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Senator Mike Mansfield Dies

(Washington, D.C.) Senator Mike Mansfield, the longest serving Senate majority leader and the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Japan, died at 7:35 this morning at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. He was 98.

“It is with sadness and a sense of loss that we note the passing of Senator Mike Mansfield, an American of the highest principles,” noted L. Gordon Flake, Executive Director of the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs. “As the longest serving Senate Majority leader and the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Japan in U.S. history, Mike Mansfield will be remembered as one of the great legislators and diplomats of this past century. His deep commitment to justice and mutual understanding did not stop at our nation’s borders. From his first trip to Asia in 1921 to his passing, he remained dedicated to the promotion of understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and Asia. As part of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, we at the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs mourn his passing, yet are honored to carry on his lifelong efforts.”

“Mike Mansfield was a great figure in American politics and diplomacy in the 20th century, all the greater for the fact that he rejected all pretensions and claims to greatness,” commented Don Oberdorfer, a former Washington Post diplomatic correspondent and now journalist-in-residence at Johns Hopkins University’s Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, who has been working on a biography of Mike Mansfield. “He was the longest serving Majority Leader of the Senate in American history (1961-77) and one of the most respected, and the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Japan (1977-89) under both Presidents Carter and Reagan, who agreed on little else. He was a participant in many of the historic moments of U.S. relations with Asia, the area of his intense and abiding interest. These ranged from his days as a U.S. Marine in an expeditionary force in China in 1922, to a mission to China for President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944, to his personal advice to Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon in the 1960s and 1970s opposing deepening U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam war. Mansfield was among the few congressional leaders present on three occasions when Johnson met his inner war cabi-

net at crucial moments of escalation. Each time he was the only person in the room who forcefully and vocally opposed the steps the President planned to take. As ambassador to Japan, he famously declared that the U.S.-Japan tie is ‘the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none,’ and helped to make it so. When asked by journalists and by me, as a biographer, how he would like to be remembered, he characteristically responded, ‘When I’m gone, I’d like to be forgotten.’ He will not be.”

As the public policy center of The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, The Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs administers a number of programs that honor Senator Mansfield’s life-long commitment and dedication to U.S.- Asia relations. The Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program was established in 1994 to honor Senator Mansfield. This program, administered by the Mansfield Center with the U.S. Department of State as grantor, is designed to build a corps of U.S. federal government employees with proficiency in the Japanese language and experience working inside the government of Japan. The Mansfield American-Pacific Lectures and the Mansfield Pacific Retreat (co-sponsored with the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana) also honor Senator Mansfield’s legacy.

Senator Mansfield was born in New York on March 16, 1903 to Irish immigrant parents and raised in Great Falls, Montana. After service in the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps, he returned to Montana where he worked in the Butte mines as a “mucker” and mining engineer until 1930. Having never completed grade school or high school, he was admitted by examination to the Montana School of Mines in Butte, where he studied from 1927 to 1928.

In 1932, Mike married Maureen Hayes, a Butte high school teacher. Encouraged by Maureen to complete his education, Mike obtained the necessary credits to transfer to Montana State University, now known as the University of Montana in Missoula. Mike received his bachelor’s degree in 1933, and both he and Maureen received master’s degrees at Missoula in 1934. Mike also attended UCLA to work on his Ph.D., before accepting a position teaching Latin American and Far Eastern history at Montana State University (the University of Montana), where he taught until 1942. The Mansfields have one daughter, Anne Mansfield.

Mike Mansfield was elected to the United States Congress in 1942, and served five terms as Representative of Montana’s 1st District. He was elected to the United States Senate on November 4, 1952, and re-elected by the people of Montana in 1958, 1964, and 1970. He was

elected Assistant Majority Leader of the United States Senate on January 3, 1957. Serving in that capacity until January 1961, he was elected Majority Leader of the Senate, a position he held until his retirement from the Senate in January 1977, longer than any other Majority Leader in the history of the United States Senate.

Appointed by President Truman in October 1951, Senator Mansfield served as a Delegate to the United Nations Sixth Session in Paris. In September 1958, he was appointed by President Eisenhower as United States Delegate to the 13th General Assembly of the United Nations. In November and December 1962, he undertook a foreign policy assignment to West Berlin and Southeast Asia for President Kennedy, and a similar foreign policy assignment for President Nixon. He visited the People's Republic of China, upon invitation from Premier Zhou Enlai in 1972, followed by visits in 1974, 1976, 1977, and 1978, at the invitation of the government of the People's Republic of China.

Senator Mansfield was a member of the Senate Committees on Rules and Administration, Foreign Relations, and Appropriations. In his capacity as Majority Leader, he served as Chairman of the Senate Democratic Conference, the Democratic Policy Committee, and the Steering Committee. Following his retirement from the Senate, Senator Mansfield was appointed by President Jimmy Carter as Ambassador to Japan in April 1977. President Ronald Reagan re-appointed him in 1981. Ambassador Mansfield retired in January 1989. Until his death on October 5, 2001, he served as International Country Advisor at Goldman Sachs & Company in Washington, D.C. His wife, Maureen, passed away in 2000.

Information about funeral arrangements may be obtained by calling Barbara Hickey at Goldman Sachs & Company, 202-637-3700.

The Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs is the public policy center of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation. For more information, see www.mcpa.org.

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