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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

A FLAKE BUT NOT A “SNOW FLAKE”

REPUBLICAN U.S. SENATOR JEFF FLAKE'S OPINION OF HIS OWN PARTY TO THE PRESIDENT TEAMSTERS REGARDLESS OF THEIR PARTY AFFILIATION SHOULD TAKE TIME TO VIEW HIS OPINION

Republican Senator Jeff Flake from Arizona announced on Tuesday, January 16, 2018 that he would not run for re-election and condemned the direction of his own Republican Party, saying he “will not be complicit or silent.” ***Below is his entire speech he gave on the U.S. Senate floor:***

Mr. President, I rise today to address a matter that has been much on my mind, at a moment when it seems that our democracy is more defined by our discord and our dysfunction than it is by our values and our principles. Let me begin by noting a somewhat obvious point that these offices that we hold are not ours to hold indefinitely. We are not here simply to mark time. Sustained incumbency is certainly not the point of seeking office. And there are times when we must risk our careers in favor of our principles.

Now is such a time. It must also be said that I rise today with no small measure of regret. Regret, because of the state of our disunion, regret because of the disrepair and destructiveness of our politics, regret because of the indecency of our discourse, regret because of the coarseness of our leadership, regret for the compromise of our moral authority, and by our – all of our – complicity in this alarming and dangerous state of affairs. It is time for our complicity and our accommodation of the unacceptable to end. In this century, a new phrase has entered the language to describe the accommodation of a new and undesirable order – that phrase being “the new normal.” But we must never adjust to the present coarseness of our national dialogue – with the tone set at the top.

We must never regard as “normal” the regular and casual undermining of our democratic norms and ideals. We must never meekly accept the daily sundering of our country – the personal attacks, the threats against principles, freedoms, and institutions, the flagrant disregard for truth or decency, the reckless provocations, most often for the pettiest and most personal reasons, reasons having nothing whatsoever to do with the fortunes of the people that we have all been elected to serve

None of these appalling features of our current politics should ever be regarded as normal. We must never allow ourselves to lapse into thinking that this is just the way things are now. If we simply become inured to this condition, thinking that this is just politics as usual, then heaven help us. Without fear of the consequences, and without consideration of the rules of what is politically safe or palatable, we must stop pretending that the degradation of our politics and the conduct of some in our executive branch are normal. They are not normal.

Reckless, outrageous, and undignified behavior has become excused and countenanced as “telling it like it is,” when it is actually just reckless, outrageous, and undignified. And when such behavior emanates from the top of our government, it is something else: It is dangerous to a democracy. Such behavior does not project strength – because our strength comes from our values. It instead projects a corruption of the spirit, and weakness.

It is often said that children are watching. Well, they are. And what are we going to do about that? When the next generation asks us, Why didn't you do something? Why didn't you speak up? — what are we going to say? Mr. President, I rise today to say: Enough. We must dedicate ourselves to making sure that the anomalous never becomes normal. With respect and humility, I must say that we have fooled ourselves for long enough that a pivot to governing is right around the corner, a return to civility and stability right behind it. We know better than that. By now, we all know better than that.

Here, today, I stand to say that we would better serve the country and better fulfill our obligations under the constitution by adhering to our Article 1 “old normal” – Mr. Madison's doctrine of the separation of powers. This genius innovation which affirms Madison's status as a true visionary and for which Madison argued in Federalist 51 – held that the equal branches of our government would balance and counteract each other when necessary. “Ambition counteracts ambition,” he wrote. But what happens if ambition fails to counteract ambition? What happens if stability fails to assert itself in the face of chaos and instability? If decency fails to call out indecency? Were the shoe on the other foot, would we Republicans meekly accept such behavior on display from dominant Democrats? Of course not, and we would be wrong if we did.

When we remain silent and fail to act when we know that that silence and inaction is the wrong thing to do – because of political considerations, because we might make enemies, because we might alienate the base, because we might provoke a primary challenge, because ad infinitum, ad nauseam – when we succumb to those considerations in spite of what should be greater considerations and imperatives in defense of the institutions of our liberty, then we dishonor our principles and forsake our obligations. Those things are far more important than politics. Now, I am aware that more politically savvy people than I caution against such talk. I am aware that a segment of my party believes that anything short of complete and unquestioning loyalty to a president who belongs to my party is unacceptable and suspect.

If I have been critical, it not because I relish criticizing the behavior of the president of the United States. If I have been critical, it is because I believe that it is my obligation to do so, as a matter of duty and conscience. The notion that one should stay silent as the norms and values that keep America strong are undermined and as the alliances and agreements that ensure the stability of the entire world are routinely threatened by the level of thought that goes into 140 characters – the notion that one should say and do nothing in the face of such mercurial behavior is a historic and, I believe, profoundly misguided. A Republican president named Roosevelt had this to say about the president and a citizen's relationship to the office:

“The President is merely the most important among a large number of public servants. He should be supported or opposed exactly to the degree which is warranted by his good conduct or bad conduct, his efficiency or inefficiency in rendering loyal, able, and disinterested service to the nation as a whole. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that there should be full liberty to tell the truth about his acts, and this means that it is exactly as necessary to blame him when he does wrong as to praise him when he does right. Any other attitude in an American citizen is both base and servile.” President Roosevelt continued. “To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public.”

Acting on conscience and principle is the manner in which we express our moral selves, and as such, loyalty to conscience and principle should supersede loyalty to any man or party. We can all be forgiven for failing in that measure from time to time. I certainly put myself at the top of the list of those who fall short in that regard. I am holier-than-none. But too often, we rush not to salvage principle but to forgive and excuse our failures so that we might accommodate them and go right on failing—until the accommodation itself becomes our principle. In that way and over time, we can justify almost any behavior and sacrifice almost any principle. I'm afraid that is where we now find ourselves. When a leader correctly identifies real hurt and insecurity in our country and instead of addressing it goes looking for somebody to blame, there is perhaps nothing more devastating to a pluralistic society. Leadership knows that most often a good place to start in assigning blame is to first look somewhat closer to home. Leadership knows where the buck stops. Humility helps. Character counts. Leadership does not knowingly encourage or feed ugly and debased appetites in us. Leadership lives by the American creed: E Pluribus Unum. From many, one. American leadership looks to the world, and just as Lincoln did, sees the family of man. Humanity is not a zero-sum game. When we have been at our most prosperous, we have also been at our most principled. And when we do well, the rest of the world also does well. These

articles of civic faith have been central to the American identity for as long as we have all been alive. They are our birthright and our obligation. We must guard them jealously, and pass them on for as long as the calendar has days. To betray them, or to be unserious in their defense is a betrayal of the fundamental obligations of American leadership. And to behave as if they don't matter is simply not who we are.

Now, the efficacy of American leadership around the globe has come into question. When the United States emerged from World War II we contributed about half of the world's economic activity. It would have been easy to secure our dominance, keeping the countries that had been defeated or greatly weakened during the war in their place. We didn't do that. It would have been easy to focus inward. We resisted those impulses. Instead, we financed reconstruction of shattered countries and created international organizations and institutions that have helped provide security and foster prosperity around the world for more than 70 years.

Now, it seems that we, the architects of this visionary rules-based world order that has brought so much freedom and prosperity, are the ones most eager to abandon it. The implications of this abandonment are profound. And the beneficiaries of this rather radical departure in the American approach to the world are the ideological enemies of our values. Despotism loves a vacuum. And our allies are now looking elsewhere for leadership. Why are they doing this? None of this is normal. And what do we as United States Senators have to say about it?

The principles that underlie our politics, the values of our founding, are too vital to our identity and to our survival to allow them to be compromised by the requirements of politics. Because politics can make us silent when we should speak, and silence can equal complicity. I have children and grandchildren to answer to, and so, Mr. President, I will not be complicit. I have decided that I will be better able to represent the people of Arizona and to better serve my country and my conscience by freeing myself from the political considerations that consume far too much bandwidth and would cause me to compromise far too many principles. To that end, I am announcing today that my service in the Senate will conclude at the end of my term in early January 2019.

It is clear at this moment that a traditional conservative who believes in limited government and free markets, who is devoted to free trade, and who is pro-immigration, has a narrower and narrower path to nomination in the Republican party – the party that for so long has defined itself by belief in those things. It is also clear to me for the moment we have given in or given up on those core principles in favor of the more viscerally satisfying anger and resentment. To be clear, the anger and resentment that the people feel at the royal mess we have created are justified. But anger and resentment are not a governing philosophy.

There is an undeniable potency to a populist appeal – but mischaracterizing or misunderstanding our problems and giving in to the impulse to scapegoat and belittle threatens to turn us into a fearful, backward-looking people. In the case of the Republican party, those things also threaten to turn us into a fearful, backward-looking minority party. We were not made great as a country by indulging or even exalting our worst impulses, turning against ourselves, glorying in the things which divide us, and calling fake things true and true things fake. And we did not become the beacon of freedom in the darkest corners of the world by flouting our institutions and failing to understand just how hard-won and vulnerable they are.

This spell will eventually break. That is my belief. We will return to ourselves once more, and I say the sooner the better. Because to have a healthy government we must have healthy and functioning parties. We must respect each other again in an atmosphere of shared facts and shared values, comity and good faith. We must argue our positions fervently, and never be afraid to compromise. We must assume the best of our fellow man, and always look for the good. Until that day comes, we must be unafraid to stand up and speak out as if our country depends on it. Because it does. I plan to spend the remaining fourteen months of my senate term doing just that.

Mr. President, the graveyard is full of indispensable men and women — none of us here is indispensable. Nor were even the great figures from history who toiled at these very desks in this very chamber to shape this country that we have inherited. What is indispensable are the values that they consecrated in Philadelphia and in this place, values which have endured and will endure for so long as men and women wish to remain free. What is indispensable is what we do here in defense of those values. A political career doesn't mean much if we are complicit in undermining those values. I thank my colleagues for indulging me here today, and will close by borrowing the words of President Lincoln, who knew more about healing enmity and preserving our founding values than any other American who has ever lived. His words from his first inaugural were a prayer in his time, and are no less so in ours: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.