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Press Release - Muskie Urges Change in Rule 22, Asks Administration Backing

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

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MUSKIE URGES CHANGE IN RULE 22, ASKS ADMINISTRATION BACKING

Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) today called for a change in the Senate rules limiting debates as a "substantial step" toward erasing the public's "widespread lack of confidence in government."

He also urged that the President "publicly and forcefully back the efforts of those who are attempting to modernize the Senate procedures," and he chided the Vice President's "failure to join our effort."

In remarks prepared for delivery in the Senate debate on changing rule 22, Senator Muskie supported a revision which would permit three-fifths, rather than two-thirds of those present and voting to invoke cloture. He told his colleagues that "Congress cannot rigidly adhere to rules and practices that no longer serve any meaningful purpose and that hinder its work if it is to continue to be a responsible branch of government and to enjoy the confidence of our people..."

"Today I sense that there is a mood toward our government--and Congress in particular--of cynicism, discouragement and resignation borne of a conviction that reform will not come. There is a growing feeling that we cannot provide solutions to our common problems."

Senator Muskie outlined as the crucial question whether one-third of the Senate should "be granted an absolute veto over every piece of legislation that comes before this body? The answer, in my opinion, is no."

Such a veto delays the Senate in coping with yesterday's challenges and often completely prohibits it from anticipating tomorrow's. As Senator Muskie added: "The cost of delay is often staggering. For example, had we been able to meet the challenges of the civil rights movement more rapidly, if we had granted equal rights more quickly, I am convinced that much of today's violence and disillusion among black people would not have developed. A majority was ready to act, but it could not."

In assessing the chances of building the two-thirds majority to bring about a vote on the question, Senator Muskie said, "The prospects...may rest in large measure upon the vote-gathering efforts of the White House. I hope the President will publicly and forcefully back the efforts of those who are attempting to modernize the Senate procedures."

"In the past two years, the Administration has on occasion blamed Congress for a failure to respond to its legislative programs. And no doubt, if the President's program does not move forward, we shall hear more of this. It seems to me incumbent upon an administration which asks so much responsiveness from Congress to help reform procedures so that programs cannot be stopped by a small minority."

Mr. Muskie said that the Vice President's "failure to issue even an advisory opinion on the appropriate procedures needed to revise Rule 22 not only represents a rejection of the position of the then-Vice President Humphrey in 1969 but also is a retreat from the stance President Nixon took as Vice President in 1958...In the light of the President's suggestion of January 5 of this year that Congress revise its "'turn of the century' work schedules and procedures" coupled with a bitter attack on our legislative record, the Vice President has a heavy burden of responsibility which he has evaded."