



PROMOTING THE MARIGOLD AS NATIONAL FLORAL EMBLEM

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August 2011

Introduction

On January 12, 1959, the president of the W. Atlee Burpee Co., flower and vegetable seed growers located in Pennsylvania, wrote newly-elected Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen, “There seems to be considerable interest in the matter of naming a national flower. As this is something that will be done once, probably for all time, I think it rather important to name a very suitable flower.” After pointing out the advantages of selecting the marigold over the rose, David Burpee concluded, “Anything you can do to promote the Marigold as our National Floral Emblem will be greatly appreciated not only by me but, I believe, by thousands of gardeners.”¹ Burpee accompanied the letter with a bouquet of American Marigolds, a strain developed exclusively by his company.

And so began both a decade-long effort on behalf of the marigold and a budding friendship between the seed grower and the senator. The two exchanged more than 160 letters over ten years.² In many respects, the story of how Dirksen became the champion of the marigold is a classic tale of lobbying on the part of the seed company president. The two of them, Dirksen and Burpee together with their allies, ultimately failed in their task. But it was not for lack of trying.

¹ Burpee to Dirksen, January 12, 1959, Dirksen Information File. Unless otherwise noted, all documents are photocopies located in the Dirksen Information File.

² The correspondence was unusual, too, because Dirksen personally dictated these letters rather than passing them off to staff.

Getting a Bill to the Senate: Recruiting Everett Dirksen as Sponsor

The historical record does not reveal why David Burpee selected Everett Dirksen to take up the cause of the marigold. Perhaps he had attended the Seed Trade Convention Dinner in Chicago in 1956 which featured Dirksen as a main speaker. In his remarks then, Dirksen described himself as “One of those to whom a seed catalogue is a reverent thing.” Employing his trademark eloquence, the first term senator from Illinois boasted, “I shall yet have a lawn as perfect as an arrow collar and roses that put experts to shame—snap dragons that dazzle—asters as big as saucers—matchless petunias—turnips to beggar description.” Not a word about the marigold!

Perhaps surprisingly, Burpee’s request posed a dilemma for Dirksen. True, Dirksen’s love of gardening was well known. He admitted to Burpee in writing back that “As an amateur gardener I work at the business some when I have time because it is so refreshing, so delightful, so stimulating and helpful to keep the middle down.” Also true, “One reason I like the marigold is that like the zinnia and petunia it is hearty and it withstands all comers and not even the insidious Japanese beetles seem to make a dent in it.” And of the bouquet Burpee had sent, “They were indeed gorgeous and so much better than anything I have produced that when spring comes you can be sure that I want a lot of those American marigolds around the little place I have near Leesburg, Virginia.”³

³ Dirksen to Burpee, January 16, 1959

But, as a senator hailing from Illinois, Dirksen explained

For several years I have been beset with people and groups who are trying to make the corn tassel our national flower. Those who are advancing the cause of the Rose have not been so diligent in their crusade but the corn tassel people really have. Manifestly, it becomes a little awkward for me coming from the heart of the corn belt but I have never quite considered the corn tassel a flower.⁴

Consequently, Dirksen did not immediately agree to sponsor the bill Burpee sought and believed that congressional action was “problematical.” He advised Burpee that introducing the marigold resolution “could more properly be done by a senator from one of the states where they have seed and plant installations such as California, Pennsylvania and elsewhere.”⁵

Louella Dirksen, the senator’s wife and a gardener in her own right, titled her 1972 memoir *The Honorable Mr. Marigold* in recognition of her late husband’s association with the flower. But that association lay in the future for, in 1959, Dirksen resisted Burpee’s entreaties.

Burpee did not let the matter rest, however, and wrote Dirksen again on January 23, 1959. He called Dirksen’s earlier letter “heartwarming” and expressed delight at “recognizing a kindred soul and fellow gardener.” He admitted that the marigold, despite having “a very substantial and proper claim to be named the National Floral Emblem of our country,” faced competition. Burpee quickly dismissed the corn tassel, however, as “not a perfect flower as it contains only the male part.”⁶ He thought little of the rose, too: “Many people favor the naming of the Rose as our national flower but I do not believe it is suitable. The Rose is a native of other countries. It has an ancient association with bloodshed, for instance the War of the Roses. It

already is the national flower of England, Honduras, Iran and Luxembourg.”⁷ Burpee, who hoped to meet personally with Dirksen during an upcoming trip to Washington, also sent him a *Saturday Evening Post* article touting the marigold.⁸

Dirksen responded within a few days. “Evidently the Senate is becoming a flower minded group,



for only recently we had a discussion of both the corn tassel and the rose as possible national flowers,” Dirksen wrote. “I hope the interest continues and that the names of other flowers will be advanced. Before very long we may be organizing a senatorial garden club and that would be something.”⁹

He invited Burpee to drop by for a visit during his trip to the nation’s capital. “I am already toying with the garden catalogues, because nothing give[s] me more delight at this season of the year.” “I am not a fancy gardener,” Dirksen admitted. “I like to fuss with petunias, asters, marigolds, glads, some lilies, tulips, salvia, dahlias, zinnias and those good hardy varieties that stand up and talk back to bugs.” The Japanese beetle proved particularly vexatious. Dirksen concluded, “I have laid the *Saturday Evening Post* article aside for reading this weekend when I can get into old clothes and get my feet up in the air. I will read it with the greatest of interest and delight.”¹⁰

The Dirksen garden flourished at their home outside Leesburg, Virginia, 50 minutes from the

⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, January 12, 1959.

⁵ Dirksen recounted events in Dirksen to Thomas Mumma, May 18, 1960.

⁶ Burpee to Dirksen, January 23, 1959. The female part of the corn tassel is the silk.

⁷ Burpee to Dirksen, January 12, 1959.

⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, January 23, 1959.

⁹ Dirksen to Burpee, January 30, 1959.

¹⁰ Dirksen to Burpee, January 30, 1959.

Capitol. After living in Washington hotels and apartments for years, Everett and Louella moved into their homestead known as "Heart's Desire" on 3.5 acres overlooking the Potomac River in 1958. Mrs. Dirksen took charge of designing and furnishing the house; she assigned her husband the task of caring for the grounds. Eager for a diversion from his duties in the Senate, Everett began the landscaping work three years before construction began on the house. He relished the assignment.

"It is March. I look out the window and it is snowing, a wet kind of snow that clings to the branches like cotton and magnifies the appearance of winter," Dirksen explained. "But I don't care, because on the desk before me is a chart of my garden and beside it are some seed catalogs—a feast for the eyes and the soul, too. I wouldn't care at all about the bluster and the cold of winter if I could only get results in my garden that would be something like the beauties painted by the seed catalog artist."¹¹

Burpee replied in late February after returning to Philadelphia from a trip to California. He sent along some complimentary seeds for a vegetable garden and invited Everett and Louella to join him for the private opening of the Washington Flower Show on March 5. Once again, he asked Dirksen to introduce the marigold resolution in the Senate, reporting that a like measure had been introduced in the House. "You see," he wrote, "I am a rank amateur in this lobbying business and must depend on the advice of good friends, such as yourself, in a field which is somewhat over my head."¹²

David Burpee and the Burpee Seed Company¹³

Burpee was immodest if not disingenuous in discounting his lobbying prowess. According to his company's history, David Burpee admired Phineas T. Barnum, the celebrated showman who had all but invented the publicity campaign. Although personally a rather shy, unassuming

¹¹ Dirksen, "Forget Turmoil For A Moment—It's Flower Time," *Pekin Times*, March 18, 1969.

¹² Burpee to Dirksen, February 26, 1959.

¹³ This section is based on information posted at <http://www.burpee.com/gardening/content/the-legacy-of-w.-atlee-burpee/legacy.html>. Accessed August 18, 2011.

person, Burpee was quick to adopt and modernize the novel approach to promotion and advertising pioneered by Barnum.

He found numerous ways to capture the nation's attention. He named flowers after Helen Hayes, Mamie Eisenhower, and Pennsylvania neighbor Pearl S. Buck. He also "starred" in one of Edward R. Murrow's "Person to Person" TV programs at his Pennsylvania headquarters (making sure the TV cameras captured his latest plant introductions). David "handed out seed packets the way John D. Rockefeller handed out dimes," to quote one reporter. All for the purpose of promoting his seed and plant sales.

The company he headed had become the largest seed company in the world by the 1890s. When founder W. Atlee Burpee died in 1915, his 22-year-old son David became head of the firm by which time his company was sending out a million catalogs a year. World War I precipitated a shortage of seeds—but also made America rather than Europe the world's leading seed supplier. Primary beneficiary: The Burpee company.



Although the company produced seeds of all types, flowers were David Burpee's great love. The Burpee "Hall of Fame" was enhanced by the Double Hybrid Nasturtium (1934), Crown of Gold Marigold (1937), Red and Gold Marigold (1939), and many others—all developed under

David's careful supervision. Marigolds were David's particular favorites—and are still Burpee's most popular flower seeds—so it was not surprising that David Burpee saw a golden opportunity for his firm and his passion in the effort to name the marigold the nation's floral emblem.

David Burpee—Lobbyist Extraordinaire

Burpee met face-to-face meeting with Dirksen for the first time in the senator's Capitol Hill office on Thursday, March 5, 1959. He brought along John Bracken, an attorney with the Philadelphia firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Burpee reported to Dirksen that he had agreed to meet with several other senators as part of his lobbying effort. "I am sure you will acquit yourself in masterly style in the floral field when you match wits with four members of the Senate," Dirksen later wrote. "That should make a stimulating program." Yet the Minority Leader still resisted leading the marigold charge: "As I indicated, I will find someone to do the honors for the marigold."¹⁴

Still Burpee persisted. After reporting that Congressman Willard Curtin (R-PA) had introduced the marigold resolution in the House, the seed grower exclaimed, "I have been quite dismayed in not having an adequate one introduced in the Senate." Burpee worked hard to make it easy for Dirksen to become the sponsor of his bill in the Senate. With this letter, he enclosed a draft resolution in the correct form and prepared a one-page squib about the marigold for use in promoting the bill and in press releases.¹⁵

Dirksen did not rise to the bait, however. He thanked Burpee for the draft resolution but only promised to give the matter more thought. "I have been puzzling over names in the hope of finding an appropriate perseon [sic] from an appropriate state to do the job," Dirksen wrote on March 16. "Bear with me a little while and in due time I shall send you a complete report on the matter."¹⁶

Two days later, Dirksen attempted to convince Clifford Case, Republican senator from New Jersey, to introduce the resolution and passed

along to him the enclosures Burpee had supplied. "I think you can very appropriately do this," Dirksen urged. "This will definitely add to the gaiety of nations and the floral debate can continue with greater vigor than ever before."¹⁷

As Case considered his leader's request, Burpee continued to target Dirksen. He sent him photos of marigolds from the Washington Flower Show, copies of editorials supporting the effort, and noted that he had received 285 newspaper clippings boosting the marigold as the national floral emblem. "It is really creating tremendous national interest." Burpee reported that the editors of *Life Magazine* had agreed to run a two-page feature on the marigold the last week in April. And he enclosed still more tips about the flower "that may be helpful to the Senator who introduces the Resolution."¹⁸ Burpee distilled the essence of his argument on behalf of his favorite blossom into nine talking points, which he suggested that Dirksen make available to other senators:

1. The national flower should be one that any American can grow easily in his own garden, and at little cost. It should be available to everyone.
2. The Marigold is a native American plant, --native to southwestern United States and Mexico.
3. The Marigold is sturdy, glamorous, bold and hardy.
4. It is immune to disease, and practically no insects attack it.
5. It grows well in all kinds of garden soil, and in every state of the union.
6. Not only is the Marigold a native American flower, but also the greatest improvements in breeding new and better varieties of Marigolds has [sic] been achieved in the United States and recognized throughout every civilized country in the world.

¹⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, March 7, 1959.

¹⁵ Burpee to Dirksen, March 11, 1959.

¹⁶ Dirksen to Burpee, March 16, 1959.

¹⁷ Dirksen to Case, March 18, 1959.

¹⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, March 20, 1959.

7. The Marigold is exclusively a native American flower, and it is not the floral emblem of any other nation.

8. It has many of the sturdy characteristics that have made our country great.

9. The Marigold is really a flower of the people.¹⁹

The best that Dirksen could offer, however, was to follow up with Senator Case by urging him “to introduce the marigold resolution without delay.”²⁰ Case, though, “finally succumbed to the blandishments of the purple violet . . . and felt under the circumstances that he could not espouse the cause of the marigold,” Dirksen informed Burpee on April 9. “I shall now have to look elsewhere for a sponsor. I will do my best.”²¹

Burpee tried to help the measure along by meeting with four senators on May 5 to consider rival claims as to which flower deserved to be the national blossom. Gordon Allot (R-CO) favored the carnation; Hugh Scott (R-PA), the rose; Thruston Morton (R-KT), the blue grass; and Paul Douglas (D-IL), who had a tension-filled relationship with his junior colleague from Illinois, the corn tassel.²² What transpired is not a matter of record. At this point, Burpee appeared willing to give up—at least for a time. “Under present circumstances it seems to me it may be best to postpone the introduction of the ‘Marigold Bill’ in the Senate until early next January, when interest in gardening starts up again,” he advised Dirksen. “This would give you a lot more time to find a Senator to introduce the Bill, and that postponement would be quite agreeable to me.”²³

There is no record of Dirksen’s reply, but it is easy to imagine that he had more pressing

¹⁹ “MARIGOLD FOR THE NATIONAL FLORAL EMBLEM,” Burpee to Dirksen, March 20, 1959. See also Burpee to Dirksen, February 11, 1965.

²⁰ Dirksen to Burpee, March 23, 1959.

²¹ Case to Dirksen, March 27, 1959 and Dirksen to Burpee, April 9, 1959.

²² George Dixon, “Washington Scene: Arbiter Needed in Flowering Crisis,” *The Camden Chronicle*, March 10, 1959.

²³ Burpee to Dirksen, April 15, 1959.

legislative work. In the first session of the 86th Congress not only did Dirksen lead the Republican troops during the last two years of the Eisenhower administration, he also introduced 65 bills and resolutions on his own accord. They spanned topics from statehood for Hawaii to Lake Michigan water diversion. The frenetic activity took a toll on the senator’s health—Dirksen suffered what was described as a minor heart attack in October.

Burpee did continue to cultivate his relationship with the Minority Leader, however, sending him special marigold seeds in May. Passing along complimentary seed to the senator became standard practice for the seed company president. When Dirksen received them, he wrote, “I will give them all the care bestowed on a newborn baby Thanks a million.”²⁴

The seed merchant met for a second time with Dirksen on December 6, 1959, and Dirksen agreed, as Burpee described it, “to have introduced in the Senate a Joint Resolution designating the Marigold as the National Floral Emblem.”²⁵ Tellingly, the senator’s promise was not the same as a pledge to introduce the measure himself, however. Instead, he would introduce the resolution “by request.” As Dirksen explained to Burpee, introducing a measure “by request” meant that a senator introduced a bill *on behalf of* the president, an executive agency, or private individual or organization, more or less as a favor. Dirksen’s offer did NOT mean an official endorsement. In any event, Burpee equipped the senator with more information about the Burpee seed company and offered to send him hundreds of seed packets “to present to some of your garden friends.”²⁶

Dirksen Relents—Sort Of

Not even a month had elapsed since Burpee’s meeting with Dirksen in December when the seed merchant went at it again: “I hope you will not think me a too persistent cuss in seeking your good offices to have introduced in the Senate the enclosed resolution with respect to the Marigold,” Burpee wrote on January 4, 1960. “I know that it is presumptuous of me to ask it of you but you were kind enough to indicate that

²⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, June 2, 1959.

²⁵ Burpee to Dirksen, December 7, 1959.

²⁶ Burpee to Dirksen, December 7, 1959.

you would be willing to introduce it 'by request.' It would be most helpful to me if you could put it in the legislative mill on the 13th or 14st [sic] of January" when Burpee intended to be in Washington. ²⁷

At the same time, Burpee acknowledged the dilemma Dirksen faced: "I will be most grateful to you for this great favor [introducing the resolution "by request"] and fully understand the reasons why you cannot be an active partisan of this or any other flower as the national floral emblem. I am hopeful though that, if a hearing is held before the Judiciary Committee, we will at least have a friend at court."²⁸

Burpee attached what he hoped would be the form of the resolution:

WHEREAS, the American Marigold is grown easily and quickly from seed in every state of the Union; and

WHEREAS, the American Marigold is already acknowledged as a symbol of religious faith; and

WHEREAS, the American Marigold in its very appearance represents not only beauty but a rugged humility of character; and

WHEREAS, the American Marigold like the American Eagle and the American Flag, would be an exclusively American Emblem, unclaimed by any foreign nation:

THEREFORE be it

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED, that the flower commonly known as the American Marigold is hereby designated and adopted as the national

²⁷ Bracken to Dirksen and Burpee to Dirksen, January 4, 1960.

²⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, January 4, 1960.

floral emblem of the United States, and the President is requested to declare such fact by proclamation.²⁹

Dirksen and his staff set to work on the formal resolution, embellishing Burpee's draft by more than doubling the number of Whereas clauses in the measure. Although Burpee recommended introducing the resolution on January 13 or 14, 1960, Dirksen chose Monday, January 11, to submit S.J. Res. 146 "by request."

Dirksen began his remarks with a salute to Johnny Appleseed and David Burpee. The latter, he said "has experimented with flowers, in the hope of producing one that is of American origin, and so hardy, so lovely, so easy to grow, so diffused, so long-blooming, that it might properly claim a place as the national floral emblem of this country." That effort had produced the marigold.³⁰

Dirksen admitted that many other flowers contested for the honor; he even dismissed the corn tassel by name. But, the senator intoned, Burpee deserved recognition for the "incalculable hours and untold sums of money" he had devoted to developing the marigold. Accordingly, "I assured him, when he was in my office, that, *by request*, I would be glad to introduce a measure to designate the marigold as our national flower."³¹

To make the case for the marigold, S.J. Res. 146 consisted of 12 Whereas statements as preface to the actual resolution.

Whereas the people of the world have from time immemorial adopted emblems for their countries, representative of their national virtues; and

Whereas from time to time the people of the United States through their Congress or through common usage have adopted emblems to represent

²⁹ Attachment to Burpee to Dirksen, January 4, 1960.

³⁰ *Congressional Record*, January 11, 1960, 165, 200.

³¹ *Congressional Record*, January 11, 1960, 165, 200. Emphasis added.

to the world the virtues of their country; and

Whereas by the American eagle, there is symbolized the strength and virility of this country, and by the American flag the common virtues of courage, purity, and loyalty; and

Whereas the United States is the only major country in the world without a floral emblem; and

Whereas the Marigold represents the character of the United States more appropriately as an emblem than does any other flower; and

Whereas the American marigold is an American native and native of nowhere else in the world; and

Whereas the American marigold is grown in abundance in the home gardens of every state in the Union; and

Whereas the American marigold is not the floral emblem of any individual state of the Union; and

Whereas the American marigold is grown easily and quickly from seed in every state of the Union; and

Whereas the American marigold is already acknowledged as a symbol of religious faith; and

Whereas the American marigold in its very appearance represents not only beauty but a rugged humility of character; and

Whereas the American marigold, like the American eagle and the American flag, would be an exclusively American emblem, unclaimed by any foreign nation: Therefore be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, That the flower commonly known as the American marigold is hereby designated and adopted as the national floral emblem of the United States, and the President is requested to declare such fact by proclamation.*³²

To Burpee's original draft, Dirksen added eight Whereas clauses to begin the resolution and left the resolving clause unchanged. The bill was referred to the Judiciary Committee.

One day short of a year after David Burpee's first letter asking for Dirksen's help, the senator finally relented and brought the bill to the Senate. He did not officially endorse the measure, however, introducing it "by request," possibly because he was sensitive to the potential controversy over even this minor event, more probably because he treasured all flowers and could not select only one to promote.

A few months later, Dirksen explained his decision this way:

There appears to be some reluctance on the part of senators to undertake this with the result that the rose, carnation, corn tassel, and other proposed floral emblems all managed to secure the introduction of a bill to achieve this objective.

I esteemed it only fair and proper that the marigold have its day in court quite aside from whatever personal preference I might have in the whole floral field and, therefore, I presented a resolution on this point so that the marigold might be considered as this matter finally comes to the testimony stage by the appropriate committee of the Senate.³³

³² S.J. Res. 146, January 11, 1960.

³³ Dirksen, to Mumma, May 18, 1960.

Within the week after the introduction of S.J. Res. 146, Dirksen's staff sent 206,000 reprints of the senator's remarks to Burpee headquarters.³⁴

Nothing came of the bill in the 86th Congress, however. Over the next decade, Dirksen introduced the marigold resolution five more times. Although the form varied in some respects, the basic rationale represented by the 12 whereas statements remained the same throughout.³⁵

Early on, Dirksen and Burpee knew that the marigold faced an uphill climb. A survey by the Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association delivered to Dirksen in late January 1960, for example, showed the rose polling over a third of the more than one million votes cast in the contest (386,841). The marigold ran 20th out of 20 (10,741) behind such plants as grass and the corn tassel.³⁶ The popularity of the rose led Pennsylvania Senator Hugh Scott to introduce a resolution to make that blossom the national flower. Dirksen put the best possible interpretation on the information, however, telling Burpee that, "It may be, after a number of proposals have been made, that this matter will take on new life and can be moved along for some kind of action."³⁷

Burpee recognized the value of cultivating his relationship with the Senate Minority Leader. He courted Dirksen assiduously. On February 2, 1960, he sent Dirksen 162 complimentary packets of seeds representing 46 varieties of vegetables and flowers, a gesture which thrilled the senator.³⁸ "What a perfect way to start Monday morning when I found the superb assortment of seeds on my desk," he wrote. "I can think of no subject to which I would rather give my early, constant, careful, and tender attention." Dirksen also agreed to Burpee's

³⁴ Ray to John, Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Legislative File, f. 688.

³⁵ 87th Congress, S.J. Res. 3; 88th, S.J. Res. 57; 89th, S.J. Res. 19; 90th, S.J. Res. 73; 91st, S.J. Res. 39.

³⁶ "It's Rose by More Than a Nose," UPI, December 2, 1959; "The nation picks a flower," *Parade*, January 24, 1960; Irving Allen, President, Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association, Inc., to Dirksen, January 25, 1960.

³⁷ Dirksen to Burpee, February 1, 1960.

³⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, February 2, 1960.

request to forward even more seed packets to his gardening friends.³⁹

The marigold resolution languished in committee through the balance of 1960. By mid-December, Burpee readied himself to renew the campaign and asked Dirksen to introduce the bill in the new Congress—the seed grower supplied a draft.⁴⁰ Dirksen readily agreed.⁴¹

On January 5, 1961, the Senate Minority Leader introduced S.J. Res. 3 again "by request" and without making any remarks on the Senate floor—Dirksen had not yet assumed the role of the marigold's champion. The persistent Burpee would not give up and plied Dirksen with more gardening tidbits, catalogs, marigold bouquets, and complimentary tickets to the Washington Flower Show.⁴² "This is a fine time to be sending a seed order with six inches of snow on the terrain and more to come according to the forecaster," Dirksen relayed to his friend. "However, hope springs eternal and I patiently abide the day when warm winds will coax the earth into a new resurrection and I may be able to sally forth with my trusty hoe and spade to put some seed in the earth and to nurse the little plants to vigor and beauty."⁴³

Still the resolution languished into the second session of the 87th Congress.

The delay prompted Burpee to add another weapon to his lobbying arsenal; he developed a new marigold which he named for the famed Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn—an obvious ploy to capture Congress's attention.⁴⁴ The new bright golden yellow marigold was meant as the perfect complement to the Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower hybrid all-double bright salmon petunia.⁴⁵ It was a fortuitous combination that would come into play just a few months later.

On April 25 and 26, a provocative exchange took place on the Senate floor between Dirksen and Hubert Humphrey (D-MN). Humphrey proposed to have the Capitol grounds, in Dirksen's words, "bedecked with nature's

³⁹ Dirksen to Burpee, February 9, 1960.

⁴⁰ Burpee to Dirksen, December 19, 1960.

⁴¹ Dirksen to Burpee, January 4, 1961.

⁴² Burpee to Dirksen, February 20, 1961; Dirksen to Burpee, June 26, 1961 and January 19, 1962.

⁴³ Dirksen to Burpee, February 3, 1961.

⁴⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, January 19, 1962.

⁴⁵ Burpee to Stewart, May 2, 1962.

choicest flowers, to delight the eyes and the hearts of the thousands of Americans who come here.” But Humphrey wanted the planting to begin immediately. This prompted Dirksen to launch into a recital of which plants could survive a late frost. “Thus it is, Mr. President, that the Senator from Minnesota and I and the tourists must wait for nature, and must permit nature to take its own sweet time.”⁴⁶ Dirksen did not believe blooms were safe from a late frost until mid-May.

Not to be outdone by his friend from Illinois, Humphrey returned to the floor the next day to challenge Dirksen’s information about which flowers could be planted when on the Capitol grounds. The Democrat favored forsythia and azaleas. “He is an expert on Illinois planting conditions,” Humphrey agreed, “but when it comes to Washington, D.C., he is a fiction writer.” Dirksen rose to challenge and pointed out that Humphrey had confused shrubs with flowers—yes, shrubs, including Humphrey’s favorites, could be planted in April, but not flowers. “So, Mr. President, I am going to take my friend in hand,” Dirksen offered, “I am going to take him out to those rather impoverished acres of mine and give him some elementary lectures on the difference between a flower and a shrub.” Humphrey attempted a feeble rebuttal to which Dirksen replied: “Whenever the Senator from Minnesota can convert the Senate or anyone else who is rooted in the soil to believe that a flower is a shrub, I will nominate him to the next vacant seat on the Supreme Court of the United States.”⁴⁷

David Burpee took note of the Dirksen-Humphrey exchange and telegraphed Dirksen the following message: “Congratulations on your stand for flowers for the Capitol Gardens. I shall be glad to supply thousands of petunia and marigold plants to beautify the grounds.” Ever attuned to floral politics, Burpee suggested the Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower petunias and the Mr. Sam marigolds, striking the right balance between political parties and branches of government!⁴⁸

The idea intrigued Dirksen. He replied to Burpee:

My colleague from Minnesota, Senator Humphrey, and I had quite a good round on the Floor of the Senate because he insisted on mixing shrubs and flowers and secondly, because the flower beds that have always been reserved for cannas showed no hint of any plants at the time this colloquy took place. This is under the direction of Mr. George Steward [sic], Architect of the Capitol, and the Botanical Gardens and they do have their own ideas as to what goes where.

I, however, am entranced by the thought of the Eisenhower petunias and the Mr. Sam marigolds. My marigold seed is just coming up and petunia seed I did not get this year, so I must go shopping for a host of petunias to bring my own flower beds up to date. I am glad this exchange on the Senate Floor was widely publicized because it must perforce help to develop a greater interest in flowers and florticulture [sic].⁴⁹

Burpee seized the opportunity and wrote Stewart offering “thousands of plants” at no cost to the government to make up for “the lack of colorful flowers around the Capitol.” Included in his offer were “two lovely varieties named for two famous political figures representing our two major political parties” referring to the Mr. Sam marigold and the Eisenhower petunia.⁵⁰ Stewart turned down the offer because he already had sufficient plants; he did offer to purchase the two varieties for next Spring’s planting.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Dirksen to Burpee, May 2, 1962; Burpee telegram to Dirksen, April 29, 1962. The Dirksen-Humphrey exchange took place on April 25 [*Congressional Record*, 7163] and April 26 [*Congressional Record*, 7213].

⁵⁰ Burpee to Stewart, May 2, 1962.

⁵¹ Stewart to Burpee, May 4, 1962. The following note appears in Dirksen’s files following this document: “It would appear to me that George could cooperate with the flower industry and let them plan lots of flowers. Maybe the flower industry could set up an advisory committee and

⁴⁶ *Congressional Record*, April 25, 1962, 7163.

⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, April 26, 1962, 7213.

⁴⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, April 29, 1962.

Stewart's decision left Burpee with thousands of plants for which he had no ready market.⁵²

The 87th Congress expired with no action on S.J. Res. 3.

Dirksen Is All In

The 88th Congress brought the third opportunity to name a national flower, and Dirksen introduced S.J. Res. 57 on March 7, 1963. For the first time, Dirksen did not offer the measure "by request"; he became its full-fledged sponsor. And this time, he prepared remarks for the Senate floor. He noted that when he first introduced the marigold resolution, others had advanced other candidates. "But I still find myself wedded to the marigold—robust, rugged, bright, stately, single colored and multicolored, somehow able to resist the onslaught of insects." He continued: "It takes in its stride extreme changes in temperature, and fights back the scorching sun in summer and the chill of early spring evenings. What a flower the marigold is. I am looking forward to the time when these gay flowers will salute and intrigue our sense of beauty."⁵³

With these words, Dirksen embraced the marigold without reservation. No longer did he present the blossom simply as a matter of fairness and testimony to the work of Burpee. The marigold deserved the honor in its own merits.

David Burpee was, of course, delighted. He proceeded with a variation of the strategy he employed in the previous Congress, i.e., boosting the Mr. Sam marigold for Capitol Hill. As it happened, the new Sam Rayburn House Office Building was nearing completion, so Burpee suggested to Dirksen another approach to Capitol Architect Stewart.⁵⁴ The senator spoke with Stewart and reported to Burpee that the building would not be occupied until next year, foreclosing the opportunity for marigold gardens in 1963 but keeping it open for 1964.⁵⁵

thus avoid discrimination between the various seed companies."

⁵² Burpee to Dirksen, May 8, 1962.

⁵³ *Congressional Record*, March 7, 1963, 3621-22.

⁵⁴ Burpee to Dirksen, March 12, 1963.

⁵⁵ Dirksen to Burpee, March 19, 1963.

Concerned that the movement had stalled, Burpee contacted Dirksen about exploring an effort to get Democratic support for the marigold. Because the marigold was native to Texas, Burpee had been trying to enlist support from the Texas Democrats in Congress but without success. He even named a new marigold "Texas" to be introduced in 1964. But Texans favored the rose because growing rose plants commercially was a big industry in Texas.⁵⁶ Dirksen promised to try to enlist help.⁵⁷ On April 26, he asked Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas to join Dirksen as a co-sponsor.⁵⁸ Yarborough declined, however, recalling that his campaign song had been "The Yellow Rose of Texas."⁵⁹

The first session of the 88th Congress concluded on December 30, 1963. S.J. Res. 57 remained mired in the Judiciary Committee with no hearings, no votes, no action.

As the year ended, Burpee retained Ballard & Walter, a public relations firm in New York City, to promote the marigold. Account director Abbot Geer informed Dirksen that on Wednesday, January 8, the day after the convening of the second session of the 88th Congress, Burpee intended to send bouquets of American Marigolds to several senators and congressmen, to the House and Senate dining rooms, to the Secretary of Agriculture, to the National Press Club, and to the Washington press corps "in honor of the commencement of the Congressional session."

Burpee hoped that Dirksen would personally present Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) with her bouquet on Tuesday—the firm prepared a press release to mark the event should Dirksen decide to proceed.⁶⁰ Dirksen did, and photographers covered the presentation.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Burpee to Dirksen, April 2, 1963 and April 13, 1963.

⁵⁷ Dirksen to Burpee, April 10, 1963.

⁵⁸ Dirksen to Burpee, April 26, 1963.

⁵⁹ Yarborough to Dirksen, April 30, 1963.

⁶⁰ Abbot M. Greer to Dirksen, December 31, 1963. Burpee repeated the generous distribution of marigold bouquets to congressmen and others in 1965—see Charles Covell, "There's Gold in Marigolds," *The evening Star*, January 15, 1965.

⁶¹ Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Still Photographs 64/1/10-2d and 64/1/10-4, for example.



Leaders of the marigold campaign put a fresh emphasis on publicity in the mid-1960s. In October 1963, for example, Burpee thanked Dirksen for “putting marigolds on the map” citing a recent article in *Readers’ Digest* entitled “Marigolds on Mars.”⁶² Dirksen and Senator Smith appeared on the Huntley-Brinkley Show to boast about their favorite flowers. Burpee called it “a grand boost for the American marigold as our National Floral Emblem” and reported that columnist and humorist Art Buchwald was thinking about a piece “on the battle of flowers.”⁶³

Not all of the publicity was positive. Columnist George Dixon wrote the following in February 1965 just as Dirksen was lobbying the chairman of the Judiciary Committee for a hearing on the marigold resolution:

The only thing we need less than a national flower is a national debate on a national flower. Yet

⁶² Burpee to Dirksen, October 28, 1963.

⁶³ Burpee to Dirksen, January 27, 1964. Burpee, Senator Hugh Scott, and Congressman William Ayres met with Buchwald in February. Although invited, Dirksen could not attend. According to Burpee, the meeting “went off right well.” See Burpee to Dirksen, February 11, 1964.

many thousands of congressional man hours are wasted on florid forensics.

It sometimes seems as if more members of Congress made speeches about a national flower than about the national weal. Scarcely a week goes by that a Senator or Representative doesn’t come up with a national flower bill.

If all the national flower bills were planted deep in good rich loam, heavily fertilized, and secured against being disturbed . . . , it’d be a mercy.⁶⁴

In April 1968, Dirksen wrote Burpee that he had appeared on television to boost the marigold and had written about the flower in his nationally syndicated column⁶⁵, which reached 150 “leading newspapers of the country.”⁶⁶

A year later, Dirksen penned another column, “Forget Turmoil For A Moment—It’s Flower Time.” After praising the coming of Spring in words only Dirksen could muster, he described in exquisite detail the pile of gardening catalogs arrayed before him. “Let kings and emperors, Presidents and senators, suffer highly important matters to furrow their brows. There must be a little time to draw back and think just about the noblest creations from the hand of a generous Creator—the endless variety of flowers.”⁶⁷

Throughout the decade-long effort on behalf of Dirksen’s favorite flower, the senator and Burpee kept up the publicity campaign.

The lobbyist in Burpee recognized the importance of constantly attending to Dirksen’s interest in gardening in general and marigolds in particular. Now that Dirksen was so publicly identified with Burpee’s cause, the seed grower sought ways to enrich the relationship. In March

⁶⁴ Dixon, “Washington Scene: The Flower Debate,” no newspaper cited, February 1965.

⁶⁵ “Time Out for Marigolds,” A Senator’s Notebook, *Washington Daily News*, April 24, 1968.

⁶⁶ Dirksen to Burpee, April 4, 1968.

⁶⁷ Dirksen, “Forget Turmoil For A Moment—It’s Flower Time,” *Pekin Daily Times*, March 18, 1969.

1964, he hit upon a particularly clever way to appeal to his sponsor. Burpee asked the senator to test in his Virginia garden some new plant varieties—he even offered to pay Dirksen for the privilege.⁶⁸ The prospect of planting untested, newly-developed varieties thrilled the senator:

I feel thoroughly set up that you should ask me to test out F₁ First Generation Marigold, Petunia and Zinnia Hybrids. You make me feel like a professional and the first thing you know somebody will be calling me Burpee or Burbank.

How I shall look forward to the plants when they come and I trust the Senate schedule will ease sufficiently so that I can do full justice to this fancy strain—the Yellow Nugget. I shall be a thousand times grateful because I think floriculture, limited as my experience is, helps keep me alive.⁶⁹

The flats arrived at Dirksen's home in Virginia on May 4, and the senator agreed to take color photos of the experimentals once they reached the blooming stage.⁷⁰

The second session of the 88th Congress ended without action on the marigold resolution.

By now the routine was well established. Upon the expiration of a Congress, Burpee would write Dirksen asking yet again that he sponsor the resolution in the new Congress. The version Burpee sent on December 15, 1966, was typical: "I'm hoping you will introduce the Marigold for the National Floral Emblem Bill in the new Congress. While I shall be away in January, I shall have marigold flowers sent to you and to any others in the Senate or House that you may care to suggest. Would it be desirable for us to get a Democrat to support our marigold project?"⁷¹ He authored similar letters on December 19, 1960; December 16, 1964; December 15, 1966; November 6, 1968; and

⁶⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, March 12, 1964.

⁶⁹ Dirksen to Burpee, March 17, 1964 and April 20, 1964.

⁷⁰ Dirksen to Burpee, May 4, 1964.

⁷¹ Burpee to Dirksen, December 15, 1966.

January 29, 1969. Dirksen agreed to each request.

January 8, 1965, brought S.J. Res. 19. In his remarks, Dirksen repeated the Whereas clauses to support his case. Senator Allen Ellender (D-LA) chided the Minority Leader for repeatedly introducing a bill that never saw any action, complaining about the cost of printing the bill, which he pegged at a minimum of \$24. "It seems to me," Ellender stated, "that something should be done to get action on these various bills instead of just introducing them at every session in this way."

In response, Dirksen explained:

I ran into some obstacles. I discovered that the carnation, the rose, the corn tassel, and other flowers are competitors. I have had difficulty persuading enough people to the virtues of my cause.

This committee [Judiciary] has been dealing for a long time with highly noncontroversial matters such as civil rights. We have not been able to obtain an opportunity, so far, to discuss the merits of our humble, little, sprightly marigold.⁷²

The senator mailed Burpee a tear sheet from the *Congressional Record* and promised "to press for a very early hearing on this bill" and asked his friend "to be ready to appear when you are summoned."⁷³

The Judiciary Committee Refuses to Cooperate

The Minority Leader had reason to believe that the Senate Judiciary Committee would, at long last, hold hearings on the various proposals for a national floral emblem. Dirksen anticipated the hearing by asking the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress to analyze the strengths of competing proposals. The resulting

⁷² *Congressional Record*, January 8, 1965, 439-40. "Highly noncontroversial" was a sarcastic reference.

⁷³ Dirksen to Burpee, January 11 and January 22, 1965.

report, "Statements on Selected Flowers, Including Relevancy of Their Consideration as the United States National Flower," touted the strengths of the marigold and 11 of its competitors.⁷⁴

Dirksen took particular pains to combat efforts to name the corn tassel, perhaps because Paul Douglas, the Democratic senator from Illinois, favored it. Dirksen challenged its categorization as a flower. He wrote Orville Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture, in February 1965 attaching a disquisition on the corn tassel for the national floral emblem. "Would you refer this to your experts in the Department for comment," Dirksen asked, "because I am not persuaded that the corn tassel is a flower or could be considered as a floral emblem."⁷⁵ Dirksen received a reply from the Assistant Director of Science and Education who concluded, "There may well be violent difference of opinion as to the esthetic merit of the corn tassel as a floral emblem. However that may be, it is a fact that the corn tassel is the male inflorescence or flower cluster of the corn plant."⁷⁶

Dirksen went to the trouble of drafting his own testimony for the committee, too, testimony that recounted the by-now well-known case for the marigold. The 420-word statement also employed the eloquence routinely associated with the senator:

How like our forebears is this lovely flower, robust, rugged and able to conquer extreme changes in temperature. It wilts not from the summer sun, not is it dismayed by the chill of the evening. Special requirements of fertility are shrugged off by the marigold. It will flourish in soil which would defeat other flowers and bravely withstand the assaults of the elements up

⁷⁴ William F. Woods, "Statements on Selected Flowers, Including Relevancy of Their Consideration as the United States National Flower," Library of Congress, January 14, 1965; Library of Congress, Natural Resources Division Memorandum to Dirksen, "National Flower," January 15, 1965.

⁷⁵ Dirksen to Freeman, February 9, 1965.

⁷⁶ J. H. Starkey to Dirksen, February 24, 1965.

to the heavy frosts of early winter.⁷⁷

Burpee buttressed the senator's arguments by offering yet another version of "marigold exceptionalism."⁷⁸ It consisted of these points: (1) the Marigold was native to the American continent and to nowhere else in the world; (2) the marigold was popular with gardeners in every state, whereas other candidates, such as the goldenrod, columbine, and violet were not suitable in every state; (3) the marigold was known as the Friendship Flower ("Especially in these troubled times we would like our National Floral Emblem to be a symbol of friendship for all the people of the world"); (4) First Lady Johnson wanted to beautify America, and the marigold "can add to the beauty of every home in America that has a garden."⁷⁹

The *Washington Post*, in "Flower Issue Soft Petaled on Hill," reported on February 18 that no hearings had yet been scheduled.⁸⁰ To Dirksen's disappointment, the press of business before the Judiciary Committee continued into May.⁸¹

Dirksen used his appearance on the Jack Paar Program that month to discuss his fondness for gardening. "You did, as usual, a magnificent job on the Jack Paar show Friday night, even if you did admit that Marigolds stink," Burpee wrote. "Always remember that some are sweet-scented. Examine Hawaii in your garden this summer."⁸² Dirksen replied: "I thought the word 'stink' on the Jack Paar show was just right to simulate lovers of the marigold as never before and that we might coin a slogan not unlike a certain cigarette ad which says 'we will fight rather than switch.'"⁸³

The senator received volumes of letters from all over the country "just because of this continuing manifestation of interest in flowers and very particularly the marigold." But the Judiciary Committee "has been so hog tied with constitutional amendments and civil rights legislation that there has not been a show of

⁷⁷ "The Marigold as the National Flower," 1965.

⁷⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, February 11, 1965.

⁷⁹ Burpee to Dirksen, February 11, 1965.

⁸⁰ "Flower Issue Soft Petaled on Hill," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1965.

⁸¹ Dirksen to Lydel Sims, May 12, 1965.

⁸² Burpee to Dirksen, May 17, 1965.

⁸³ Dirksen to Burpee, May 25, 1965.

getting a substantial number of members together at any one time for a full dress debate and discussion of our bill on marigolds.”⁸⁴ Of course, Dirksen contributed to the logjam with his work on behalf of what would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and his efforts to amend the Constitution regarding reapportionment—both issues before the committee.

Nineteen Sixty-Five came and went without Judiciary Committee hearings on the marigold resolution.



As both men awaited the fate of the resolution, their personal relationship continued to blossom, aided no doubt by Burpee’s careful attention to Dirksen’s gardening needs. Every Spring saw a Burpee catalog land on Dirksen’s desk. Every Spring brought a seed order from Dirksen. Every Summer included a bouquet of fresh marigolds spirited to Dirksen’s office.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, May 25, 1965. Burpee was concerned that the hearing might take place while he was traveling. Dirksen told him not to worry.

⁸⁵ In the early years, Burpee sent seeds to Dirksen at no charge. Later Dirksen attempted to pay for them, but Burpee would return the check. Finally, Dirksen insisted on paying for the seeds and Burpee accepted. The Spring orders

Each transaction offered the senator the chance to proclaim his love of the season. Here is one example: “Spring is a little belated but I presume it will burst upon us like a sudden splash of sun emerging from the clouds and then it is there. I am looking forward to the moment when I can root in the soil again and recapture a somewhat more pleasant nature and a better state of mind.”⁸⁶ And another: “I can hardly wait for the plants. The planting season is here and I must get my fingers and my nose into the sweet fragrance of the soil before I can become normal.”⁸⁷

By September 1966, Burpee was ready to give up hope for action in the current Congress. “I’m still interested in getting the American Marigold designated as our National Floral Emblem,” he admitted, “but think it best not to do much for that effort during this election year.”⁸⁸ Dirksen sympathized:

I also am still interested in the marigold and, in fact, had an entire set-up made whereby a dozen members would appear before the committee with statements on other flowers and I would cap it off with my statement on the marigold. We have had quite a time in the Judiciary Committee in securing quorums and in sidetracking some very important legislation and so my flower project sort of fell by the wayside. If I do not get it done during this session it will make a prime undertaking for the 90th Congress which will convene in January.⁸⁹

In September 1966, Burpee sent a contribution to the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee for a candidate Dirksen favored. In his letter informing Dirksen, Burpee expressed yet again his interest in having the marigold designated as the National Floral Emblem.⁹⁰

generally consisted of about 100 plants and cost about \$100.

⁸⁶ Dirksen to Burpee, April 4, 1966.

⁸⁷ Dirksen to Burpee, April 27, 1966.

⁸⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, September 22, 1966.

⁸⁹ Dirksen to Burpee, September 29, 1966.

⁹⁰ Burpee to Dirksen, September 22, 1966.

On December 15, David Burpee began anew. He asked Dirksen to re-introduce the resolution, promised to send marigolds to anyone in the Senate or House Dirksen cared to suggest, and asked if recruiting a Democrat would improve chances of success.⁹¹ Not hearing from Dirksen (except for courteous acknowledgments of the seeds and bouquets he received from Burpee), the seed grower renewed his request on April 7, 1967. This time, the senator readily agreed and said he had been working on remarks for the occasion.⁹²

Seven years into the effort, Burpee once again reached into his bag of marketing tricks. He suggested giving the campaign a new name that would have sales appeal such as “‘The Friendship Flower for Our National Floral Emblem’ and then tell how we Americans want to develop friendship with all the peoples of the world.”⁹³ He also arranged to attend a lunch at the White House on April 27 with Lady Bird Johnson where he would introduce a new half dwarf hybrid American Marigold named for her.⁹⁴

Everett Dirksen introduced S.J. Res. 73 in the 90th Congress on April 17. His remarks consisted mainly of the standard phrases he had been employing for years. Of the marigold, however, he added, “It beguiles the senses and ennobs the spirit of man. It is the delight of the amateur gardener and a constant challenge to the professional.”⁹⁵ And off to the Judiciary Committee the resolution went.

A month later, after battling pneumonia and then catching up with correspondence, Dirksen updated Burpee first by mentioning how many people had responded to Dirksen’s television appearances related to the marigold. “One interesting aspect of it is that people starting with seed from you have learned to produce what they believe are Blue Ribbon Marigolds and insist on sending me seed from their prize plants. I feel flattered beyond words.” He complimented Burpee on participating in the First Lady’s beautification program and then

⁹¹ Burpee to Dirksen, December 15, 1966.

⁹² Dirksen to Burpee, April 13, 1967.

⁹³ Burpee to Dirksen, April 15, 1967. Burpee enclosed a clipping describing how adding a name such as “truth-in-lending” to a controversial bill had been an effective ploy.

⁹⁴ Burpee to Dirksen, April 15, 1967.

⁹⁵ *Congressional Record*, April 17, 1967, S 5266.

raised yet a new opportunity to promote the marigold.

The tulips planted in the Old Senate Office Building’s square quadrangle center had died. Two senators on the Building Commission approached Dirksen to see if he would arrange for a televised re-planting ceremony to feature marigolds. Dirksen suggested that Burpee furnish the plants—if so, “I would undertake to get the matter in line so that it might become a real ceremony. I think it would help to take the minds of people off the war, the fever and brutality that goes on in the world.”⁹⁶ Burpee readily offered 25 large “Yellow Climax” and 400 smaller “First Lady” plants. On June 29, Dirksen reported that the marigolds had been planted and that a ceremony would take place later.⁹⁷ The well-attended and publicized ceremony took place on July 13—photographs of the event show Dirksen in shirt sleeves up to his elbows in marigolds.⁹⁸ “You are doing a magnificent job for the Marigold as well as for our Country!” Burpee exclaimed.⁹⁹



Dirksen closed out 1967 by writing a piece entitled “I Nominate the Marigold” in the December issue of *National Wildlife*. The 1,200 word essay described the variety of marigolds, claimed it as a “New World native,” noted how popular the flower was in governmental gardens, explained how historical sites throughout the country, had adopted the blossom, and boasted

⁹⁶ Dirksen to Burpee, May 25, 1967.

⁹⁷ Dirksen to Burpee, June 29, 1967. On June 22, Dirksen drafted but did not send a letter indicating that the U.S. Botanical Gardens would supply the plants.

⁹⁸ Photographs, July 13, 1967.

⁹⁹ Burpee to Dirksen, July 6, 1967.

that it was “already the nation’s choice” for the national floral emblem.¹⁰⁰

Opportunities Dwindle

While Congress may have preferred inaction, Burpee and Dirksen teamed up to satisfy the public’s desire for marigolds. Dirksen’s office fielded requests from people all over the country to help them promote the plant. In April 1968, for example, Dirksen asked Burpee if he would send 1,000 marigold seed packets to a school in Muncie, Indiana.¹⁰¹ Burpee obliged, shipping the seeds at no cost: “We are glad to be rather liberal in distributing Marigold seed at no cost to some of the people who write to you, and I have been wondering, may we do this with the statement that the seeds are coming with your compliments?”¹⁰² Burpee, of course, recognized the value to his company of such an endorsement. Dirksen quickly agreed, writing, “Marigolds continue to excite interest everywhere and I am always happy to participate wherever I can.” He went on to describe an effort in Silver Springs, Florida, to plant 50,000 marigolds in what would become the Everett McKinley Dirksen Garden.¹⁰³

By this time in his career, Dirksen’s highly publicized weekly press conferences, appearances on television, and recording career, had earned him a popular following. As a result, he landed a contract for a weekly newspaper column, *Your Senator Report*, which appeared in about 150 newspapers throughout the country. He used that platform in the Spring of 1968 to call for a “Time Out for Marigolds.” He explained that for years he had worked to designate the marigold as the floral emblem, but success had eluded him. “Perhaps now, while we are beset with such restless fevers, we should take time out for the marigold.” He recounted public disenchantment with religion, with the war in Vietnam, with out-of-control government spending and public debt. He described racial ferment in the cities and unsettling gyrations in the stock market. “What a pleasant escape it would be for just a little while to take time out

for marigolds.” He closed with an appeal to Congress to consider the marigold resolution.¹⁰⁴

Late in life, the senator came to rely on the imagery associated with plants and flowers to endow his public policy interests with color and context. His campaign to restore prayer to public schools by constitutional amendment is the perfect illustration. On July 9, 1968, the Senate Minority Leader took to the floor of the chamber to argue for action:

Mr. President, on Independence Day I looked out the window to see the flag flying in a mild breeze and the lawn drenched in sunshine. Against the rail fence were dogwood, japonica, spirea, hydrangea, crepe myrtle and filbert bushes furnished the backdrop, golden marigolds were dancing in the mild breeze. In a center garden incredibly beautiful canna heads were finding glory under a cloudless sky. In still another garden, double white petunias were the edging for the deep colored zinnias that stood like sentinels in the sun. . . .

Presiding over this cavalcade of beauty [referring to the vast Capitol gardens] were the gentle birch trees, the pin oaks, the pines and hemlock, the aged cottonwoods and sycamores, the beech and elm, walnut and maple, hickory and willow, Japanese yew and Greek juniper, Virginia spruce and pyracantha, Chinese tulip and flowering crab, flowering peach and flowering cherry, domestic holly and Norway maple.

Mr. President, who can live with this beauty, this diversity, this color, this salute to the mind, the heart, the soul of man and not believe in God—in a Creator behind it all?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Dirksen, “I Nominate the Marigold,” *National Wildlife* (December 1967): 28-29.

¹⁰¹ Dirksen to Burpee, April 4, 1968.

¹⁰² Burpee to Dirksen, April 9, 1968.

¹⁰³ Dirksen to Burpee, April 23, 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Dirksen, “A Senator’s Notebook,” April 24, 1968.

¹⁰⁵ “Prayer Amendment,” July 9, 1968, Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Remarks and Releases.

Meanwhile, the senator did what he could do at the local level. At his urging, the Landscape Architect with the Beautification Task Force of the National Park Service, part of Lady Bird Johnson's beautification project, planted marigolds throughout the Service's plots in the District of Columbia.¹⁰⁶

Dirksen was re-elected to a fourth term in the Senate in November. He received a telegram from Burpee: "Congratulations. You have been doing a magnificent job for our party and nation. We need you. 1969 may be the year to make the American Marigold our National Floral Emblem. Best wishes for your continued success."¹⁰⁷

The End Nears

On January 2, 1969, Dirksen thanked David Burpee for sending him seeds for his garden, writing that "Quite a number of marigold gardens seem to have sprung up and they do bring them to my attention." He concluded on an optimistic note: "Perhaps we are making progress after all in putting the American marigold in the American heart."¹⁰⁸ Dirksen could not have known, however, that 1969 would prove to be his last opportunity to pass the marigold resolution.

Burpee replied three days later by sending Dirksen the 1969 Burpee catalog, asking for his order, and inviting him to the Chicago International Flower & Garden Show in March. He also repeated his usual refrain, "Will you again introduce the bill to make the Marigold our National Floral Emblem?" This time, he added a new twist to the pro-marigold argument—that selecting other flowers would violate states' rights! He enclosed a list of U.S. state flowers and argued that "as a matter of States' rights, it would not be right to make our National Flower the flower of any one state and it's our good luck that no state has the marigold as its State Flower . . ."¹⁰⁹ The seed merchant

¹⁰⁶ Dirksen to DeHaven and Dirksen to Burpee, June 6, 1968.

¹⁰⁷ Burpee to Dirksen, November 6, 1968.

¹⁰⁸ Dirksen to Burpee, January 2, 1969.

¹⁰⁹ Burpee to Dirksen, January 5, 1969. This new line of argument was jeopardized by, ironically, Illinois when State Representative Edward Wolbank introduced House Bill 1061 in March which would have declared the marigold the native State flower (Wolbank to Dirksen, March

did not bother to wonder why no state had so honored his favorite plant.

Not having heard from the senator, Burpee repeated his request on January 29.¹¹⁰ Dirksen responded on February 3. Yes, he would sponsor the resolution. "The progress has been slow in this crusade but I think we are gaining and making more friends for the marigold year after year," he advised his friend. He concluded:

Soon I shall be preparing my Spring list. As a matter of fact I picked up your 1969 catalogue and brought it with me to the office thinking that if there were a minute I would regale myself by going through it. There is nothing so exciting as a garden catalog, the night the first Spring rain develops, the birds twitter, and the ringing song of the frogs is in the air.¹¹¹

The next day, Dirksen introduced S.J. Res. 39, "Designating the American marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) as the national floral emblem of the United States." His remarks were matter-of-fact.¹¹²

On February 20, 1969, Senate Minority Leader Everett McKinley Dirksen sent what would be his final order for plants to the W. Atlee Burpee Company. A check for \$150 accompanied the order.¹¹³ In addition to marigolds, petunias, and zinnias, Dirksen's order included tomatoes, dahlias, caladium, impatiens, a dwarf apricot tree, an everbearing fig tree, and a five-foot

26, 1969). Although Dirksen was delighted (Dirksen to Wolbank, March 31, 1969), the prospect troubled Burpee: "This is interesting but it would not be such a calamity if it were not done. Illinois of course already has the Violet as its state flower and there is some advantage for our effort . . . in the fact that it is not the flower of any individual state." Burpee to Dirksen, April 19, 1969.

¹¹⁰ Burpee to Dirksen, January 29, 1969.

¹¹¹ Dirksen to Burpee, February 3, 1969.

¹¹² *Congressional Record*, February 4, 1969, S 1241-42.

¹¹³ Dirksen to Burpee, February 20, 1969. Burpee returned the check on February 24 "because you are doing us a great favor in growing these things that we want to have tested in your climate."

English walnut tree—1004 plants in all! The shipment arrived at Dirksen's home on Friday, May 2, and Dirksen was, as usual, eager to "get my nose into the good earth." He even hosted a staff party at Broad Run on the 4th to show off the plantings.¹¹⁴

Early in the year brought a new wrinkle to the Dirksen-Burpee relationship. On February 21, Lee Nunn, a Republican operative and fundraiser, asked Dirksen's office for help in securing a \$1,000 contribution from Burpee.¹¹⁵ Dirksen obliged, though without much enthusiasm. He forwarded the request to his friend but noted plainly, "I would prefer to have you make your own determination in the matter and whatever your good judgment dictates will be most acceptable in my book."¹¹⁶ At first, Burpee pleaded previous business commitments as the reason not to support the Republican Victory Dinner set for April 2.¹¹⁷ Three days later, however, he sent Dirksen a \$500 check to use "in the way you think best."¹¹⁸

In March, Dirksen began to work on the remarks about Spring and flowers that would become his most famous. They appeared in his nationally syndicated column, *A Senator's Notebook*, and carried the title, "I Begin to Think About My Garden . . ."¹¹⁹ He opened by quoting the poet Shelley: "O, Wind. If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind!" Dirksen proceeded to describe, as only he could, the promise of the season, the joy of perusing his cherished seed catalogs, and the anticipation of planting a seemingly endless variety of flowers. "Could the Resurrection have come in any season but spring? It makes me think of the question that Job in all his misery propounded to his friends: 'If a man die, shall

¹¹⁴ Dirksen to Burpee, April 28, 1969.

¹¹⁵ Nunn to John Gomien, February 21, 1969. Nunn had discovered that Burpee had contributed \$1,000 to the Nixon-Agnew campaign in 1968. On April 28, 1965, Burpee paid \$500 per ticket to attend a fundraising dinner in Dirksen's honor at the Sheraton-Park Hotel in Washington. See Burpee to Dirksen, April 10, 1965.

¹¹⁶ Dirksen to Burpee, March 10, 1969.

¹¹⁷ Burpee to Dirksen, March 14, 1969.

¹¹⁸ Burpee to Dirksen, March 17, 1969. Dirksen turned the check over to the dinner committee—see Dirksen to Burpee and Dirksen to Nunn, March 20, 1969.

¹¹⁹ "A Senator's Notebook," March 19, 1969.

he live again?' He surely will, for the earth becomes vital all over again with spring."¹²⁰

As Dirksen's biographer wrote, "In time, his annual speech on behalf of the marigold became something of a ritual in the Senate, a harbinger of springtime. He pulled a crowd into the Senate every time he began a verbal rhapsody on the marigold."¹²¹

The last surviving exchange between the senator and the seed grower concerned a trivial matter. The May 2 delivery of plants to Dirksen's home took place when Dirksen was away—Burpee always sent a driver from Pennsylvania headquarters to handle the transaction. "I know what a long hard drive it is," Dirksen wrote, "and I would like to substantially thank him" by giving him "the brand of cigarettes he smokes."¹²² Burpee let the senator know that the driver did not smoke but would be thrilled to receive a note from the senator.¹²³ Dirksen complied, adding "a little token which is only a modest measure of our appreciation."¹²⁴

Summer passed with no action on the marigold resolution. The Senate recessed for the summer on August 12. Dirksen entered Walter Reed hospital on August 14 for further x-rays of a rapidly growing tumor on his right lung. He agreed to return on August 31 for surgery scheduled two days later. Although the operation was a success and Dirksen seemed poised for a good recovery, the post-operative situation deteriorated, and Everett McKinley Dirksen died on September 7, 1969, his wish to pass the marigold resolution unfulfilled. To mark his passing, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the rose's most prominent advocate, placed a single marigold on Dirksen's desk in the Senate chamber.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ "A Senator's Notebook," March 19, 1969.

¹²¹ Neil MacNeil, *Portrait of a Public Man* (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1970) 216.

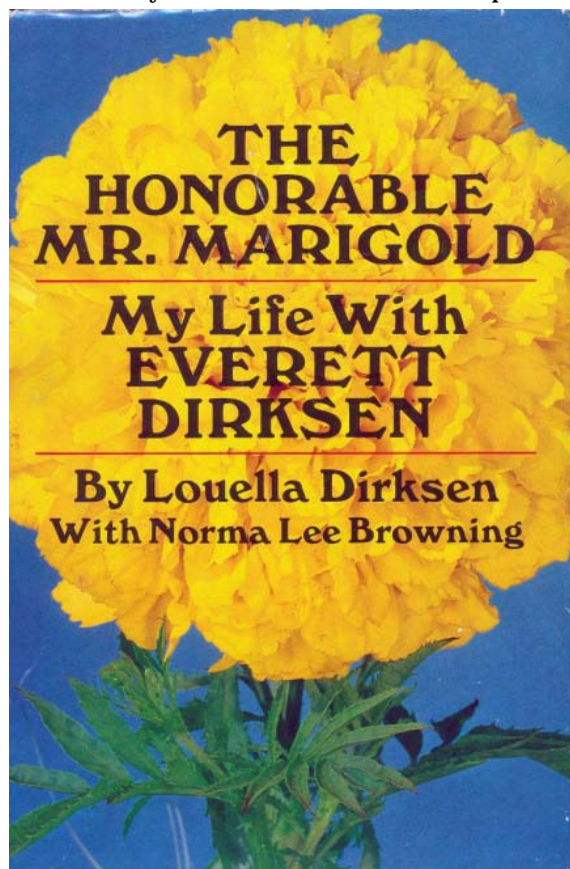
¹²² Dirksen to Burpee, May 5, 1969.

¹²³ Burpee to Dirksen, May 13, 1969.

¹²⁴ Dirksen to William Fleck, May 15, 1969.

¹²⁵ MacNeil, 390.

Although Everett McKinley Dirksen, “The Honorable Mr. Marigold” as Louella called him, may have been a reluctant recruit to the marigold cause in 1959, he endorsed it unreservedly at the end of his life. It was part



and parcel of his deeply felt adoration of all things floral. In a column never published, Dirksen made the point. An unidentified man had threatened to kill Dirksen in July 1968 for opposing a gun control bill. In contemplating an untimely end, Dirksen had written, “Birds and flowers are an integral part of my life. . . . All these feathered friends would miss me. And of course, the flowers would miss me—snap dragons, dahlias, petunias, geraniums, canna, zinnis, roses, gladiolus, lilies, gerbera daisies, shasta daisies, red and blue salvia, and of course the marigolds. They need me around.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ “Thoughts About Having Your Head Blown Off,” A Senator’s Notebook, ca. July 15, 1968, Dirksen Information File. Apparently never published.

Epilogue

Following Dirksen’s death, other Congress members introduced the marigold resolution in honor of the senator’s crusade. David Burpee continued to push, too. He bred a new, golden hybrid marigold and named it for the senator. The flower was introduced to the public for the first time at the Chicago World Flower and Garden Show in March 1970. Burpee described it as bearing large, golden blooms, sometimes measuring five inches across, in profusion on strong, stout stems. The company’s 1970 catalog, which would go to 2.5 million home gardeners, would feature a four color picture of the Senator Dirksen Marigold, Burpee promised.¹²⁷ Deprived of Dirksen’s presence, however, Burpee’s efforts to enact the famed “Marigold Resolution” fell short.

Finally, in 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation to make the rose the floral emblem of the United States.

Photograph credits

“Heart’s Desire”: Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Still Photographs, n.d. Places-19

David Burpee in marigolds:
<http://www.burpee.com/gardening/content/the-legacy-of-w.-atlee-burpee/legacy.html>.
Accessed August 18, 2011.

Dirksen and Margaret Chase Smith exchange favorite blossoms: Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Still Photographs, January 10, 1964.

Louella and Everett in their garden: Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Still Photographs, June 10, 1964. Credit: *Life Magazine*.

Dirksen tending to marigolds on Capitol Hill: Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Still Photographs, July 13, 1967.

¹²⁷ “In Memory of a Golden Senator,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1969.