

Pompano Beach, Florida
March 31, 1959

April 7, 1959

THE NATIONAL FLORAL EMBLEM DEBATE
WASHINGTON, D.C., MAY 5, 1959

(First rough draft. Have not yet tried to
straighten it out so please be liberal
with your criticisms and suggestions.)

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Senators, Ladies and Gentlemen,- my fellow
Gardeners,

It is a real pleasure to be here with you tonight. I think we are
all here for the same purpose - to nominate the most suitable flower as
our National Floral Emblem.

To my mind:
The first question is what qualities do we want in our National
Flower?

It seems to me that every American wants ^{*our national*} a flower that, to a ~~very~~
~~large extent~~, ^{*in this*} represents the outstanding character of the American people.
A flower that is glamorous, yes, a flower that is a native American -
sturdy and vigorous and one that can be grown easily in the home gardens
of our people in all parts of the United States, even as far north as
Alaska and as far south as Texas and Florida and even in the tropical
climate of Hawaii. Certainly we want a flower that is not already the
Floral Emblem of another country.

It should not be an expensive flower. It should be democratic. It
should be a flower that is easy to grow everywhere and available to all
of our citizens ~~who have gardens~~, even to our people who have low incomes.

But this American flower must be glamorous in your garden and very
attractive and long lasting as a cut-flower in your home.

Such a flower is the American Marigold.

Forty years ago I started working ^{*with*} on Marigolds. Before that the

Excerpt from David Burpee's draft remarks for a national flower debate at the U.S. Capitol attended by members of the Falls Church Garden Club on May 5, 1959. The city of Falls Church is in Virginia, about eight miles outside Washington, D.C. Garden clubs started as intellectual and social outlets for women in the early 1900s and grew to play important roles in preserving historic places and natural resources in the United States.

Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, W. Atlee Burpee & Co. Records – Accretion 2. Draft of speech on the National Floral Emblem Debate by David Burpee, "National Floral Emblem Debate," Box 347, Folder 8.



NATIONAL FLOWER DEBATE

Marigold Wins Round Over Rose, 'Weeds'

By MICHAEL MOK

Star Staff Writer

Not even a Senator can pull popcorn over the eyes of Falls Church Garden Clubbers.

Paul Douglas of Illinois tried, but he fared no better than three other lawmakers who tried to give them the business, as they say on Capitol Hill.

When the gardeners entered the Senate Caucus room last night for hearings on a National Flower, one wall was banked with blossoms. Pretty girls circulated through the crowd passing out popcorn, corsages and smiles.

One young man seemed to be dressed up as a mushroom, but he turned out to be John Davis, a Douglas aide, who said: "I'm supposed to be some baker who won the Revolutionary War by baking cornbread."

After Carnation Vote

Pumping for the carnation was Representative Ayres, Republican of Ohio, who immediately attacked the rose backers.

"If you adopt the rose you will alienate two important segments of the population," he said, and to illustrate, whipped out a bottle of appropriately labeled whisky.

"This is a blended whisky, and any mention of roses would ruin you in the eyes of scotch and bourbon drinkers." Representative Ayres also suggested that the Rev. Billy Graham might object.

Senator Douglas, a corn tassel advocate, defended himself against Senator Morton, Republican of Kentucky—himself a lobbyist for grass—who said he would lose the female vote because the corn tassel is male.

"The bald eagle is a male and they don't object to that," Senator Douglas said.

Survive Golfing

Backing the rose, was Senator Scott, Republican of Pennsylvania.

"President Eisenhower damages the grass on bad days, but I've never heard of him knock-

ing the heads off roses," he said.

Alluding to "the rose and these lesser flowers," Senator Scott suggested that his listeners behold the rose and "brush away the weeds."

Grassman Morton reminded the hearing that it was "Soil Stewardship Week," and cited the importance of grass roots. Senator Morton added that a wife feels safe when her husband is cutting the grass, and even when he isn't, "he's on the golf course and close to the grass."

Senator Douglas not only stuffed the voters, if not the ballot boxes with popcorn, but had a handful of costumed aides besides the mobile mushroom to boost corn.

Marigold Lobbyist

But it was to no avail. A dark horse, in the shape of Seedman David Burpee faced the garden club and introduced himself as "a registered lobbyist for marigolds."

Lights from the television hookup glittered on his glasses as Mr. Burpee spoke quietly of the hardihood of the marigold to "my honorable opponents and fellow gardeners."

He said his favorite flower thrives from Alaska to Hawaii, and is native to the Americas. Mr. Burpee said a national flower should be something "you don't have to go to the florist's to buy—thank goodness no one suggested the orchid."

Looking modest and strangely out of place away from his garden, Mr. Burpee mentioned that there are "nine kinds of bugs which attack the rose."

"My friends," the seedman said, "it's the marigold."

A straw vote was taken, and it was.

Phrases and terms:

"Pull popcorn over..." - reference to the phrase "to pull the wool over someone's eyes," meaning to attempt to trick them

"President Eisenhower damages the grass" - President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a golfer

orchid - famous for its rare, expensive, and hard-to-get varieties

straw vote - an informal, quickly-taken poll

Michael Mok, "Marigold Wins Round Over Rose, 'Weeds',"

The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), 6 May

1959. *Chronicling America: Historic American*

Newspapers. Library of Congress.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462-1959-05-06/ed-1/seq-33/>



GRASS, ROSES AND LOTS OF CORN—This beflowered scene was the hearing room at Capitol Hill last night where legislators and garden lovers debated the selection of a national flower for the Nation. At the table are, left to right: Senator Morton, Republican of Ken-

tucky; Senator Scott, Republican of Pennsylvania; Dr. O. Lloyd Meehan, president of the Falls Church Garden Club; David Burpee, president of a seed company; Senator Douglas, Democrat of Illinois, and Representative Ayres, Republican of Ohio.—Star Staff Photo.

Michael Mok, "Marigold Wins Round Over Rose, 'Weeds,'" *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 6 May 1959. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress.*
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