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Statement before the Democratic Policy Council's Committee on Human Environment

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
BEFORE THE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE
ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1970

One of the most troubling aspects of our national mood is the crisis in confidence which afflicts too many Americans in all walks of life. It is a crisis marked by self-doubt, by a fear that our problems may be greater than our capacity to solve them, that our public and private institutions may be inadequate at a time when we need them most.

Our environmental problems have contributed heavily to that self-doubt and fear. A nation which has been able to conquer the far reaches of space, which has unlocked the mysteries of the atom, and which has an enormous reserve of economic power, technological genius, and managerial skills seems incapable of halting the steady deterioration of our air, water and land.

Our response to this environmental challenge will reflect the depth of our commitment and our faith: in our institutions, in our capacity to find answers to difficult economic and technological problems, and in our willingness to make difficult choices.

In the final analysis, our success in repairing the environment will depend less on our technological skills and imagination and more on our readiness to make new choices.

First, we should all recognize that a clean, healthy environment will not come cheap. The air pollution bill that was passed by the Senate two days ago will cost four times more to operate in fiscal 1973 than the President requested for the program for this fiscal year.

That may seem like a lot, but this year the President asked for almost three times as much money for the SST as he asked for air pollution control.

What did he request for water pollution control? This year the President asked for \$800 million. The Congress said that was not enough, and appropriated \$1 billion. Again, this may seem like a lot, but not in light of the President's other requests -- \$3.4 billion for the space program or \$7.3 billion for arms research and development.

Billions for arms, space and the SST...small change for our water and air. That is big spending...and bad spending. Here we must make new choices...we must show a new commitment.

Spending the money to clean up the past mess is only the first of the new commitments we must make. At the same time, we must start changing our attitudes that permitted this environmental abuse in the first place.

For example, electric utilities have been regulated -- inadequately in many cases -- by State commissions and the Federal Power Commission with respect to rates.

But few commissions have told the utility companies where they can or cannot build their plants, where they can or cannot run their transmission lines, how large their reserves must be, or how they should interconnect.

We have taken electric power for granted.

We use it to improve the quality of our lives.

We have assumed it will be there when we need it. We have assumed that it is clean. We have assumed that those who supply it will respond to our needs. And we have assumed that someone in government somewhere is looking after our electric power interests.

Now we know...that it is not always there when we need it...that it is not very clean...that the companies do not respond to our needs...and that no one in government anywhere is effectively looking after our interests.

What does all of this mean for the human environment?

It means that we are in danger of massive power shortages and failures, not just brownouts.

It means that we are losing the race between the capacity of people to use electricity and the capacity of our nation to supply it.

It means that electric power is responsible for about 14 percent of our air pollution.

It means that the people have become environmentally conscious and will not permit electric power plants in their backyards.

And it means that our planning and protection in this area is a national disgrace. We are at the state of the first incandescent lightbulb.

All level of government have failed to fashion the tools to deal with this crisis.

Local & State governments have failed to work out regional plans. The Federal Power Commission has not faced up to the need for a national power network. And the Nixon Administration still has not delivered on its promise of a national power policy, nor has it offered any leadership.

This crisis could stop America in its tracks. Only a public demand for national policy to cope with it can head us in the right direction, and that is the only way to effectively look after our interests.

The electric power industry is only one of many American industries with a double edge. On the one hand, they improve the quality of our lives...and on the other hand, they degrade the quality of our environment. This double edge is not unavoidable...and we can no longer afford it.

The new choices we must make to protect our environment involve new directions and new philosophies.

In the past, the double edge of American industry has forced us to make a choice between a clean environment and economic growth.

It is time we demanded the advantages of both...it is time to discard the double edge, and to follow the lead of the National Air Quality Standards Act of 1970 just passed by the Senate. That Act tells American industry...

-- that nothing is more important to the American people than our health and the quality of our environment;

-- that business as usual is no longer acceptable;

--and that we refuse to pay the price of a continued deterioration in the quality of our lives.

Why do we need to police the way in which industry affects our health and our environment? Not because our industries are intentional sinners, but because we can no longer expect them to become intentional saints.

Earlier in my statement I spoke of commitment and faith...and of a willingness to make difficult choices.

The only way to conquer our doubts and fears...to halt the deterioration in the quality of our environment...is to talk sense about what is important to the American people...to spend our dollars wisely...and to stand up to those who would continue to degrade the environment and tell them it is time to stop.

These are the new choices, the new directions and the new commitments the Democratic Party can offer.
