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## Kick-Off Rally - Tampa, Florida

Edmund S. Muskie

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TRANSCRIPT

ADDRESS BY SEN. EDMUND S. MUSKIE  
TAMPA, FL - KICK-OFF RALLY  
JANUARY 7, 1972

Thank you very much. Thank you very much Louie, Carol and my good friends of the west coast of Florida.

I guess the campaign has really begun. (APPLAUSE)

A reporter asked me today whether I felt any differently since I became a formal candidate for president three days ago--I guess it's three days ago. And I wasn't able to give him any difference, but I think I'm beginning to because last night in New Hampshire and tonight here in Florida I found that people are beginning to reach out to touch the message, as they see it, of particular candidates.

For three years now I've been traveling this country in a non-candidate status, trying to test myself, trying to feel the sense of the country with respect to what our future ought to be.

You know, years ago Adlai Stevenson told a story that's always been one of my favorites. He stood before an audience and gave one of his typically eloquent speeches. And at his conclusion an enthusiast in the back of the room jumped to his feet and said, "Governor, every thinking man and woman in America will vote for you." Stevenson's reply was, "Thank you very much but that isn't good enough. I need a majority." (LAUGHTER & APPLAUSE)

The thing that strikes me about what is happening in this country, and it's becoming visible, increasingly visible, since I became an announced candidate, is that I'm beginning to understand what more and more Americans are thinking about the future of our country. What it ought to be and what it isn't today. I've never had quite that sense of a people before.

You know, I've been a candidate for public office for a quarter of a century. But never prior to 1968 have I...have I been involved in campaigns which so involve the emotions and the deeply felt feelings of a people.

You know, one of the objectives--and may I say at the out-set that I'm not going to make a cheerleading speech tonight. Oh, I could say the cheerleading lines. I can say that we're going to win next November, and we are! (APPLAUSE) I could say, and I will, that we're going to elect a new president next November! (APPLAUSE) And I could say, and I will that next January, a year from this one, we're going to begin to set this country on the right course. (APPLAUSE) And having said that, now let me talk seriously about what's really involved.

Let me do it in this way. This year candidates for the presidency face a total of 23 state primary elections, beginning on March 7 in New Hampshire and ending in June in New York. And Florida, of course as you all so well know, is the second. Now there are two approaches to this challenge. A reporter asked me today, "Well now, what do you think the people will be saying in these 23 primaries?" The dilemma that a candidate faces is this: that the people in each of these 23 states have a different perception of where their day-to-day interests lie. The people in each of these 23 states have a different standard by which to measure a candidate in terms of their own self-interest.

And so the easy appeal, and the one that's traditional to American politics, is to say to the people in each state, in each of these 23 states, what the candidate thinks that they would like to hear. Alright, that's the first road that's open to a candidate.

What is the second? The second one is to identify, or to try to identify the shared interests of the people of all 23 states, indeed of all 50 states. To try to make clear to the people in each state how their best interests are related to our common interests as a country. That is more difficult and more complicated.

Now the practical politicians say to me, "Senator, you ought to go into Florida and you ought to promise those people this. Then you ought to go into New Hampshire and you ought to promise those people that. State by state, you ought to find the specific things, the specific projects that would persuade those people to vote for you. If you do that, you can put together enough people in each state to give you a victory." Well, that's a temptation, if all I were concerned with is winning elections.

But I didn't announce for president this week simply for the purpose of winning elections. I announced for president because I want to try to lead a country. (APPLAUSE)

It's my responsibility to lay down the terms. If I do not do it in ways that appeal to you, then it's your prerogative to say no. If I understand my responsibilities, I can only hope that you understand yours.

In undertaking to lay down my terms, I will try to be sensitive to what I perceive, after three years of traveling through this country, perceive what our American people want for the future of our country. Do we want a country of people, however different, who find it possible to work together? Or do we want a country of different kinds of people, each of them fighting to pursue their own self-interest? Which is the better choice? I'll say to you in all frankness that given the mood of the country today and the division and the doubts and the suspicions, that the inclination of most Americans is to pursue their own narrow...narrowly perceived self-interests--whether white or black, young or old, Southerners, Northerners, Easterners or Westerners. I've never seen a time in my lifetime when people are more likely to withdraw into their own group than at this time in American life and I say to you, that isn't good enough. That simply isn't good enough. (APPLAUSE)

If I have to come down to Florida and get your vote by demonstrating to you that I am, at heart, nothing more than a Southerner, then I don't want your vote. (APPLAUSE) But if I can come down here and get your vote by persuading you that, first of all, I want to be an American, and that I want your vote because you want to be an American, then I'll take that vote. (APPLAUSE)

For three years I've been reading editorials in southern newspapers saying to me: Senator, why don't you show an interest in the South? Why don't you come down here and talk to us? Why don't you come down here and understand your problems? Well, I happen to have been doing that for a long time. But as I see your problems, and what is necessary to deal with them, the answer is no different, essentially, than it is for the people of Maine, or New England, or the Midwest, or the Far West or the Southwest. Because a very simple answer to the question, "Why has America become a great nation" is this: the people have been able and have found it possible to advance their own interests by advancing the general interest of all of us. We've done that in our best moments, we've fallen short of it in our worst moments--at the present time we're in one of our worst periods.

Now that isn't to say that we aren't a great country. We are. We have great resources, great power--if that's what counts. In addition to that we really have, despite our present doubts, a great tradition, successful tradition, in the practice of the arts of freedom in a way that includes life for each citizen. We haven't done it fully or completely, but we've got a better case for this country than in other country in the history of man. And so I think that if I am elected president, my objective would be to try to advance the interests of every American of every group of Americans, whoever you are, anywhere in this country. But if you want me only to be concerned with your problems and no one else's, then find another candidate. (APPLAUSE)

Now I happen to believe that Florida is a great state, that Florida has made a great contribution to our country's welfare, as well as the welfare of this state and this region. And I happen to believe that Florida can make an even greater contribution to the future of our country in positive, enlightened, constructive ways that would improve the lives of your people and strengthen our country. And I believe that deeply. And I believe it because you've demonstrated it. As a matter of fact, you've attracted a great many people from my own state who now live here. And they must have done it for a reason. And a lot of them are here today.

You know, we have a saying in Maine: you're either a Mainiac or a State of Mainer. You may like to know what the difference is. Well, if you're born in Maine and still live there, you're a State of Mainer. But if you were born a Mainer and left, you're a Mainiac. The one exception is: unless you've come to Florida. (APPLAUSE)

Florida represents so many interesting things in facets of American life. It is a place where so many older Americans retire and try to build something of their remaining future. And so their problem; which is the problem of old people all across this country, should touch our hearts and be of concern to us.

Florida is a place which, in recent years, has moved into the space age, and you brought into your midst here all of the skills and the know-how and the experience and the techniques and the systems which have made the space age possible. That's a very great resource, a very great resource, which has a narrower potential application than simply the space industry. We need that kind of skill, that kind of know-how, that kind of approach to deal with so many of the very real problems of our country--cleaning up the environment, mass transportation, the government of our cities, the building of housing with....which can be within the reach of even the poorest of our people--and so on down the line. We need the skills and know-how and ability that the people of Florida, which have been assembled here for one reason or another, to apply them to problems like this.

The South also, of course, is a great playground in the winter. Well, what you do in times of play ought not to be the concern of the government, so we won't get into that. We'll let you manage that yourselves.

But I say to you that Florida proves, above all else--and increasingly it's proving this, whatever the exceptions in the past--that different kinds of people, white and black, young and old, from all regions of the country can live in the same place, share the same resources, share the same values and hopes and dreams, and somehow work together. Sometimes haltingly, sometimes with friction, but eventually in the long run successfully, to work out their common problems and to advance their common interests. And indeed, you're doing it better than many of us in the North. Because some of the new....some of the problems that are old to you are new to us and are just erupting in explosive ways up there. So there's much we can learn from you with respect to the racial problem. Not that you've always handled it perfectly, because you haven't. And not because we have because we haven't. But you've had a longer experience in it and your beginning to move



through it into a healthy relationship between your peoples here. And that's what we've got to achieve in the North.

Now there are those who say to me, you know, how are you going to solve the remaining problems? How are you going to bring quality education to all children? How are you going to break down the other remaining discriminations? And I say to you that the imperfection of the means is not so important as the importance of the result. There is no comfortable way to deal with any of the great problems that face us whether it's the war in Southeast Asia, or the question of working out the Middle East problem, or stabilizing the nuclear arms race in the...in the SALT negotiations, or governing our cities, or working out the racial problems or meeting the hopes and expectations and doubts of our young people. I don't care what problem it is, the tough ones can rise to the presidential level, there's no comfortable way to solve any one of them. And when any presid....presidential candidate comes to you and tells you there's...there's an easy way, a comfortable way, a way that doesn't impose any burdens or hardships upon you, you turn away from that candidate as fast as you can turn, because he's wrong. (APPLAUSE)

President Nixon has demonstrated how hard it is to end the war. He promised us three years ago and he's still trying to explain why we're still there. And that performance isn't good enough--that's too uncomfortable for any of us to absorb. (APPLAUSE)

And he's also demonstrated how hard it is, you know, to come to grips with inflation and unemployment. All he's succeeded is make both work. Well, that's too uncomfortable for any of us. We can do better than that. (APPLAUSE)

And he's demonstrated also that it isn't easy to bring Americans together. And he's demonstrated that best of all. And his failure in that respect is the best reason to vote against him next November. The President of the United States....(APPLAUSE) because a President of the United States who cannot instinctively reach out and touch the hearts, the minds, the problems, the feeling of aloneness of every human being under his jurisdiction isn't fit to be president of this country.

You know, Alan King, the comedian--I'm sure you all know him--said something the other night that struck home to me. He said, "Why is it, why is it that we can't have a president that we can like and respect and look up to?" Let me put the question in a different way. I've lived, you know, on this planet 57 years and I can remember a time when I wouldn't have asked this question. Why is it that we can't somehow put our country together in a way that we can all love it and be willing to fight for it and die for it without question, if need be? Why not? We have in the past. We don't now, too many of us, because the country is headed in the wrong direction. Because it represents the wrong policies, because it isn't perceived by too many of our people as being responsive to their needs and to their voices. But I say to you that instinctively this country is that kind of a country. It has been that kind of a country for most of my life and because it is I'm here as a candidate for President of the United States.

When I was a boy it would have been inconceivable that someone like me would be standing here tonight appealing to the citizens of the west coast of Florida for your support in a pursuit of the presidency of the United States. It would have been incredible, it would have been a political miracle, and yet I'm here. And I intend to go the rest of the way, I might say. (APPLAUSE)

But more important than that is the reason why I want to do it. I want to do it so that once again Americans, whoever they are, wherever they live--black, white, North, South, East, West, young, old--will be neighbors once again. Because I happen to believe that it is the peculiar destiny of this country to prove something that may be beyond the

reach of any other country on this planet. I think it is the peculiar destiny of this country to prove and to demonstrate that justice--full justice--is within the reach of even the least member of our country. That I happen to believe is what the United States has represented, that I happen to believe is why I'm here. And it is this ideal and this target which I would like to give to them as President of the United States.

Now if you'll buy me on those terms, I promise you that life will be better in Florida, that life will be better in Maine, that life will be better in California and in every other one of the 50 states. So if you'll go with me, follow me, support me--and I can't do any of it without it--I promise you that kind of a future. You may not always agree with the means I choose, you may not always agree with my judgment--and I promise you that I'll make mistakes. But I'll also promise you this: that I will never waver from this goal in response to anybody's pressure for any reason, because I am going to do my best as president to work toward domestic peace at home, to work to help making the United States a symbol of peace around this planet. Because I think without peace we cannot do this job. (APPLAUSE)

So that's my commitment to you. I appologize for not making a cheerleading speech, but let me say to you that you've filled me with great good cheer here tonight.

Thank you all. (APPLAUSE)