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Floor Statement on Joint Resolution 17 - Concerning the Creation of a Joint Committee on the Environment

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resolution died because agreement could not be reached on this issue.

The language concerning the chairmanship flows freely and clearly. As has been the case with previously established Joint Committees, the chairman would be determined by the members and alternate between the Senate and House of Representatives with each Congress.

I would hope that the certain reluctance among certain conferees of the other body concerning a selection of the chairman has disappeared. We should proceed with the important work in the environment.

Mr. President, I think it is fair to say that during the past three sessions of the Congress, the Senate has come to agree on two major purposes for establishing a Joint Committee on Environment.

1. The Senate recognizes that it needs to improve the congressional capacity for collecting relevant information on present and emerging environmental problems; and

2. The Senate recognizes that it needs to create a well-staffed congressional institution which can conduct a continuing assessment of the relationship between human beings and their environment.

It is no secret that the standing committees are increasingly burdened by legislative proposals in their special fields. The committee staffs have little or no opportunity to test relationships between their fields, those of other committees, and the total environment.

During the 91st Congress, more than 40 bills and resolutions were introduced in the Senate alone to restructure the legislative branch so that it might deal more effectively with environmental problems.

The questions of jurisdiction also became more numerous. During 1970 alone, there were jurisdictional conflicts in the Senate over ocean dumping, land use planning, coastal zone management, pesticides, radiation standards, low emission vehicle development, noise pollution, power plant siting, and environmental class actions.

Let me emphasize that it is not my intent to establish a joint committee which will infringe the substantive jurisdiction of any standing committee. What I am seeking is a source of information and analysis which the standing committees do not have time or authority to produce for themselves.

The joint committee also should help us to keep a record of our accomplishments and failures in the handling of environmental problems. No legislative mechanism exists, for example, to evaluate the criticisms and recommendations of Federal programs sent to the Senate by the Comptroller General. Yet the number of such criticisms and recommendations are bound to increase as the programs mature and progress.

Finally, Mr. President, a joint committee on environment should assist the Congress to maintain its proper role as a balance to the executive and judicial branches in the Federal system.

During the past year, the Congress through new legislation helped the Executive to reorganize its efforts against environmental problems. The Council on Environmental Quality was established; an Office of Environmental Quality was authorized. The Congress approved the reorganization plans which set up the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Now, we need, as the Senate report on last year's resolution observed, "the creation of a non-legislative Joint Committee on the Environment (to) provide the legislative branch with a parallel overview capacity on a continuing basis . . .

"It is clear that none of the existing congressional committees is equipped, or has the jurisdictional authority, to provide a comprehensive overview which will identify the emerging problems which threaten the deterioration of man's environment."

SOUTH VIETNAM OFFERS TO RELEASE ALL SICK AND WOUNDED PRISONERS

Mr. GRIFFIN. Mr. President, the Government of South Vietnam today made a dramatic offer to release unilaterally all sick and wounded prisoners of war now being held in South Vietnam who express a desire to be released to the North.

The Foreign Minister of South Vietnam, Tran Van Lam, told newsmen today that there are 783 North Vietnamese, 1,267 Vietcong, and 30 "regroupees"—South Vietnamese whose loyalties lie with North Vietnam—who are eligible to be sent to North Vietnam.

The announcement came on the eve of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year holiday, which begins tomorrow.

Foreign Minister Lam said the offer was made in the spirit of the season:

When it is customary for all Vietnamese, wherever they happen to be, to join their families for celebration of the New Year.

At the same time, Foreign Minister Lam proposed that:

In this humane spirit . . . the other side release immediately all sick and wounded Vietnamese and allied prisoners of war.

Mr. President, last Sunday the Government of South Vietnam released 37 sick and wounded prisoners of war in the demilitarized zone so that they could return to their homes in North Vietnam in time for Tet.

These encouraging and significant South Vietnamese initiatives follow a suggestion which I made in the Senate last month calling for the unilateral release by our side of all sick and wounded, along with 1,500 other North Vietnamese prisoners.

At the time, I said that such a dramatic, humanitarian gesture should create, worldwide, an expectation of response in kind by the Communist side.

The Government of South Vietnam deserves the commendation of the Senate and of this Nation, Mr. President, for its forthcoming attitude and its willingness to comply with the Geneva conventions on prisoners of war despite the refusal, so far, of North Vietnam to reciprocate.

Foreign Minister Lam explained his Government's failure to offer the unilateral release of prisoners previously in forthright terms:

Such a decision, consonant with the Geneva Convention of 1949, would have been made earlier and carried out fully and entirely, had it not been for the consistent refusal of the North Vietnamese leaders to adopt a humane attitude on all matters relating to prisoners of war. They have refused even to cooperate in working out the safest and most convenient measures for the return of their own prisoners to the North. It is therefore understandable that prisoners of war held in South Vietnam should entertain the greatest fears for their security upon being released to the North.

The Government of South Vietnam expressed its readiness to welcome "here and now" all prisoners of war released by the authorities in North Vietnam.

Prisoners held by South Vietnam are now being interviewed, Foreign Minister Lam said, indicating that a series of unilateral releases can be expected in the future.

S248- 8249

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 17—INTRODUCTION OF A JOINT RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on behalf of the Senator from Maine (Mr. MUSKIE) I introduce a joint resolution concerning the creation of a Joint Committee on the Environment.

This resolution is identical to the resolution adopted unanimously by the Senate in the last Congress. Its appearance on the Senate Calendar has been cleared by all parties, and I ask that it accordingly be placed on the calendar and that a statement in its behalf by the Senator from Maine (Mr. MUSKIE) be printed at this point in the Record.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The joint resolution will be received and, without objection, will be placed on the calendar; and, without objection, the statement will be printed in the Record.

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 17) to establish a Joint Committee on the Environment, introduced by Mr. MANSFIELD (for Mr. MUSKIE) (for himself and other Senators), was received, read twice by its title, and placed on the calendar, by unanimous consent.

The statement by Senator MUSKIE is as follows:

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. MUSKIE. Mr. President, I offer for introduction in the Senate this morning a joint resolution which would establish a non-legislative committee of Senate and House members to be known as the Joint Committee on Environment.

The resolution, with the exception of minor changes for clarification, is identical to the joint resolution approved by the Senate last year. That resolution, as Senators will recall, died in conference when the 91st Congress adjourned.

There was in 1970, among the conferees of the other body, a certain reluctance to allow the members of the Joint Committee to select their own first chairman. The

Certainly these South Vietnamese initiatives provide impressive evidence of the good faith of our side in seeking to end the misery and hardships for all prisoners on both sides in the war.

Now we look to the Communist side for a response.

If the other side desires to improve its tarnished reputation for mistreatment of prisoners, they should respond to the South Vietnamese initiative by releasing at least some of the American and other free world prisoners they hold, particularly those who are sick or wounded.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to insert into the Record a report by the American Embassy in Saigon transmitted to the State Department concerning Foreign Minister Lam's press conference today.

There being no objection, the report was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

AMERICAN EMBASSY REPORT

At press conference, January 26, GVN Foreign Minister Lam released following statement:

A. On January 24, 1971, thirty-seven disabled and incurably sick North Vietnamese prisoners of war were released across the Ben Hai River at the 17th parallel, in accordance with the communication given to North Vietnam at the Paris conference table by the delegation of the Republic of Vietnam. The release operation has been achieved.

B. Confident in the correctness of its humanitarian policy, and on the special occasion of the Vietnamese new year, the government of the Republic of Vietnam is launching today another new initiative. This is the third initiative since last month, put forward with a view to improving the lot of prisoners of war detained by both sides.

C. In this season, when it is customary for all Vietnamese wherever they happen to be to join their families for the celebration of the New Year, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam proposes to release all sick and wounded prisoners of war now being held in South Vietnam who express a desire to be released to the North.

D. Such a decision, consonant with the Geneva Convention of 1949, would have been made earlier and carried out fully and entirely, had it not been for the consistent refusal of the North Vietnamese leaders to adopt a humane attitude on all matters relating to prisoners of war. They have refused even to cooperate in working out the safest and most convenient measures for the return of their own prisoners to the North. It is therefore understandable that prisoners of war held in South Vietnam should entertain the greatest fears for their security upon being released to the North.

E. The Government of the Republic of Vietnam hopes that the Hanoi authorities will clearly manifest their agreement to warmly welcome and treat well all sick and wounded prisoners of war who express their desire to be released to the North.

F. In this humane spirit, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam proposes that the other side release immediately all sick and wounded Vietnamese and allied prisoners of war.

G. The Government of the Republic of Vietnam declares that it is ready here and now to welcome all prisoners of war released by the authorities of the North.

H. In view of the condition of the sick and wounded prisoners of war, it is eminently desirable that the other side promptly give its agreement so that the long internment of the prisoners of war on both sides can be ended in the shortest possible time.

End quote

During press conference LAM made following additional points:

A. GVN will convey proposal to the other side via liaison officers in Paris, and to ICRC in Geneva.

B. There are 783 NVA, 30 regroupes, and 1267 VC sick and wounded who are eligible for sending to NVN.

C. Asked how many want to go North, LAM said GVN is "asking gradually" NVA and regroupes. Process is complicated by "danger of retaliation".