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Press release - Muskie Warns that Air Pollution Act May Represent Nation's "Last Chance"

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

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MUSKIE WARNS THAT AIR POLLUTION ACT MAY REPRESENT NATION'S "LAST CHANCE"

Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D. Maine) warned a pollution seminar today that the National Air Quality Standards Act of 1970 "is possibly our last chance" to head off the disasters which increasing air pollution could bring.

"Unless we act--and act now--the smog alert throughout this country will eventually become death watches of the grimmest kind," Senator Muskie told the American Institute of Plant Engineers meeting in East Brunswick, New Jersey.

The public outcry which would result from that situation, he said in his prepared remarks, "would force Congress to enact crisis legislation of the most stringent variety--legislation which might provide for Federal pre-emption of state and local governmental authority...for Federal control over industry decision-making...or for nationalization itself.

"These are solutions that none of us wants. But they will be demanded unless we make the hard choices now that just might save us.

"Why do we need to police the way in which industry affects the air?" Senator Muskie asked. "Not because our industries are intentional sinners. But because we can no longer expect them to become intentional saints."

Turning to costs of air pollution, Senator Muskie said that "in hard economic terms, it has been estimated that a 50 percent reduction in air pollution in our major urban areas could save the country well over \$2 billion a year in medical costs and lost work days alone.

"But think of the human price," he added.

"That same 50 percent reduction could reduce deaths from bronchitis by up to 50 percent, deaths from lung cancer by 25 percent, and deaths from heart and blood vessel disorders by 20 percent."

Senator Muskie said the nation can no longer accept "business as usual. I do not suggest that we put companies out of business, repeal technology or return to a primitive state of nature," he added. "But I am convinced we can no longer continue to pay the price of a steady deterioration of the basic elements of life."

REMARKS BY
SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
AMERICAN INSTITUTE PLANT ENGINEERS
EAST BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

A century ago, the Massachusetts Board of Health--the first of its kind on the country--made the following declaration:

"We believe that all citizens have an inherent right to the enjoyment of pure and uncontaminated air and water and soil; that this right should be regarded as belonging to the whole community; and that no one should be allowed to reeapass upon it by his carelessness or his avarice or even by his ignorance."

We are finally beginning to appreciate that point of view--even those of us who have never flown up the East Coast from Washington, looking down through the smog.

The environmental point of view requires more than philosophy...more than poetry...more even than speeches.

It requires action--action that is prompt and decisive.

Too many Americans have a sense of drifting uncontrollably from problem to problem...of being dominated by events beyond their grasp...of facing challenges that our institutions--both public and private--seem unable to meet.

Our environmental problems have contributed greatly to that self-doubt and fear of what the future may hold.

For the nation which has--

- sent men into space;
- unlocked the mysteries of the atom;
- built the most powerful industrial base in the world--

has not yet halted the deterioration of its air, its water and its land.

And so the time has come to determine whether we still possess the courage, the ingenuity and the skill to pursue a common cause--not only of survival, but of a better life.

During the last decade, a number of us in the Senate began trying to shape an effective policy for the preservation and improvement of our environment.

We have worked at it--in every session.

And over the years, we have had to fight public apathy, overcome Presidential and Congressional reluctance to appropriate the necessary funds, and break down industry resistance.

As a result, we have not done nearly enough.

We have not even kept pace with the pollution.

And it is clear to me that we can no longer accept "business as usual."

I do not suggest that we--

- put companies out of business;
- repeal technology;
- or return to a primitive state of nature.

But I am convinced we can no longer continue to pay the price of a steady deterioration of the basic elements of life.

We need to change--

- our attitudes;
- our operations;
- and our standards of what is sufficient to protect the public health and what is

not.

Take, for example, the problem of air pollution.

Each year, over 200 million tons of pollutants are released into the air--

- soiling our clothes..our homes..and our lungs;
- destroying plant and animal life;
- threatening to change forever our atmosphere and our climate.

In hard economic terms, it has been estimated that a 50 percent reduction in air pollution in our major urban areas could save the country well over \$2 billion a year in medical costs and lost work days alone.

But think of the human price.

That same 50 percent reduction could reduce--

- deaths from bronchitis by up to 50 percent;
- deaths from lung cancer by 25 percent;
- deaths from heart and blood vessel disorders by 20 percent.

And we all know that no single statistic or set of statistics can really explain what it feels like to take a breath of fresh air.

For all the progress we have taken pride in--

- technological advances;
- industrial development;
- material comforts--

our fathers and their fathers before them filled their lungs with better air than we now have at our disposal.

Unless we act--and act now--the smog alerts throughout this country will eventually become death watches of the grimmest kind.

And the public outcry which would result would force Congress to enact crisis legislation of the most stringent variety--legislation which might provide for Federal preemption of state and local governmental authority...for Federal control over industry decision-making...or for nationalization itself.

These are solutions that none of us wants.

But they will be demanded, unless we make the hard choices now that just might save us.

That is why we voted yesterday--in the Senate--for the National Air Quality Standards Act of 1970.

The critics of that Act are right in some of the things they say.

This Act does put industry under pressure.

This Act will cost money and time and effort.

This Act may ultimately close down the worst offenders.

But this Act is necessary.

It is sensible.

It is possibly our last chance.

And so--with respect to stationary sources of pollution--industrial plants of every description--the Act--

- establishes national ambient air quality standards for major contaminants that must be met by national deadlines;
- provides rigorous national standards of performance for newly-constructed sources of pollution;
- grants authority to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare to prohibit completely the emission of hazardous substances.

Why do we need to police the way in which industry affects the air?

Not because our industries are intentional sinners.

But because we can no longer expect them to become intentional saints.

Obviously, if this Act becomes law, your responsibilities will be greater than ever--

- to your employers;
- to your communities;
- to your families and yourselves.

For air pollution spares no individual. It recognizes no geographic boundaries. And it is subject to no immediate remedy.

I recognize that the requirements of the Act will be difficult to meet.

But American industry--its technological know-how and its managerial ability--has been challenged in the past.

And it has not fallen short.

At the beginning of World War II, President Roosevelt set a goal of building 100,000 new planes a year.

The doubters said it couldn't be done.

But it was, and we won the war.

At the start of the last decade, President Kennedy set a goal of landing a man on the moon by 1970.

The skeptics said it couldn't be done.

But it was, and we began to conquer space.

Now, for example, in this Act, we have set a goal of developing a 90-percent cleaner car by 1975.

Industry doubts whether this goal can be met.

But it must be--and we shall all breathe easier again.

In 1968, moving sources were responsible for more than 42 percent of the total emissions of the five major air pollutants--including 64% of the carbon monoxide and 50% of the hydrocarbons.

That is no way to run the automotive industry.

The auto manufacturers have told us that Americans cannot live without the automobile.

We are telling them, if that is so, then make an automobile with which Americans can live.

None of us can afford a casual and relaxed attitude toward problems that only grow more burdensome with every passing day.

We are all running out of time.

And the legislation on which we are staking our common future must deal with those problems--

- with businesslike precision;
- with fixed targets;
- and with tough performance standards.

Remember--this is only a single aspect of the whole environmental challenge facing us at the beginning of the 1970's.

Don't forget--

- electric power--a serious pollution risk as well as an indispensable source of energy;

- or oil--the potential and actual desecrator of oceans and shorelines and wildlife as well as an unmatched source of fuel;

- or nuclear power--an environmental hazard of the first magnitude as well as the most likely supplier of the massive amounts of energy we shall need in the future.

It should be obvious to us by now that the problems of the environment require more from us than a determination to clean up the mess we have created, although that is important.

We must also--at this point in time--start changing the very habits that permitted us to abuse our environment in the first place.

After all, each of you is concerned with these problems far beyond the scope of your professional lives.

You and your families breathe dirty air. You vacation beside dying lakes. You travel on crowded roads.

You feel the side effects of uncontrolled technology--and yet you are certainly not prepared to give up the comforts of contemporary life.

So we must work together--

- to develop rational and orderly methods of planning for the future;
- to adopt meaningful and enforceable criteria;
- to achieve economic progress and environmental improvement.

And to avoid the apocalypse which James Thurber once warned us about:

"Man is flying too fast for a world that is round. Soon he will catch up with himself, in a great rear-end collision, and man will never know what hit man from behind was man."

Thank you.
