
Speech to the Indiana Legislature Nominating Daniel W. Voorhees for the United States Senate, Jan. 20, 1885 by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *Indiana Daily Sentinel*, vol. 34, no. 21 (Jan. 21, 1885), pg. 5.

At 11 o'clock yesterday [Jan. 20, 1885] Speaker Jewett announced that the nomination of candidates for the United States Senate was in order, and Representative Debs, of Vigo [County], was recognized, and said:

Mr. Speaker:—

A privilege in connection with my duties as a member of the House, which I esteem an honor of high consequence, has fallen to my lot, and I shall ask the generous indulgence of the Chair and of my fellow Representatives while to the best of my ability I respond to a request well calculated to embarrass men of more years and experience than I can boast. I need not state to this House, as a matter of information, that the important duty of electing a United States Senator to be the successor of Hon. Daniel W. Voorhees devolves upon this General Assembly. I could not hope, did the agreeable task I have assumed require it at my hands, to enlighten this House in regard to the superior abilities necessary to enable a Senator of the United States to meet all the high requirements of his office and worthily discharge its serious duties. The merest reference to such subjects is suggestive of qualities of head and heart which should command the reverence of the people.

I am aware that there have been, in the common acceptance of the terms, good men who were not great and great men who were not good, but I have learned from the lessons of history, notwithstanding the frailties of human nature and the imperfections of the methods of government, that in the lottery of politics do very often become the favorites of fortune, and in taking the chances secure for their servants the right men, and in all matters pertaining to the welfare of the state such men may be properly designated as the highest prizes, since there can be nothing better, nothing of greater value in government than the right man in the right place. It can not be expected that the people, however intelligent and sincere, will always secure for places of great responsibility men distinguished for talent, energy, courage, and virtue, but such great and good fortune is often bestowed, and when obtained the people, if qualified to appreciate the blessing, will unite in a patriotic determination to perpetuate it.

The man who in public life has been proved and tested, who again and again has passed through the ordeal of temptation without scar or blemish, becomes a public benefactor, defying the ordinary methods of computation whereby to estimate his value to the state; and wisdom and patriotism win universal applause when the people retain such men in official positions.

Mr. Speaker, I shall not detain the House by an extended reference to the lives, the characters, and the deeds of the distinguished men who have represented Indiana in the Senate of the United States. We frequently hear men who, in speaking of the past, deplore, in comparison, the degeneracy of the present. I shall stop no longer than to say I am not in sympathy with their vagaries.

In the month of November 1877, James D. Williams, then Governor of Indiana, appointed Daniel W. Voorhees as the successor of Oliver P. Morton, deceased, to represent Indiana in the United States Senate. The name and fame of Morton had filled the land. His great abilities had made him the leader of his party in the Senate. It was thought to be no ordinary responsibility to occupy the place made vacant by the death of Morton. It was deemed a herculean task to maintain the advanced position of the state which the admirers of Mr. Morton claimed was due to his masterly powers, but, sir, I do but repeat the truth of history when I say that as soon as opportunity offered Mr. Voorhees came to the front in a speech which triumphantly vindicated the prescience of Governor Williams, a speech which electrified the nation by the profundity of its statesmanship, the majesty

of its grasp, and the overwhelming power of its arguments and eloquence, and whatever else may be said of the sad event, the fame of Indiana did not wane by the death of Morton. Voorhees caught the standard as it fell from Morton's hands, and the whole country, as he bore it aloft in the fierce contest between monopolies and the people, with a united voice gave him an ovation of gratitude.

In 1878 a Democratic legislature ratified the wisdom of Governor Williams' appointment by electing Daniel W. Voorhees to a seat in the United States Senate, and for nearly six years he has, in a manner worthy of the highest commendation, maintained his own and Indiana's renown in that august body. His term expires on the 4th day of March next, and now, Mr. Speaker, I nominate Daniel W. Voorhees to be his own successor in the Senate of the United States for the ensuing term.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that I am one of the Representatives of Vigo county, the home of Mr. Voorhees, is doubtless the reason why the honor has been given me to nominate him for Senator, and, though I am among the youngest members of this House, with legislative experience as limited as that of any other member, I am neither so juvenile nor unschooled as not to be familiar with the scholastic attainments, the erudition, the statesmanship and patriotic devotion to the state of Indiana, and the whole country, which have preeminently distinguished the official career of the citizen and Senator whom I have the honor to place in nomination today.

Coming here as a workingman, with whatever duties attach to my position as the representative of workingmen, I feel just pride in placing in nomination for the exalted office a man who has availed himself of every opportunity to champion the cause of toiling people of the state and nation. In every emergency Mr. Voorhees has been the friend of labor, the foe of monopoly, and the defender of the eternal right. And fully appreciating the patriotism, the privations, and heroic service of his fellow citizens, who went forth at the call of their country to battle for the Union and preserve it "one and indivisible," he has on all occasions demonstrated by prompt action and eloquent words, his unerring devotion to the interest of the Union soldier. In the campaign just closed, which has placed the Democratic Party of the state and the Democratic Party of the republic in power, a splendid array of great men has been in the van of the Democratic hosts, and of them all not one has rendered more effective service than the eloquent orator and distinguished statesman whom I now nominate

to be his own successor in the United States Senate, and whom the people of Indiana delight to honor — Daniel W. Voorhees.

The nomination of Mr. Voorhees was seconded by several members, all of whom paid high tributes to his worth as a man, and dwelt with special emphasis upon his honorable career of public life. Mr. Copeland then placed in nomination Hon. A.G. Porter, and this was seconded by several members also. The roll was then called, and 64 votes were recorded for Voorhees and 35 for Porter.

* * *

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · March 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.
First Edition.