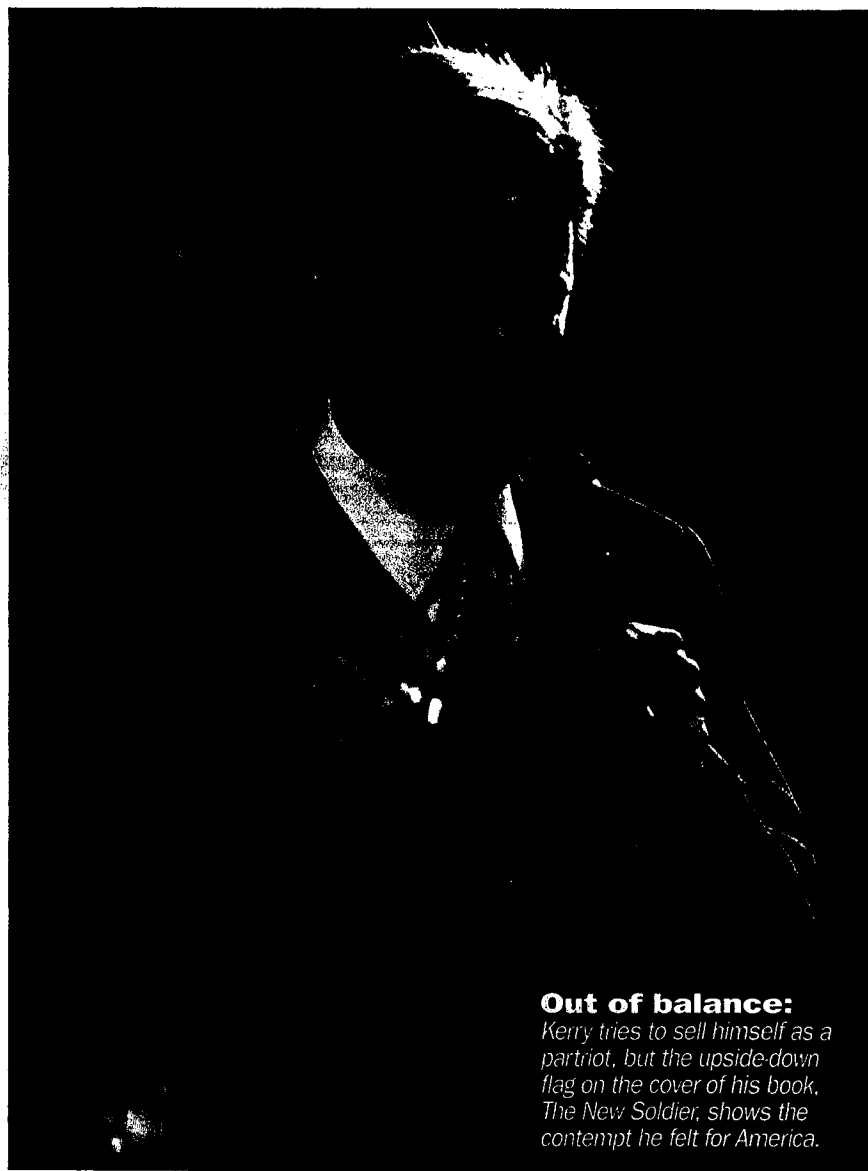


# Kerry Exploits Vets for Hanoi

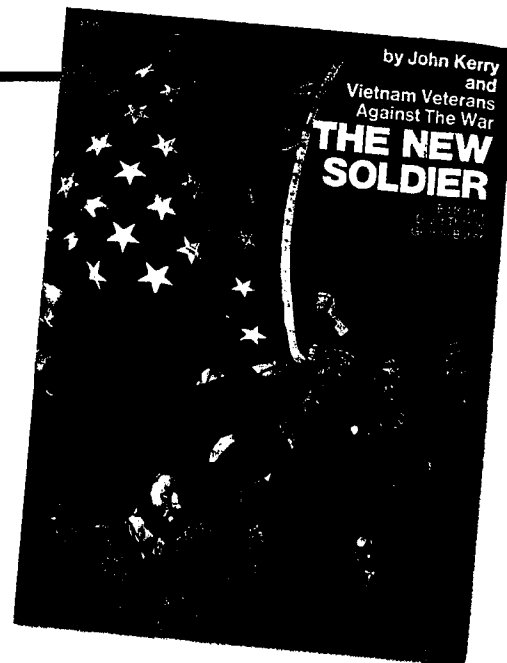
By J. MICHAEL WALLER

John Kerry has a history of exploiting his war service for political gain and real trouble discerning the line between patriotism and collaborating with the enemy.



### Out of balance:

Kerry tries to sell himself as a patriot, but the upside-down flag on the cover of his book, *The New Soldier*, shows the contempt he felt for America.



Since quitting the Navy six months early at age 27 so he could run for Congress on an antiwar platform, John Kerry has built a political career on his service in Vietnam. His unsuccessful 1970 congressional bid lasted only a month, during which it proved impossible for even he to get to the left of the winner, Robert Drinan, but it forged a conflicting political persona — one hammered out between his combat medals earned in the Mekong delta and the common cause he made with the enemy upon his return home.

Now, at age 60, the junior Democratic senator from Massachusetts is milking his veteran status once again in an effort to show that he's tougher and more patriotic than the man he seeks to replace, President George W. Bush. And, as unrepentant as ever for his pro-Hanoi activism, he is just as conflicted in 2004 as he was in the 1960s.

If there is any consistency in Kerry's political career, it is his in-your-face use of that four-month stint in Vietnam. He enlisted like many other young men of privilege, trying to serve without going to the front lines. When in 1966 it looked like his draft number was coming up during his senior year at Yale University, and already having spoken out in public against the war, Kerry signed up with the Navy under the conscious inspiration of his hero, the late President John F. Kennedy. As a lieutenant junior grade, Kerry skippered a CTF-115 swift boat, a light, aluminum patrol vessel that bore a passing resemblance to PT-109. He thought he'd arranged to avoid combat. "I didn't really want to get involved in the war," he later would tell the *Boston Globe*. "When I signed up for the swift boats, they had very little to do with the

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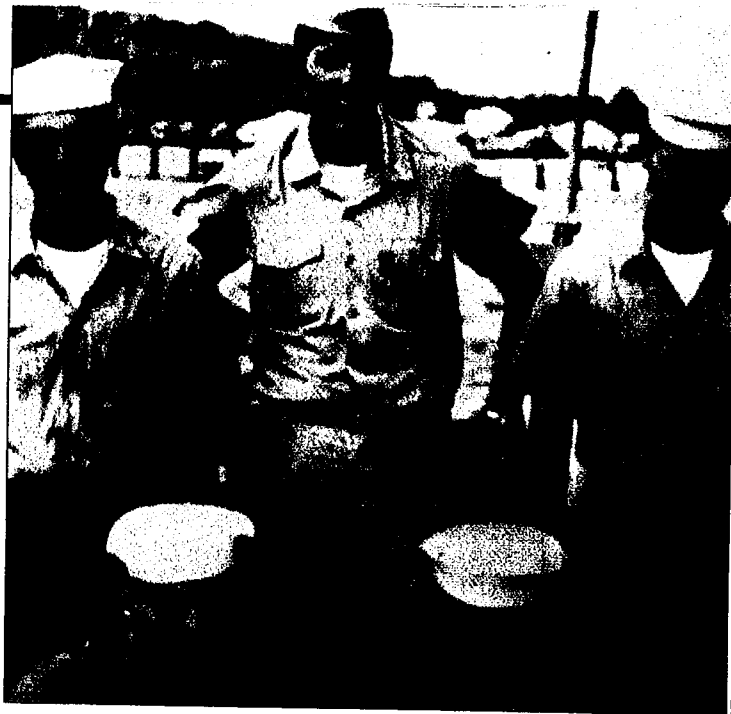
war. They were engaged in coastal patrolling, and that's what I thought I was going to do."

Soon, however, Kerry was reassigned to patrol the Mekong River in South Vietnam, a formative experience for his political odyssey. The official record shows that he rose to the occasion. It was along the Mekong where he first killed a man, aggressively fighting the enemy Viet Cong and reportedly saving the lives of his own men, earning a Bronze Star, a Silver Star for valor, and three Purple Hearts in the process.

Kerry opted for reassignment to New York City, where — as a uniformed, active-duty officer — he reportedly began acting out the antiwar feelings he had expressed before enlisting. Press reports from the time say that he marched in the October 1969 Moratorium protests — a mass demonstration by a quarter-million people that had been orchestrated the previous summer by North Vietnamese officials and American antiwar leaders in Cuba (see sidebar, p. 27). Kerry had found his purpose in life. *The New York Times* reported on April 23, 1971, that at about the time of the Moratorium march, Lt. Kerry had "asked for, and was given, an early release from the Navy so he could run for Congress on an antiwar platform from his home district in Waltham, Mass."

For Kerry, politicizing the nation's war effort for partisan purposes was the right thing to do, in contrast to the violent revolutionary designs of colleagues who were out to destroy the system. Kerry didn't want to take down the establishment. He wanted to take it over. His aborted, monthlong 1970 congressional campaign was a victory for him politically, as it landed him on television's popular *Dick Cavett Show*, where he came to the attention of some of the central organizers of the antiwar/pro-Hanoi group known as Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

VVAW was a numerically small part of the protest movement, but it was extremely influential through skillful political theater, the novelty of uniformed combat veterans joining the Vietnicks, and a ruthless coalition-building strategy that forged partnerships with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), its Trotskyite rival, the Socialist Workers Party, and a broad front that



ranged from pacifists to supporters of the Black Panthers and other domestic terrorist groups.

Kerry signed on as a full-time organizer and member of the VVAW's six-member executive committee. By early 1971 he had become one of the antiwar movement's principal figureheads, lending a moderate face to a movement that championed, and was championed by, imprisoned murder conspirator Angela Davis and actress Jane Fonda.

The young former and future political candidate acted as one of the main leaders of a massive, five-day April protest in Washington and other cities. Kerry's partner, Jan Crumb, read a list of 15 demands. According to the CPUSA paper *Daily World*, the VVAW demands were, "Immediate, unilateral, unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. armed forces and Central Intelligence Agency personnel from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand," plus "full amnesty" to all "war resisters" and draft dodgers, and "withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Latin America, Africa, Asia and elsewhere in the world."

Kerry was the star of the political theater that historic week, angry that the law forbade political protests at veterans' graves in Arlington National Cemetery and angrier that President Richard Nixon enforced the law and that the Supreme Court upheld it. He led an illegal encampment of veterans and people who dressed as veterans on the Mall in downtown Washington and used the services of Ramsey Clark — a former Johnson administration attorney general who by that time openly was supporting the enemy in Hanoi — to fight a federal order to disperse. According to the *Daily World*, which published a page-one photo of Kerry passing Clark a note

### Change in plan:

*Kerry thought he had arranged to avoid combat by skipping a swift boat, but he was reassigned to patrol the Mekong River.*

during the march, the protesters converged on the White House chanting, "One, Two, Three, Four — We Don't Want Your F- - - - War."

Kerry's establishment model was working where the home-baked revolutionaries were failing. The activist bumped into William Fulbright, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at a party and landed himself in the

spotlight as a witness in a hearing held the last day of the weeklong march. There, he made his infamous exaggerated and untruthful allegations that his fellow servicemen, not merely the commanders, deliberately were committing widespread atrocities against innocent Vietnamese civilians (see sidebar, p. 26). Afterward, he joined a dramatic political-theater display at the Capitol steps, where hundreds of vets took a microphone and, one by one, stated their name, identified their combat medals and flung them over a police fence on the steps. Kerry renounced his Bronze Star, his Silver Star and his three Purple Hearts. (Later, as a politician, he would give ever-changing versions of the story.)

He seemed to want it both ways in the protest movement. While claiming to "hate" the communists, he decried any attempt to marginalize them within the movement. Once, when questioned about his political alliance with supporters of the enemy, Kerry said that any attempts to push out Hanoi supporters might result "in seriously dividing and weakening the movement, and making it less effective."

That didn't sit well with some VVAW members beyond the Washington Beltway. Back in Massachusetts, VVAW state coordinator Walker "Monty" Montgomery, a Tennessee native, publicly differed with Kerry. The *Boston Herald-Traveler* reported that Montgomery "was considerably more candid than Kerry about the problems posed by revolutionary communists inside an antiwar organization."

"You can quote me," said Montgomery, "as one who believes that the revolutionary communists in our organization are detrimental to the organization."

Kerry had trouble discerning the line

between legitimate dissent and collaboration with the enemy. In the summer of 1971, he spoke at a VVAW news conference in Washington, assailing President Nixon for not accepting an enemy propaganda initiative — a Viet Cong statement in Paris that Hanoi would guarantee the release of American prisoners of war once the last U.S. troops left Vietnam. Featuring a photo of Kerry in the July 24 *Daily World*, the CPUSA said Kerry “asked President Nixon to accept [a] seven-point peace proposal of Vietnamese patriots.”

Kerry traveled the country that fall, trying to breathe new life into a sagging college antiwar movement. The protest spirit was coming alive, he said. “It isn’t withering,” he told a reporter at Fort Hays State University in Kansas. “The feeling is there. I do seriously believe there’s beginning to be a turning away from the tear-it-down mentality. The movement is turning toward electoral politics again.”

Covering his antiwar campaign, the *National Observer* reported at the time, “He wants the Vietnam Veterans [Against the War] to move quickly and strongly into grass-roots electoral politics.” He sought to organize like-minded veterans to become delegates at the upcoming 1972 presidential conventions. “Though the veterans are, for the record, nonpartisan,” the *Observer* said, “what this really means is whether the [George] McGovern Commission reforms for the Democratic Convention are implemented and enforced. Most antiwar veterans laugh at the idea of getting anything started in the Republican Convention.”

Yet for all his want of the spotlight, Kerry avoided public debates with other veterans. On seven occasions, by July 1971, he had refused to allow other veterans to challenge him publicly on television, even when CBS and NBC offered to host formal debates. He relented only when Dick Cavett, who had made him a national figure not long before, agreed to terms Kerry found advantageous. Even then, with Kerry holding all the advantages, *Boston Globe* political columnist David Nyhan observed, his “scrappy little” opponent, John O’Neill, “was all over Kerry like a terrier, keeping the star of the Foreign Relations Committee hearings ... off balance.”

Kerry couldn’t hope to take over the political establishment without the political organization skills, mobilization abilities and support networks of those radical groups that supported the enemy against U.S. troops. He needed to latch on to those in the establishment who funded them.

The *New York Times* reported on a



## Kerry Accused Servicemen of Atrocities

As a VVAW leader, John Kerry testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, alleging that U.S. servicemen daily committed deliberate atrocities against Vietnamese civilians. He based his testimony on stories he helped collect at a Detroit conference funded by actress Jane Fonda. Excerpts of his April 22, 1971, testimony follow:

“I would like to talk, representing all those veterans, and say that several months ago in Detroit, we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-

day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command. ...

“They told the stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.”

— JMW

millionaire’s gathering in East Hampton, Long Island, in August 1971. Many of the attendees had participated in “fund-raising affairs for the Black Panthers” and other extremist causes. With fellow VVAW leader Al Hubbard, Kerry sought a less radical position, but he showed parts of a full-length film containing testimony of 125 alleged veterans who said they had witnessed U.S. atrocities in Vietnam, “before a request for funds sent everyone scrambling for pens and checkbooks.”

As with Kerry’s Senate testimony, which contained wild and unsubstantiated allegations of deliberate U.S. atrocities throughout the ranks, many of them disproved, the mission outweighed the truth. His VVAW sidekick Hubbard identified himself as an Air Force captain, a pilot, when in reality he was an ex-sergeant who had never

served in Vietnam. Kerry was content to stand by VVAW’s claims that it had 12,000 members in 1971. Massachusetts VVAW coordinator Montgomery was more open about the figures. He said that only 50 to 75 members in the entire state were really active and that the official statewide membership of 1,500 Vietnam vets was just a “paper membership.”

The angry young veteran’s political ambition shone through his public earnestness. The 1970 congressional race that had propelled him into national politics also undercut his credibility, exacerbated by his drive to run for office again. Many saw him as exploiting the war for political gain. “Angry wives of American prisoners of war [POWs] lashed out yesterday at peace advocate John Kerry of Waltham, Mass., accusing him of using the POW

## John Kerry's First Big Protest

The first documented major antiwar protest that John Kerry attended was the Oct. 15, 1969, Moratorium march on Washington. Hanoi needed to harness the U.S. antiwar movement to make it impossible for President Richard Nixon, inaugurated earlier that year, to take the war to North Vietnam.

Peter Collier and David Horowitz, then top activists on the pro-Hanoi left, later wrote that militant activists went in July to "meet Cuban and Vietnamese officials in

Havana to map out strategies for the war in America, the 'other war' which would ultimately defeat the United States."

The U.S. activists returned home to organize massive, militant protests, including the Oct. 15 Moratorium, which Kerry reportedly attended while still an active-duty Navy officer. National Review reported at the time that Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) was one of the endorsers of the Moratorium.

— JMW

issue as a springboard to political office," the Associated Press (AP) reported on July 22, 1971. "One of the women accused Kerry of 'constantly using their own suffering and grief' for purely political reasons."

Patricia Hardy of Los Angeles, whose husband had been killed in 1967, told reporters, "I think he couldn't care less about these men or these families." Cathi and Janice Ray, whose stepbrother was a POW, accompanied her. (Official records show that only one U.S. serviceman named Hardy was killed in the war, Marine Lance Cpl. Frank Earle Hardy, whose platoon was ambushed in Quang Tri on May 29,

**Peas in a pod:** Kerry put a much-needed moderate face on a radical antiwar movement that was championed by actress Jane Fonda, among others.

1967. His name appears on panel 21E, row D14, of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington.)

The wife of Air Force Col. Arthur Mearns, a pilot missing since he was shot down in 1966, protested Kerry with them. Her husband later was declared killed in action. His name appears on panel 12E, row 055, of the wall.

"Mr. Kerry, when asked if he planned to run again for political office, said only that he was committed to political change and that he would use whatever forum seemed best at the time," according to AP. "He did not rule out mounting another political campaign." At the time, "I was totally consumed with the notion of going to Congress," Kerry later told the *Washington Post*. AP hinted that Kerry already held presidential ambitions. A Boston newspaper agreed: "The gentle cloak of idealism and dignity

which Kerry had worn during his televised testimony in Washington now appeared to be stitched together with threads of personal ambition and political expediency. Was this to be the payoff for one of the finest and most moving chapters of the counterculture antiwar movement? Just another slick Ivy League phrasemaker ego-freak political hustler with a hunger to see his name on campaign posters and his face on national television?"

By 1972, Massachusetts' third congressional seat was firmly held by radical Robert Drinan. Kerry, now 28, left Waltham and bought a house in Worcester, anticipating a run for Congress from the 4th District. But when President Nixon picked the congressman representing the 5th District for an ambassador's post, Kerry leased out his house and moved to the dying old mill city of Lowell to run for the soon-to-be-vacated seat there. The Boston *Phoenix*, an alternative newspaper whose reporter traveled with Kerry on the 1972 campaign, profiled the candidate in a story headlined, "Cruising with a Carpetbagger."

"Kerry, media superstar, suddenly found himself having to deny that he had political plans lest he be accused of ripping off the veterans by using them as a bow for the arrow of his ambition," the *Phoenix* reported. "John Kerry is burning with desire to be a congressman, but he has to keep paying off that loan from the Vietnam Veterans [VVAW] by seeming to be cool and indifferent to personal gain, and this underlying dilemma produces an uncomfortable tension around him."

The candidate had trouble balancing himself between Kerry the patriot and Kerry the minion of Hanoi's agitprop apparatus. He tried to distance himself from his brand-new book, *The New Soldier*. According to a major newspaper in the district, the *Lowell Sun*, the book cover "carried a picture of three or four bearded youths of the hippie type carrying the American flag in a photo resembling remarkably the immortal photo by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal of U.S. Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima after its capture from the Japanese during World War II. The big difference between the two pictures, however, is that the photo on John Kerry's book shows the flag being carried upside down in a gesture of contempt."

The book was hard to come by at the time, according to the newspaper, but a rival in the Democratic primary found one in Greenwich Village and



LEF SHOENBERG/CORBIS

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tried to publish the cover as an advertisement in the *Sun*. Kerry tried to cover it up. "Things began to get hot as the old pressure went on to prevent publication of the advertisement showing the cover of the book," the *Sun's* editors wrote on Oct. 18, 1972. "Permission from the publisher of the book, Macmillan Co. of New York, to reproduce the cover, granted by Macmillan in a telegram on the day publication of the ad was scheduled, was quickly withdrawn hours later by Macmillan with the explanation that the approval of the author, John Kerry, would be required before the cover could be reproduced in a political advertisement. So that killed the ad."

Kerry said it wasn't he who blocked publication. According to the *Sun*, "Subsequently, efforts were made to obtain Mr. Kerry's okay to reproduce the famous book cover, but Mr. Kerry now says he doesn't have the right to give this permission because the copyright on the book cover belongs to a coeditor of the book, one George Butler." The *Sun* couldn't locate Butler.

When the book had come out the year before, Macmillan sent a review copy to Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), requesting an endorsement. Byrd wrote back, "I say most respectfully to you, I threw it in the wastebasket after leafing through it."

Having lost the primary in humiliation — his brother had been caught trying to wiretap an opponent's office — Kerry went to Boston College Law School. Later, he was appointed assistant district attorney, then was elected lieutenant governor under Mike Dukakis in 1982. Two years later, he ran for the U.S. Senate — dusting off his veteran's credentials by standing in front of the black Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington to shoot a TV campaign ad, defying regulations that the memorial not be used for political purposes. The ad "was filmed illegally against the wishes of the National Park Service," according to the *Boston Globe*. Kerry authorized its broadcast anyway.

Kerry's campaign only stirred up long-smoldering embers from the war. Retired Maj. Gen. George S. Patton III, who had commanded combat troops in Vietnam, said that, medals or no medals,

by the nature of his wartime protests Kerry gave "aid and comfort to the enemy" in the style of Ramsey Clark and Jane Fonda. "Mr. Kerry probably caused some of my guys to get killed," Patton

difficult. ... These incidents caused our opponent, already highly motivated, to fight harder against us and our Vietnamese allies. Hence the comment made by me which included the provision of 'aid and comfort to the enemy' by Mr. Kerry."

Under relentless attack from the pro-Kerry Boston press, Patton received strong veteran support. Robert Hagopian, past commander of the Massachusetts division of the Disabled American Veterans, spoke for many about the general's views, telling reporters, "I agree with everything he said."

The Lowell *Sun* ran a cartoon of Kerry trying fruitlessly to wash his blood-covered hands. An accompanying editorial said, "During his antiwar years, John Kerry was

**Antiwar celebrity:** Kerry renounced his military decorations and gained access to politicians such as Sen. Ted Kennedy (below). But unlike many radicals, he wanted to rise within the liberal establishment, not take it down.



COURTESY OF JOHN KERRY/EPA



SHELDON RAMSDELL

said, even as he self-deprecatingly acknowledged shortcomings of his own as a commander. "And I don't like that. There is no soap ever invented that can wash that blood off his hands."

Responding to controversy over his remarks, Patton wrote in the Worcester *Evening Gazette*, "The dissent against our efforts in that unhappy war, as exemplified by Mr. Kerry, and of course others, made the soldier's duties even more

about the closest thing to a male Jane Fonda in the U.S. anybody could find — and Ms. Fonda came as close to treason to her country as anybody ever could without being convicted of it."

To no avail. Massachusetts voters elected Kerry that year to join Ted Kennedy in the United States Senate.

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