

Mike Mansfield

Born in New York City but raised by relatives in Great Falls, Montana, Mike Mansfield served as Senator for the State of Montana from 1953 to 1977 and was the longest-serving Majority Leader of the Senate, from 1961-1977.

A high-school dropout, Mansfield lied about his age and entered the Navy in 1918, when he was only fourteen years old. He served during WWI in the Navy, Army, and Marines. After his discharge from the Marines in 1922, Mansfield spent the next years as a miner and mining engineer in Butte and attended first the Montana School of Mines and then Montana State University (future University of Montana, Missoula), graduating in 1934 with a B.A. and an M.A. For the next ten years he taught Latin American and Far Eastern History.

First elected to Congress in 1942, Mansfield served in the House of Representatives until 1953 and then in the Senate. Although Mansfield's work on domestic issues is remarkable, especially during Johnson's Great Society period, he is remembered best for his work U.S.-Asia relations. He served as delegate to the United Nations under Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, and his conversations with Nixon on China and Asia set the stage for Nixon's historical visit to China in 1972.

On the war in Vietnam, Mansfield was also highly vocal. In 1962, Mansfield told President Kennedy that U.S. aid to the country was being wasted and that the U.S. should not become involved further in Vietnam. Mansfield first applauded the Nixon administration and the Nixon Doctrine, but he soon became disillusioned with the new President as the war in Vietnam continued. Mansfield sponsored Congressional action that limited funds for and the use of armed forces in Vietnam, causing Nixon to reduce U.S. forces in the country.

After leaving the Senate, Jimmy Carter appointed Mansfield Ambassador to Japan in 1977. Mansfield stayed in Japan until 1988, believing that the U.S. relationship with Japan was pivotal for both countries and for the world at large.

Mike Mansfield died in October, 2001. Although his view of the world was decidedly global, as was his place in it, he maintained close ties to his constituents in Montana throughout his life, sending personal Christmas cards every year and always taking the time to respond personally to correspondence from his home state.

Along with the United States Military Academy's Sylvanus Thayer Award (for national service) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Mansfield was also awarded Japan's highest civilian honor, the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun with Paulownia Flowers. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with a common marker that notes only his status in the Marine Corps, rather than his status as a politician.

Resources:

Book: Oberdorfer, Don. *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003.

Web: For more information on Mike and Maureen Mansfield and their legacy in Montana and across the globe, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at <http://www.umt.edu/mansfield/center/mansfields.htm> and the Mike Mansfield Foundation at <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/>.

Newspaper articles: For a collection of articles on Mike Mansfield written by the *Missoulian*, including local and national reaction to his death, see <http://www.missoulian.com/specials/mansfield/>.
