventure and discovery of life; we mourn over the disappointments they will meet.”¹⁶ Hoover inspired the delegates to draw up a “Children’s Charter” to dramatize the need for prompt legislative and administrative action which led to the passage of numerous laws on the state and local level.

His commitment to children did not end once he left office. In 1936, four years after he had left the White House, Herbert Hoover took over as Chairman of the Board of the Boys Clubs of America (now the Boys and Girls Clubs). This organization is dedicated to assisting young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to develop skills for employment as well as social and leadership skills. Under his direction, the organization grew rapidly and, in 1956, Congress chartered the Boys Clubs. Hoover remained the Chairman of the Board, its guiding force, until his death in 1964.

I have been asked on a number of occasions whether I think that Herbert Hoover is an enduring model of leadership for the current generation. I have no doubt that he is and I base my belief on the achievements of the tens of thousands of children who attend the sixty Herbert Hoover schools across this country or who visit the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum in West Branch and the Hoover-Minthorn home here in Newberg each year.

These young people have been inspired by leadership shown by Herbert Hoover in helping those in need. More importantly, they have translated that inspiration into practical action. Let me give you one exam-

15. Herbert Hoover, “What is a Boy?,” Hoover Presidential Library.

16. Herbert Hoover, “Address to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, November 19, 1930,” *Public Papers of the President: Herbert Hoover, 1930* (Washington, DC, 1974), 490.

ple. In the wake of the tragedy in Oklahoma City, students at Herbert Hoover School in Iowa City, Iowa mobilized a fund raising effort and turned over \$160 to the Red Cross to be used for families of the blast victims. These same Hoover students had conducted earlier relief efforts for the earthquake victims in Japan, for the victims of Hurricane Andrew, and for impoverished people in Guatemala.¹⁷

The philosophy of these students was summed up best by young Molly Egan, a student at that Hoover school. "It's satisfying to get involved," Molly said. "When others see you doing things like this, it makes them want to help too. It's contagious."¹⁸ Herbert Hoover could not have said it better.

The program at the Hoover School in Iowa City is being replicated across the nation. A new generation of young humanitarians will carry forward the message and the leadership of Herbert Hoover into the next century. When an American reaches out to help someone in need, the helpful spirit of Herbert Hoover is there. When we show compassion, we are all members of the Chief's "crew."

Just as Herbert Hoover first inspired me more than sixty years ago, he continues to inspire new generations of young people. Herbert Hoover showed us time and time again that each of us can make a difference in improving the world. We can ask for no more from a leader.

17. Steve Smith, "Hoover Students Reach Out." *Iowa City Press-Citizen* (May 3, 1995). I am grateful to the staff at the Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch for bringing this story to my attention.

18. *Ibid.*