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"On Leadership, Public Service, and Public Policy"

Remarks by Nancy Kassebaum Baker,
former U. S. Senator (1978-1997),
to Graduate Students at OSIPP

September 17, 2002

Lecture Hall, 2F OSIPP

Opening Remarks and Transcription by Robert D. Eldridge, Ph. D.,
Associate Professor (International Public Systems), OSIPP

Opening Remarks and Introduction (Robert D. Eldridge, Ph. D.): I would like to welcome everyone here, and especially Mrs. Nancy Baker, Mr. Michael Harper, and the staff from the Consulate General to OSIPP this morning.

As many of you know, this is not Mrs. Baker's first visit here. Ten months ago, on November 5 last year, OSIPP had the honor of hosting Ambassador and Mrs. Baker for a roundtable talk on U. S. -Japan relations. At that time, Ambassador Baker gave an eloquent address on his views of the bilateral relationship and expressed America's gratitude to Japan following the tragic events of September 11.

Mrs. Baker did not escape questioning that day either. Asked what she saw her role here in Japan as America's "Number 2" Ambassador, Mrs. Baker expressed a strong interest in sharing her experiences in the United States in public service in the hopes that more young people, especially women, pursue a careers in public policy. It was at that time that Mrs. Baker caught the eye, so to speak, of our Dean Nomura, who urged me and Professor Hoshino to invite Mrs. Baker as a Visiting Professor to our class on "Taking Leadership Seriously."

Mrs. Baker indeed is one of the most appropriate persons I can think of to speak on leadership. As you all know, she had a distinguished career in the United States Senate

from 1978 to 1997, being the first woman elected to a Senate term without first succeeding her husband as his widow and the first to serve without having been appointed to fill out an unfinished term of office.

In addition to these historical firsts, Senator Kassebaum was the first woman to chair a major Senate committee.

It was during this time that Senator Kassebaum met Howard Baker, Jr., whom she called "Mr. Leader" then, but not now, she told us last year jokingly, following their marriage in December 1996.

Mrs. Baker comes from a political background. Her father, Alfred Landon, was a respected Republican and later Progressive Party leader, and served as Governor of Kansas in the early to mid-1930s, eventually running against then-President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential elections. His efforts at practical yet far-reaching reform during the Great Depression deserve particular mention.

Senator Kassebaum's 20-year record in the U. S. Senate can also be described as seeking practical yet far-reaching reform and compromises in the search for better public policy.

As a public policy graduate school, OSIPP is very much looking forward to Mrs. Baker's talk this morning.

She once said that "to be a good Senator, you need to be willing to listen and to be able to work with people." In her public service career, Senator Kassebaum believed in principles and common-sense approaches. Indeed, her attitude toward public service, and leadership as whole, can probably be summarized in a quote she gave a biographer: "I just feel better if I'm true to myself."

I personally am very encouraged and stimulated by these words.

I would now like to invite Mrs. Baker to speak more about her career and share her thoughts on leadership for the next hour or so. Mrs. Baker, please.

Nancy Kassebaum Baker: Thank you Dr. Eldridge. Thank you very much. It is really a pleasure to be here and I appreciate the very thoughtful introduction.

Let me just explain first why I call my husband "Mr. Leader." He was the Majority Leader in the United States Senate. When I was first elected, he was Minority Leader because the Republicans were in the minority then. After the 1980 elections, the Republicans were in the majority and he was Majority Leader then for four more years.

After having served eighteen years, he retired from the Senate. That is why I said I call him "Mr. Leader." At that point, this was the proper way everybody called him "Mr. Leader."

I have been asked by Dr. Eldridge to speak a bit about how I became interested in politics and my role in public service. I grew up in politics because of my father's involvement in Kansas politics and then running for President as a Republican nominee in 1936. After he was defeated—and defeated soundly—by President Roosevelt in the 1936 election, he never ran again for office nor did he want to leave Kansas.

I think my greatest appreciation is growing up in Kansas and learning from Dad how important it is to have roots. I think we can live far away (as I am now from my farm in Kansas) but one has a certain sense of the importance of roots. And I think here in Japan, there are those special days, holidays I suppose or seasons of the year, that are recognized when one goes back to one's hometown and revisits the roots of where one has grown up.

I never ever contemplated a life in public service. Growing up, we frequently had dinner conversations about world affairs. I developed a keen interest in history. I still believe history is one of the most important subjects you can study. If one does not have sense of history and, today, economics, one does not have really the background for public service. History is essential in understanding how one can be a part of helping shape public policy. So in growing up, having developed this interest in history was a great advantage. I went to the University of Kansas, actually thinking at that time that I would like to be a Foreign Service Officer. I did not in the end do so, getting married and going on to get my Master's Degree from the University of Michigan in Diplomatic History. Of course, as my father said when I majored in political science, "what good would that degree do for you?" (Laughter)

The Importance of Volunteering and Community Service

My first job was actually as a receptionist at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City. It was something I did not plan on doing, but I did raise four children—three sons and a daughter. Kansas City is outside Wichita, Kansas, which is a large city but it was very much still a rural area then. I participated in those events (like I think we do in the United States) in many ways volunteering to help with the teaching of children with

cerebral palsy. I was a tutor in a classroom for handicapped children. I was a 4-H leader. I do not know if you are familiar with it, although I believe there is a 4-H program here in rural communities. It was geared toward showing the livestock that you raise at the county fair. I was involved in raising money for the United Way, which is a community fund raising effort for different programs. These are all things that I believe are very important in strengthening a community and strengthening learning how to work for needs that one believes should be met in one's community.

Volunteerism in the United States has always been a very important part of getting things done. Sometimes it does not manifest itself until one is met with the crisis such as September 11th last year when there was a huge outpouring for the tragedy of that day, and many communities and communities here in Japan and around the world as well as in the United States gathered around to express concern. In the United States it took different forms. I think it meant being more engaged in one's community and one's family.

In any case, as I was helping to raise the children, I always kept an interest in reading about politics and issues of the day. There came a time in my life—which I think happens in all our lives—when you are at sort of a crossroad and I happened to be at the right place at the right time in 1978 when my predecessor in the United States Senate, Senator Pearson, announced he was not going to seek another term of office. (The term is six years in the US Senate, as you probably know, and two years in the House of Representatives.) Many of my friends in Wichita, Kansas urged me to consider running for the Senate. They felt it was good a time for a woman to run. I had not been particularly active in the Republican Party in Kansas and my father, I might say, was vehemently opposed to my running. It was my mother, who did not care much for politics, who thought that I should in fact run. I had a lot of support from friends.

Balancing Priorities: The Decision to Run

At the time, my children were older; the youngest was a senior in high school. I could have not done it with small children because it takes tremendous amount of time. I think for young men as well as young women or older men and older women, one has to balance priorities in one's life. And I was very fortunate in being able to at that point in my life make a decision that enabled me to engage in a totally different way. I could

never have done it without the support of friends who essentially helped run my state-wide campaign. I am surprised today in the United States how costly campaigns have become. The population of my state of Kansas is smaller than it is in Osaka. The entire population of the state is about 2.5 million, and Osaka's is much larger. We have 105 counties in the state, so it is a wide area to cover campaigning, although in numbers it is not great. Having been a graduate of the University of Kansas I knew a lot of people around the state. That was a great tie to call on.

The Importance of Debate

I entered the race relatively late. It was a very aggressive primary with seven other candidates in the primary. That was an advantage. (I think there was another woman the only woman serving in the Kansas State Senate.) The race was so divided, and geographically it was divided, which was also an advantage. I do not think you enter a campaign like that just for the fun of it. You have to be serious about what the pros and cons are. It was an advantage having that many men—frankly—running because most of them were from one part of the state. So geographically, I had an advantage where I was coming from. So those are considerations, I think you have to have. I was lucky in having friends. I was fortunate in having a name—there was a name and identification with my father. One of my opponents accused me of just "running on the coattails of that name," and I finally said "well what better cocktails to run on?" (laughter). I could not deny the name.

When it came to the General Election after the Primary, I had never done any debate. I wish now looking back I had taken debate in school, in college. In fact I put off taking speech, which was required for graduation from the University of Kansas, until my senior year because I did not like to get up in front of people and speak. But something propelled me at that point and we had about five or six television debates. I think that was a great advantage to me because many questioned whether I would have the ability to speak to the issues, to hold my own in a debate.

The Importance of Purpose

In the end, I had many things that were in my favor but I think when one looks at

how one engages in public policy arena, I would say it is important to start closest home for needs in one's university, needs in one's community, to learn how to put those needs together in a way that one accomplishes a purpose at the end of day. And it is an association too that is very beneficial. So I was lucky and having friends I made through all those different associations. They were great help to me.

In Japan, it is interesting because there are many women have really not have the opportunity to take much of a role. And that is true perhaps but I have met a number of women here who have had a significant role to play. Not perhaps visible in the terms today we think of television, tabloids, and front page of the paper. But that is not always what leadership is about. In fact I have said that power and influence is not necessarily being on front page of the paper everyday. I think in this day and age, television has become such an important component of politics and shaping public policy that we do not have the opportunity to reflect on how important it is to look at some of the other ways that one can be an influence.

I do not know how many of you know the name Mrs. Soma. Her father was in the Diet for many years may be close to fifty years—Mr. Yukio Ozaki—who was regarded as the father of the constitutional government in Japan. Mrs. Yukika Soma is now 90. I have had the privilege of getting to know her through those years. For many years she has been a real leader in efforts to recognize helping refugees. She has been vigorous in her efforts against land mines. She has been a part of what was called “Moral Rearmament” initiatives, although I do not think it is called that anymore. Here is someone who probably is not terribly well known who still attends international meetings, still is dedicated. You might ask to what end. But she has influenced somebody and she has left a legacy that will be continued on by someone and perhaps that what leadership is all about.

Another one I have enormous admiration for is Dr. Sadako Ogata. How many of you know Mrs. Ogata? She is a good friend of mine. I am really honored to know her. In a very quiet way, she exercises enormous influence, has, I think, very important ideas to convey and has brought credit to her leadership not only for Japan in the international arena but for women as well.

So these are voices that are sometimes not recognized as much as others, but are quiet voices in helping with education, in finding roles of leadership. Mrs. Kayoko Hosokawa, whose husband was a former Prime Minister, has been very active in lead-

ing Special Olympics in Japan and working for the disabled. (She does not use the word "disabled" but rather the "abled" in their own unique way.)

Being a Participant and Having Followers: Keys to Successful Leadership

Wherever one lives, whether it is in the State of Kansas, or the United States, or in Japan or Osaka or wherever one might be, it is being a participant that matters, and one cannot be a successful leader without followers. And many times we have seen leadership—and leadership that has got a great deal of attention, leadership that again has been predominant for a brief and flashing moment—which ends up not creating a body of followers that has been able to through period of time, be consistent, provide some continuity. If you want to accomplish something, you have to have that continuation.

What worries me today is a trend that is even far greater than when I was elected to the Senate is the importance of polls. One reason I am worried is that polls depend on how you ask the question; what answer you get at a poll. A second reason I am worried is that polls change. Public opinion can almost change overnight. So some one might ask, "What is your view of the Prime Minister going to North Korea?" Well, today it may be okay; tomorrow there might be great objection. How does one know? It is a shifting quicksand.

Leadership is not following exactly what the shifting polls might say. It is providing leadership upon an issue and convincing somebody—everybody if you can, but certainly a body of people—that that is what should be done. It is little like whether the dog is going to wag the tail or the tail wag the dog. Today we have become so susceptible to following the trend of polls every 24 hours that it is very hard to create a substantive body of followers who can be engaged in ways that can provide successful leadership.

Now there are various kinds of leadership. One may think someone is strong leader here or strong leader there. I tend to view someone as a leader whom I suppose I feel most closely aligned with his or her points of view. But I also think you can look at someone who is providing leadership and has accomplished something at the end of day that is constructive and positive for one's community or one's country. As I say it does not always come a headline a day. And it may never come.

That is why I have enormous admiration for teachers because I think teachers have a great influence on students, young, older. They may never know how they have influenced the life that will change because of that involvement.

Listening is Learning

It is very important as I say to develop followers, but to do that you have to be willing—as Dr. Eldridge pointed out in his kind introduction (although I may be did not listen as much as much I should have in my career)—to listen. Of course you have your own thoughts you want to convey, but listening is important, because listening is learning. And it is pulling together and working for a consensus. That does not mean you need to give up your own principles. Those should be guiding.

In the Senate, for instance, you have to work with Republicans and Democrats. I am a strong believer that President Bush needs to have the support of allies, needs to have a resolution before the United Nations, before he will be able to successfully change regimes in Iraq. And I believe that is what President Bush and other world leaders feel. Because it is the long-term effect of what one does; it is the long-term change in Iraq that is important just as it is in Afghanistan. And it takes a staying power and pulling together of consensus to make that successful at the end of day.

I think Japan has role to play and I think Prime Minister Koizumi was very effective in communicating that to President Bush just a few days ago in New York. As you are looking at how you can be engaged, it will depend really on what you feel you can give and where you can contribute at any given time. As I say it is a question of balancing out priorities. I think Japan itself in a way I have said is at a crossroads between doubt and hope that there are changes that are occurring just as they are for us in the United States. But here the demographic change as the older population becomes larger in number and the younger population smaller. That is happening in the United States as well but here it is dramatic. I just saw in paper this morning that the oldest living person in the world is here in Japan and she is 115. But I think the longevity of life is something that actually is quite appealing. As people around the world look at longevity, asking if there is something in the diet in Japan or if there is something here in the lifestyle that has an influence on longevity? But the impact of those changing demographics will be dramatic not only as one looks at the work force but at pensions, health care.

These are all very important issues for us in the United States as well as in Japan. I think whether Japan decides it will wish to be a leader in the region and the regional arena is going to be enormously important.

How to Engage, How to Speak Up

How does one engage? One engages holding in tact the unique traditions, the unique culture that makes Japan such a very special place. We in the United States do not have the history of tradition as unique as Japan. We should never lose sight of the importance of that for Japan. We have become such a melting pot in the United States that, a blend of other cultures that has really strengthened us and brought a uniqueness to our own country. And so we have holiday like Thanksgiving that becomes very uniquely American in many ways or Christmas and Easter. But Japan has other long-time holidays and other traditions of recognition. It is important to keep one's sense of identity and yet be able to expand in a world that is changing.

Whether we really want globalization or not, it is not the question because it is already here. How we work in adapting to that is going to require a great deal of leadership with some vision in thinking ahead and not just of the moment. That is where I think it is going to take men and women willing to stand up and provide that leadership.

It is hard to do—finding a voice to express what you believe is important. Perhaps this is the hardest for women. When I was running for office, there was always the question of whether I could be aggressive enough. And as a woman, if one is aggressive, then there is the criticism that she is too aggressive. (Laughter) As a woman I always had a lot of people to tell me about different ways to wear my hair. I do not think that any man would have to answer that question of how to wear their hair or how to dress. But that is something that just you cannot worry about, or you can waste a lot of valuable time.

Sincerity and Trust

That is why I think it is important to be what you are. And the important thing I think that comes through is sincerity in the political arena. And trust is really the gold

of any quantity, of value in the public arena. Whether it is for a corporation, a bank, a member of the Diet, a President, a Prime Minister, a medical doctor, if you do not have the trust of the one you are serving, then you lose ultimately. That kind of effort comes through. You have to have that in order to be successful.

A woman can do that just as effectively as a man. It may be in quieter ways. It may be in different ways. But one should not be afraid to speak up and try and provide a catalyst for a vision, a longer vision of change because it will require that for Japan. It will require Japan to answer itself, and I think the Japanese people, about what in the future one would like to see Japan become.

At the end of day, it is a very exciting challenge for Japan because the world is changing. How it will change will really depend on you, who are students here right now. For those of us who are on the outside looking in, it is always easier of course to offer advice than it is to be there where you have to do something about it.

Dr. Eldridge mentioned what I did after I left the Senate. When I announced that I was retiring after 18 years. I really wanted to go back to the farm. I was planning to go back the farm. It is cow-calf operation in Kansas. My younger son and his wife do all the work but I like to go and give advice every minute. I have seven grand children and I was going to baby sit while they still want to see their grandmother come to visit. But then life changed again and I married Howard Baker. He never thought of becoming Ambassador to Japan. We had considered somehow to settle both in Tennessee, his home state, and in Kansas, mine. But another crossroad came—the appointment to Japan—and my husband said at our age it was nice to have the opportunity to stretch one's mind some more. And so we have both enjoyed being here a great deal, learning about Japan. One of the most important experiences for the both of us I think has been the ability to travel throughout Japan. If you just stayed in Tokyo, you really would not get to know Japan. So it has been a real learning experience. I am still struggling with learning Japanese. I have not gotten very far but I will keep trying.

Before we came and after I left the Senate, I joined several non-profit foundation boards because I always have been very interested in health care issues. One foundation was the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which does a lot of health care research work and another was Kaiser Family Foundation, which also does related work. The Robert Wood Foundation gives a lot of health care grants in various areas. Kaiser does mostly health analysis. I also joined the George C. Marshall Foundation. General

Marshall was someone in history I greatly admired, largely because of the Marshall Plan after WWII, which was of enormous assistance to Europe and European recovery, just as I think the initiatives that were directed towards Japan were a big help in the recovery for Japan.

We have lessons to learn I think from that period of time and WWII, both the ending of it and its beginning. That is why history and understanding history I think becomes so important. In addition, foreign affairs has always been a great interest of mine as well, having served on the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate for almost for 18 years, and chairing the Africa Sub-committee.

I hope I have not overstepped my time. I thank you very much.