

SENATOR WAYNE MORSE

REPORT TO OREGON

SEPTEMBER 1, 1963

Fellow Oregonians,

No one who was on the Mall in Washington, D C, on August 28 will ever be quite the same again. The doubts, fears, and criticisms that preceded the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom were swept away by the greatest public demonstration I have ever witnessed.

It was a great demonstration for many reasons. For one, 210,000 people who feel strongly enough about a single issue to come from all parts of the country for a 1-mile walk are impressive in themselves. Two hundred and ten thousand voices raised in the songs of the civil rights movement are impressive, too.

“We Shall Overcome,” “America,” “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “He has the Whole World in His Hands” are not marching songs of violence but of the American tradition.

It was a great demonstration because it brought together people from every corner of America and from all walks of life for a common purpose. To me, one unexpected aspect of the March was the great variety of signs telling where the marchers were from and what organizations they represented. The National Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jewish faith were among the sponsors of the March. Their local groups – Methodist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, the Catholic Inter-racial Council, Baptist, Lutheran, Jewish – came not only from great metropolitan centers but from small towns of America. My son-in-law, an Episcopal minister from New Haven, Connecticut, and my daughter, Judy, were among the marchers. Marchers – who strolled more than they marched – came from Virginia and West Virginia, Florida, Michigan, South Carolina, from several cities in Massachusetts and Ohio, from New York City and Brooklyn and Westchester County, 30,000 came from the Philadelphia area alone, from Cambridge, Maryland and from Baltimore, and even from Utah and a wonderful group from Oregon.

In addition to the church signs, many carried signs of the United Auto Workers, the Electrical Workers Union, a Teamsters local in Vermont, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Congress for Racial Equality.

Probably 80 percent of the marchers were colored Americans; the rest white. What made this a great and proud event in American history was the kindness and good-will of these marchers. I have seen more unruly and discourteous crowds in football stadiums.

This was not a mob organized to intimidate Congress. It was a pleasant and friendly section of America, exercising its right under the Bill of Rights peaceably to assemble and petition Congress for redress of grievances.

The March did not really come to Capitol Hill at all; Capitol Hill was invited to the March. Along with some dozen Senators and 150 members of the House, I went to the Lincoln Memorial and sat on the platform with the sponsors and entertainers throughout the entire program. We heard the incomparable Marian Anderson and listened to one of the most profound orations I have ever heard in my life from the Reverend Martin Luther King. We heard him say one of the sad things about our country – that the American of color is an exile in his own land.

Some in this country, and some in Congress, are still saying that the March did not change anything and they were not impressed. If so then they are people who are not impressed by anything.

The Congress of the United States is now on trial -- not our colored citizens. It is the Negro who has been patient with Congress, and it is to be wondered that he has been patient for 100 years. We have for years concerned ourselves with what we call the revolution of rising expectations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. We have spent billions of dollars to accommodate that resolution. But we have tried to ignore and suppress a revolution of rising expectations right here at home.

The peaceful assembly and petition to Congress delivered in Washington by 210,000 people on August 28 was the way our Constitution intended the great social changes should express themselves. But Congress must begin to play its Constitutional role, too, by enacting legislation that will give enforcement to all Constitutional rights. If it fails to do so, the Congress will bear the responsibility for forcing the civil rights movement into more violent channels.

We white people have the duty to deliver the Constitution of the United States to the Negroes of America, and the best vehicle for doing so is to pass President Kennedy's civil rights bill.

This is Wayne Morse reporting from Washington, D.C.

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*Transcript of a recorded statement which Senator Morse sent to media outlets in Oregon. Source: Wayne Morse Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University Of Oregon Libraries.*