TRIBUTE TO MISSION, KANSAS, MAYOR SYLVESTER POWELL

HON. DENNIS MOORE
OF KANSAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 20, 2002

Mr. MOORE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Mayor Sylvester Powell, of Mission, the Kansas city who died on March 6th, at the age of 82. Sylvester Powell served as mayor of his northeast Johnson County community, which is located in the Third Congressional District, from 1955–65 and from 1977 until his death.

Sylvester Powell was born on May 12, 1919, in Springfield, Ohio. He was drafted into the Army in March 1941, and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, entered Officer’s Candidate School. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant and eventually attained the rank of captain. He served as a company commander in General George Patton’s Third Army during the war. While in the Army, he met his future wife, Merle Cline, and they were married on July 21, 1943. Mayor Powell is survived by Merle, their son, Stephen, and their daughters, Janet and Dianne.

After leaving the Army and receiving an undergraduate degree from Wittenberg College, Sylvester attended law school at the University of Kansas City (now the University of Missouri-Kansas City), graduating in 1949. He was to practice law for the next 47 years, representing defendants in personal injury litigation.

The Powells moved to Mission in 1951, where he helped write the city charter that year, which established the city limits. Sylvester was elected to the city council in 1953 and was first elected mayor in 1955. As the Johnson County Sun recently noted: “Through Powell’s tenure, Mission grew from a sleepy community to the vital retail area it is today. Many improvements were made to the city’s infrastructure during the Powell years. But perhaps Powell’s greatest legacy was the $8 million Sylvester Powell, Jr., Community Center, which opened in May 1999. . . . The almost 3-year-old community center was an instant success and surprised both detractors and backers by covering its operational expenses.”

Prior to entering law school, Powell was fond of telling others how, “it’s a person who . . . takes a stand and you. If you’re running the city well, they ought to keep you in.”

Councilwoman Laura McConwell will become Mission’s new mayor.

[From the Kansas City Star, Mar. 8, 2002]

Lucky for Mission, Mayor was Tough

(By Mike Hendricks)

When I read Syl Powell’s obituary yesterday, the first thing that came to mind was the time he hijacked the Olympic torch.

Powell was a leader of Kansas County’s Olympic torch relay in 1996. The torch is something we may not get a second chance to see again, and I thought the people of Mission should be able to see it.”

While some critics said Powell held the city’s reins too tightly, he clearly was in control of city government during his tenure.

The city did not hire a professional administrator until last year, after a consultant recommended the move. “I don’t think they’re going to find anybody that can run the city better than I do,” Powell said in 2000.

Last year, the city’s management became a campaign issue in Powell’s first election challenge since 1985, and he pledged to hire a professional.

City Councilman Lloyd Thomas, who has served since 1976, said Mission’s strong financial position today is the result of Powell’s control over the city’s finances throughout the years.

“When’s what you call being frugal,” Thomas said recently. “He spends the taxpayers’ money just like he does his own. He’s very frugal with it.”

Powell was able to build the city’s sales tax base with development projects that didn’t sacrifice Mission’s small-town feel, Kostar said. That’s a formula other mayors in northeast Johnson County want to emulate, he added.

When the city needed a financial shot in 1994, Powell’s approach was similar. “Sometimes I think about retiring, but it’s like giving up something dear to you. If you’re running the city well, they ought to keep you in.”

Mr. Speaker, I am taking this opportunity to place in the Record two recent pieces from the Kansas City Star regarding Mayor Sylvester Powell: an obituary that the paper carried on March 7th and a column by Mike Hendricks, reflecting the character and ability of the man whom we knew as “Syl,” that the Star carried on the following day. I am proud to have known Sylvester Powell. As the Johnson County Sun said in a March 6th editorial: “People often wonder what one person can do. Syl Powell showed them.” My only regret is that we will not soon see his kind in public service again.

[From the Kansas City Star, Mar. 7, 2002]
Powell liked to have his way—and sometimes he played rough to get it. Some called the Olympic torch threat self-centered, childish, an embarrassment. Yes, sure. Exactly. And it was bloody marvelous, too.

Not only did the power play illuminate Powell’s character, but it was the kind of leadership we miss so much in local politics these days. Strong and uncompromising.

Of course, Powell was no T.J. Pendergast and no one questioned his honesty or accused him of accepting a payoff. But in his way, he was as tough as Boss Tom, a rarity in an era when most local politicians would rather retreat than get their way for the benefit of the community.

There are a lot of wimps out there. I’d like to think if Sylvester Powell Jr. had been mayor of Kansas City rather than Mission all these years, there’d have been a whole lot less hand-wringing downtown.

Cantankerous, shrowed, arrogant and big-hearted, that was Powell. He insisted on building a Cadillac of a community center for his constituents. And he saw to it that his name was on it.

I once labeled Powell Mission’s “mayor for life.” He was that. Thirty-five of the last 47 years, he was Mission’s chief executive. Critics decried his overbearing style. But when he died Wednesday at the age of 82, few residents of his tidy little town had called anyone else Mr. Mayor.

By the way, when the Olympic torch came through here this year, I noticed that the route through Johnson County came nowhere near the Mission city limits. Probably just a coincidence.

Peace and Nuclear Disarmament: A Call to Action

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH
OF OHIO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, March 20, 2002

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, in this time of national crisis, it is important for all those who love our country to speak out. I offer these thoughts with spirit of reconciliation to protect our precious world from widening war and someday fulfill the dream of peace and harmony on earth, let us begin the conversation through healing ourselves. Each of us is a citizen of the world, or the end of the world. And as each of us chooses, so becomes the world. It is dehumanizing through its calculations of mass casualties. We must overcome the simplistic scaring of war and the increased bloodshed between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

United States’ troop deployments in the Philippines, Yemen, Georgia, Colombia and Indonesia create new possibilities for expanded war. An invasion of Iraq is planned. The recent disclosure that Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and Libya are considered by the United States as possible targets for nuclear attack catalyzes potential conflicts everywhere.

These crucial political decisions promoting increased military actions, plus a new nuclear first-use policy, are occurring without the consent of the American people, without public debate, without public hearings, without public votes. The President is taking Congress’s approval of responding to the Sept. 11 terrorists as a license to flirt with nuclear war.

“Politics ought to stay out of fighting a war,” the President has been quoted as saying on March 13th 2002. Yet Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution explicitly requires that Congress take responsibility when decisions come to declaring war. This President is very popular, according to the polls. But polls are not a substitute for democratic process. Attributing a negative connotation here to politics or dismissing constitutionally mandated congressional oversight belies reality.

Spending $400 billion a year for defense is a political decision. Committing troops abroad is a political decision. War is a political decision.

When men and women die on the battlefield that is the result of a political decision. The use of nuclear weapons which end the lives of millions, is a profound political decision. In a monarchy there need be no political decisions.

In a democracy, all decisions are political, in that they derive from the consent of the governed.

In a democracy, budgetary military and national objectives must be subordinate to the political process. Before we celebrate an imperial presidency, let it be said that the lack of free and open political process, the lack of free and open political discourse can be fatal in a democracy.

We have reached a moment in our country’s history where it is urgent that people everywhere speak out as president of his or her own life, to protect the peace of the nation and world within and without.

We should speak out and caution leaders who generate fear through talk of the endless war or the final conflict.

We should appeal to our leaders to consider their own beliefs about war, to think that what we are reshaping consciousness and can have an adverse effect on our nation.

Because when one person thinks: fight! he or she finds a fight. One faction thinks: war! and starts a war. One nation, thinks: nuclear! and approaches the abyss.

Neither individuals nor nations exist in a vacuum, which is why we have a serious responsibility for each other in this world. It is also urgent that we find those places of war in our own lives, and begin healing the world through healing ourselves. Each of us is a citizen of a common planet, bound to a common destiny. So connected are we, that each of us has the power to be the eyes of the world, the voice of the world, the conscience of the world, or the end of the world. And as each of us chooses, so becomes the world.

Each of us is a architect of this world. Our thoughts, the concepts, Our words, the designs. Our deeds, the bricks and mortar of our daily lives. Which is why we should always take care to regard the power of our thoughts and words, and the commands they send into action through our lives.

Some of our leaders have been thinking and talking about nuclear war. In the past week there has been much news about a planning document which describes how and when America might wage nuclear war. The Nuclear Posture Review recently released to the media by the government:

1. Assumes that the United States has the right to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike.
2. Equates nuclear weapons with conventional weapons.
3. Attempts to minimize the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.
4. Promotes nuclear response to a chemical or biological attack.

Some dismiss this review as routine government planning. But it becomes ominous when taken in the context of a war on terrorism which keeps expanding its boundaries, rhetorically and literally.

The President equates the “war on terrorism” with World War II. He expresses a desire to have the nuclear option “on the table.” He unilaterally withdraws from the ABM treaty. He seeks $8.9 billion to fund deployment of a missile shield. He institutes, without congressional knowledge, a shadow government in a building beside our nation’s Capitol. He tries to pass off as arms reduction, the storage of, instead of the elimination of, nuclear weapons.

Two generations ago we lived with nuclear nightmares. We feared and hated the Russians who feared and hated us. We feared and hated the “godless, atheistic” communists. In our schools, we dutifully put our head between our legs and practiced duck-and-cover drills. In our nightmares, we saw the long, slow arc of a Soviet missile flash into our very neighborhood.

We got down on our knees and prayed for peace. We surveyed, wide eyed, pictures of the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. We supported the elimination of all nuclear weapons. We knew that if you “nuked” others you “nuked” yourself.

The splitting of the atom for destructive purposes admits a split consciousness, the compartmentalized thinking of Us vs. Them, the dichotomized thinking which spawns polarities and leads to war. The proposed use of nuclear weapons, pollutes the psyche with the arrogance of infinite power. It creates delusions of domination of matter and space.

It is dehumanizing through its calculations of mass casualties. We must overcome the doomsayers and sowers who invite a world descending, disintegrating into a nuclear disaster. With a world at risk, we must find the bombs in our own lives and disarm them. We must listen to that quiet inner voice which counsels that the survival of all is achieved through the unity of all.

The same powerful humanity expressed by any one of us expresses itself through each of us. We must overcome our fear of each other, by seeking out the humanity within each of us. The human heart contains every possibility of race, creed, language, religion, and politics. We are one in our commonalities. Must we always fear our differences? We can overcome our fears by not feeding our fears with more violence, nonviolent intervention, and mediation.

We need to create a new, clear vision of a world as one. A new, clear vision of people working through their differences peacefully. A new, clear vision with the teaching of non-violence, nonviolent intervention, and mediation.