

Statement by U.S. Senator Paul E. Tsongas  
Democrat of Massachusetts  
Official Democratic Response to President Reagan's Radio Message

This is Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts.

"A Black, a woman, two Jews and a cripple."

This outrageous expression of bigotry was not uttered by some unknown malcontent in an obscure conversation. It was uttered rather by a member of President Reagan's cabinet in a public speech before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

As every American knows, this outburst was just the latest example of Interior Secretary James Watts' instinct to divide his fellow countrymen and women.

Our nation has been subjected to almost three years of this sort of raw insensitivity. The America of James Watt is limited to a small cadre of like-minded and like-blooded conservatives. Everyone else and everything else is to be ridiculed, squelched or contained. That includes everyone from the Beachboys to American Indians living on reservations.

How is it possible in modern-day America for this kind of bigotry to be running amok in the President's cabinet for such a long time. The answer is very simple: because the President allows it.

Is it any wonder that James Watt serves an Administration that has shown so little concern for women, for minorities and for the less fortunate among us -- an Administration that has slashed programs for the elderly and the handicapped and shifted taxes from the wealthy to the backs of working men and women?

Is it any wonder that James Watt serves an Administration that refuses to support the basic rights of women and that opposes the Equal Rights Amendment?

Is it any wonder that James Watt serves an Administration that is trying to stack the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and has turned its back on the problems and aspirations of Black Americans?

James Watt was -- and is -- President Reagan's choice. James Watt has enjoyed the President's support. He serves at the pleasure of the President. If he is still in office, that is because it serves the pleasure of the President.

James Watt is the agent of the President. He is the servant of the President.

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All of America recoiled in dismay and disgust. Seven of my Republican colleagues in the United States Senate joined dozens of Democrats like myself in calling for James Watt to resign.

But what have we gotten from the President? Silence.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes says that James Watt continues to enjoy the confidence of the President. How is that possible? Where is the President's outrage? Why didn't President Reagan call in James Watt and fire him on the spot? Why doesn't President Reagan take charge and relieve America of the burden of James Watts' continuing divisiveness?

"A colossal bigot," stated one Republican Senator. "Throw him out, said another. And on and on.

Yet from the White House -- Silence.

Now we are told that the White House has decided to measure the decibel of national outrage over the weekend.

If the outcry is loud and sustained, James Watt may go. If the issue blows over, the confidence in James Watt will remain.

How cynical. How wrong.

Apparently, in the White House, no one is offended by James Watts' remarks. It's just a matter of political calculation to measure the impact.

Well, if we can't count on President Reagan sharing America's outrage, we have to change the political balance. We have to let the President know that James Watt offends the greatness, the moral sensitivity and the togetherness of America.

I hope you will join me in making this message heard.