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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at New Jersey Victory Dinner

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
NEW JERSEY VICTORY DINNER
CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY - MARCH 16, 1971

I am delighted to take part in this tribute to my classmate and friend, Pete Williams.

Last year about this time, I read a newspaper story that said the Republicans were pretty confident about beating Pete Williams. The Republican National Committee had done some surveys, and they thought he was vulnerable. There would be a well-heeled campaign against him, and it was even possible that they might send in that terror of the radic-libs, that scourge of the effete snobs, the Vice President himself. The word was that Mr. Agnew might come to New Jersey and bomb Pete Williams with a dictionary.

The Republicans had left two factors out of their computers. The first was the basic good sense of the New Jersey voters. The second was the Williams record in the Senate. Pete was confident on both counts. He had every reason to be.

The people of New Jersey know that Pete cares. In twelve years in the Senate, he has fought for those whom American society has forgotten or ignored -- the migrant workers and their families, the miners, the old, the wage earners threatened by joblessness on the one hand and inflation on the other.

His career symbolizes, for me, what a public servant can do who keeps his eye on the main thing -- improving the conditions of life and work for the striving majority of Americans. Achieving that takes skill, patience, and understanding. Most of all, it takes daring and commitment.

Last week, I attended an African-American Conference in Lagos, Nigeria. That conference was highlighted by the presence and the contribution of a great American whose voice is now stilled.

Whitney Young, a vigorous, rational, dedicated, caring man, who spoke for Black Americans with compassion and force, was a leader in that conference. He was not concerned with sparring or debating points. He was not concerned with proving that he was the most visible spokesman for a point of view. He was concerned with the needs of his people and the conscience of America.

Throughout his life, Whitney Young was committed to opening new doors of opportunity for Black Americans who needed jobs, education, housing and better health care. He was committed to securing rights long promised but not delivered to millions of Americans -- the right to vote, the right to freedom from fear, the right to equality in fact as well as in law. He was committed to an American foreign policy which was consistent with the goals of our Constitution.

Whitney Young spoke for the soul of America -- not simply for Blacks, but for all Americans who believe that a democracy exists to meet the needs of all its citizens -- not for things as they are, but for what should be -- not for neat and orderly designs to avoid trouble, but for life and vitality and hope for all our people.

That spirit should light America's future. That spirit is what moves men like Pete Williams -- men who have the skill, and who care deeply about the future of America.

Two months ago, President Nixon delivered his address on the State of the Union. He described what he called a "New American Revolution." He called for sharing federal revenues with the states, and for reorganizing the departments of government. There was some splendid rhetoric about the greatness of America. There was talk about the need to return decision-making powers to local instruments of government.

It is hard to take exception to much of this. The cities and states need additional revenues. That is certain. There is plenty of inefficiency and duplication of effort in the federal government. That is obvious. America is great, to be sure. And healthy, responsible government at the local level is important.

But I tell you, my friends, America needs something more than greater efficiency. America needs something more than a reorganization of its bureaucracy. America needs more than a shifting of responsibilities from national to local government.

America needs to be called to complete its human business. It needs to be reminded that affluence is hollow where millions are still suffering in poverty. It needs to be warned that efficiency is an empty virtue unless it has a purpose. More than it needs tidy organization, it needs unswerving commitment.

You will search that State of the Union Address in vain for a call to renewed commitment. You will not discover in it any sign that the President is disturbed by the cruel inequities beneath the prosperous surface of American life. You will hear the voice of the manager, not of the leader. You will sense his concern with improving the engine--not his convictions about where the people and their government should be going.

I do not accuse the Administration of not caring. But in my judgment what it cares about, and what this country needs, are two different things. An Administration whose strongest legislative efforts have been in behalf of Harold Carswell and the SST has got its priorities wrong. A President whose principal legislative victories have been sustaining his vetoes of health and employment programs has not set his sights very high.

The Administration made a great deal, when it came into office, of its intention to but back on all that Democratic rhetoric about social change. What it has substituted is Republican rhetoric about administrative efficiency. Maybe we Democrats talked too much about committing this nation to social change. But I would rather stand with those whose consciences trouble them so long as men are out of work -- than with those whose chief concern is with re-drawing the organization charts.

So let us reorganize, yes. Let us find ways of putting more revenues, more efficiently, into the hands of local governments. But for the country's sake, let us get on with the main task of improving the lives of our people. America needs more than managerial lectures; it needs moral leadership.

We need leadership which understands the need to restore the trust and confidence of the American people --

- in the economy
- in our national purpose
- in each other

How can they be confident?

When the slack in our productive capacity stands at 50 billion dollars; when business executives and skilled engineers are in line for food stamps; when wholesale prices climb 9/10ths of 1 percent in February alone, is it any wonder that people are uncertain and discontent?

We are faced with continuing discord between business and labor. We are faced with rising welfare costs and dwindling revenues in our states and cities. We are faced with growing tensions among people with jobs and people without jobs.

More than 300,000 American veterans of the Vietnam war are without jobs. In the city of New York, 4,000 of them applied for work in January. The State Employment Service found places for 1,400. What confidence the others must have in their nation's economy. What confidence they must have in their government's ability to do what it can, and in the ability of business to do what it can.

Unemployment is a damaging way of life, for all Americans. So is rampant inflation a damaging way of life, for all Americans.

But we have the power to change these things, if we try.

I believe we must take the following steps:

First, we must invest the billion dollars which Congress appropriated last year for housing, for water and sewer improvements, for urban mass transit. These investments could rapidly create another 200,000 jobs.

Second, we must send to the President an increase in social security benefits of 10 percent. Ten percent would do little more than help the elderly meet the rise in living costs since 1969. The difference between 10 percent and the 6 percent which the administration has urged would cut at least another quarter point off the unemployment rate.

Third, we must accelerate some of the personal income tax cuts now scheduled for 1972 and 1973. The estimated savings of 4.5 billion dollars could stimulate the creation of at least half a million jobs.

Fourth, we must enact a public service employment program. State and local governments today could offer more than 250,000 new jobs, if they had the resources. Jobs in the areas of public safety and health care and pollution control should not be characterized as "dead end" jobs, certainly not by a President who promised to halt inflation without increasing unemployment.

What our people need and what they want is a growing America --

-- A growing America will provide opportunity for all her people -- of all descriptions

-- A growing America will need and use the skills, the labor, and the potential of all her people -- of all descriptions

-- A growing America can improve the lives and offer promise to all her people -- of all descriptions.

A growing America is the best answer to the problems of inflation and unemployment -- because a growing America will put buying power into the hands of all her people and produce the goods and services they require.

A growing America will have the capacity to use her resources effectively, to deal justly with all her people, and, in the process, enhance and protect the quality of our environment.

And how can America grow? -- By making it possible for her people to grow -- each of them.

America's greatness has never rested in the present, but rather, in her promise for the future.

America's greatness has never rested in the status quo, but upon her capacity to improve upon it.

And that is our challenge.

It is a pleasure to join you in celebrating the victory of one who has kept his priorities straight -- and who has helped many thousands of his fellow citizens live more hopeful and fruitful lives. I hope to be here six years from now to repeat those words, with even greater cause.

Pete, I salute you.
