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Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Merv Griffin Show

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Merv Griffin

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SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE ON
MERV GRIFFIN SHOW
LOS ANGELES
SHOWN JANUARY 26, 1971

QUESTION: HOW LARGE IS MAINE IN COMPARISON WITH CALIFORNIA?

ANSWER: It is a little larger than this audience.

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL STATE.

Well, the thing that you notice about Maine is that there aren't that many people. I understand that you go up there once in a while.

QUESTION: To visit Jud Strunk.

ANSWER: And I understand you had apple pie made with tomatoes.

QUESTION: YES, THEY COOK, HOW SHOULD I PUT IT, IN A VERY INTERESTING WAY IN MAINE. APPLE PIE WITH GREEN TOMATOES. DID YOU EVER TASTE THAT?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: IF YOU TASTE IT, YOU WILL BE ON ANOTHER AROUND THE WORLD TRIP. YOU'VE REALLY BEEN TRAVELING, HAVEN'T YOU?

ANSWER: Yes, not around the world in today's terms. We went around the Roman World -- Israel, Egypt, Moscow and Germany -- in between the sessions of the Congress. It was really a great experience. I wanted to see whether or not it was possible to talk to the leaders of those countries in a kind of man to man, passionate and realistic way.

QUESTION: IS IT POSSIBLE?

ANSWER: Yes, it is. I don't mean to suggest by that you just snap at any agreements with them because you don't. They are tough about their points of view and I had to be.....

QUESTION: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO TALK TO A WOMAN LEADER? DO YOU HAVE THE SENSE THAT IT IS A WOMAN FIRST AND THEN A POLITICIAN?

ANSWER: How do I answer that first question? I'll have trouble no matter which way I answer.

QUESTION: I'LL GET YOU ON THE WOMEN'S LIB FAST.

ANSWER: Well, she is a very impressive lady. And also a very impressive leader. Maybe that's the way I'll answer it. She is obviously very sensitive about her responsibilities and she has some rare skills.

QUESTION: SHE'S FROM MILWAUKEE.

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: NOW THIS BRINGS UP AN INTERESTING POINT. IF YOU WERE THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE -- AND I'M NOT SUGGESTING ANY CONCERN --

ANSWER: I'm making no announcement tonight.

QUESTION: -- WOULD YOU EVER CONSIDER A WOMAN FOR SECOND PLACE ON YOUR TICKET?

ANSWER: Well, I might have to take my wife.

QUESTION: I MEAN ANOTHER RUNNING MATE.

ANSWER: I think the day is coming when, well, actually it's here. I don't have anyone in mind now, other than my wife. As a matter of fact, I don't have anyone in mind, even in the talking stage.

QUESTION: BUT A WOMAN IS A POSSIBILITY?

ANSWER: I think so and I think it is the example of people like Mrs. Mair, who come along from time to time who give us confidence that women have the qualities.

QUESTION: OR MAYBE THEY HAVE BETTER QUALITIES.

ANSWER: Well, we haven't done such a hot job, after all.

QUESTION: THINK ABOUT IT: QUALIFICATIONS ARE NOT MEASUREMENTS. WE ARE ALL VERY CURIOUS SIR, ABOUT THE NEW PRESIDENT OF EGYPT. DID YOU MEET WITH HIM?

ANSWER: Yes, we had a very interesting, in many ways it was the most exciting meeting. He invited us to come to his country house which I think was formerly the Palace of King Farouk, who isn't around any more. And he invited Mrs. Muskie to come, too, because Mrs. Sadat was interested in having her come. So it was just like visiting a neighbor. Two girls sat in one corner of the room and chatted and we sat in the other corner of the room talking man's talk.

Mr. Sadat is unknown and he was unknown to me and I think we tended, at least I tended, to think of him as a figurehead, but he's not. He is a person of great personal force and charm and deep passions and convictions about his country's interest. We talked very frankly and freely about what he believed in, what he regarded as his country's minimal requirements regarding the Mideastern conflict. And he was willing to listen to me no matter how hard my opinions were. So we had a good hard exchange for almost two hours.

We didn't settle anything, after all I didn't represent our government. It wasn't my place to negotiate a settlement but I got a real feel for the depth of his convictions and what I thought he might be flexible on as we consider a settlement. And he is an impressive individual and I got a great deal of -- I don't know as you'd call it enjoyment, because it was serious business. I found it a most satisfying discussion, one in which I thought he listened to my point of view. The Egyptians, you know, have, on a people-to-people basis, a very strong rapport with Americans and we sort of regret....(INAUDIBLE). He said he has no confidence with respect to our policies toward Egypt.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE) ABOUT BEN GURION.

ANSWER: He chose this place, a place which he was going to retire when he finally did. He retired with his wife and lived there until she died and he lives in an old wooden house. Wood is very scarce in Israel....

So I went down and visited him. And here he is, at the age of 84, 85 or 86, and as vital and alive as any man can be.

QUESTION: ANYTHING PARTICULAR YOU CAN REMEMBER?

ANSWER: I remember at the very end, we talked about war, the dangers of war, the possibility of a Russian-Chinese conflict and the Middle East conflict and all these controversial things. He wanted to leave me, I think, with an inspiring message. He said, "I'd like to summarize Judaism for you. He said, I can do it in three sentences: the first, there is but one God; the second, love thy neighbor; and the third, love the truth and the peace." You see, that sums it up. He said this is what mankind has been striving for all these thousands of years and we have to keep striving for it. He plans to. He is writing a book now and when he finishes that one he plans another one at the age of 86.

QUESTION: ISN'T IT A SHAME, SIRE, THAT WE HAVE TO KEEP ARMING OURSELVES TO ENSURE PEACE?

ANSWER: This is what I wanted to talk to Mr. Kosygin about in the Soviet Union. I wanted to tell him that there was a strong body of opinion in the United States -- indeed I find that includes the majority of Americans -- who are concerned not only about the cost of armaments, the escalating cost of armaments but also about the consequences for peace and for the capacity to deal with day-to-day problems of human beings on this planet, of resources being diverted to armaments.

I knew that Mr. Kosygin especially was concerned about this and always demonstrated in his domestic policies. And indeed his discussion during that four-hour talk we had related in many ways to the hopes he had to developing resources of his country. He is concerned about the ecology, about pollution. We talked about Lake Baikal, that marvelous body of water in deepest Siberia which to me -- I visited it about 12 years ago -- was one of the marvels. He was concerned about its possible pollution. So I thought that this message might make an impact. Now again I wasn't there to work at solving problems, because I didn't have official capacity to do that.

QUESTION: I BET YOU WERE SURPRISED AT THE AMOUNT OF TIME HE GAVE YOU?

ANSWER: I was surprised at the amount of time he gave me. But he was interested in talking about it because I told him we were concerned about the cost of armaments and in the Congress we were trying to do something about it, that we reduced the President's own budget this year and we were trying to divert these resources to the more constructive domestic purposes that we perceive.

I pointed out how in our view the cost of armaments related to such problems as Vietnam, Middle East and the Berlin talks to change the status of that city, the SALT talks to reduce and stabilize nuclear armaments -- and how all this related and tied them together and how the Middle East problem was poison to our relationships and the possibilities of working our agreements on the limitation of armaments.

I wanted him to know first-hand from me that there was a body of people in the United States with the hope that would influence him. You know statesmen who represent their countries ought to understand that they are dealing not only with governments, which tend to represent one point of view at the time, but that there is usually another body of opinion which may represent another point of view. When certain governments are dealing with the United States, they ought to understand that not only do we have our Administration's point of view which is legitimate and represents the view of the Administration elected by the people, but that there is another one and that in dealing with the United States, they ought to bear that in mind and perhaps it would have an effect upon their policy. We ought to have the same attitude about the Soviet Union.

We think that the Soviet Union is a country which does not permit dissent. And that may be true to some certain extent is. And we discussed the Jewish minorities question in the Soviet Union, incidentally. But nevertheless, the Soviet people develop bodies of opinion that are different from their government's. Even though they don't permit those differences to be reflected in elections, they still have to take them into account. So that in dealing with the Soviet Union, we ought to give encouragement to those people in the Soviet Union who are more prone to peaceful pursuits and to develop good relations with other countries. Now that makes statesmanship complicated because you can't be sure which appeal is having the effect upon the official policy of the country and that's where the crunch comes.

QUESTION: I WONDER SENATOR, MR. KHRUSHCHEV SUGGESTED, MUCH TO THE SHOCK OF MANY AMERICAN, THAT HE HAD GREAT INFLUENCE IN THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY. BY GRANTING YOU THIS AUDIENCE, WAS HE ENDORSING YOU AS A CANDIDATE IN AMERICA, OR WAS HE PROTESTING THE ADMINISTRATION OF MR. NIXON? BECAUSE I AM SURE HE HAS NEVER GRANTED THAT MUCH TIME, TO AN AMERICAN.

ANSWER: (INAUDIBLE)..... I am sure that he was interested in hearing my point of view. The conversation went on. There was no set time for it. I gather that he wanted to hear the point of view of the opposition. For whatever use it might be, and his reception was cordial and it was the kind of conversation you can get some satisfaction out of because it was no personal animosity. Whatever his political purposes might be, you'd have to guess. I don't want to speculate.

QUESTION: WARS JUST SEEM TO BE CONTINUING. THERE WAS ALWAYS A SUGGESTION AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II THAT WE SHOULD NEVER FIGHT THE RUSSIANS BUT THAT THERE WOULD BE THESE BRUSH FIRE WARS IN KOREA, VIETNAM AND NOW CAMBODIA LOOKS LIKE A POSSIBILITY.

ANSWER: We have the fear of ultimate intention you know. I made this point to him that I think it was right after we discussed the Middle East problem. I said, "Mr. Chairman, the United States and the Soviet Union are two great powers. In the face of power like this we haven't expected to generate love and understanding on the other side. Now when the other fellow is trying to destroy you, your natural reaction is going to be fear and suspicion and distrust and that's our problem. Neither of us can be sure of the ultimate intentions of the other. We believe that you want to destroy us. You may believe that we do. Now if we just persist in that kind of an attitude, what we ultimately are going to is destroy each other. So what we have to work at is agreements wherever we can, wherever our national interests coincide.

And the first one I started with were these disarmament talks to limit nuclear arms. I said, "Here is a place where we are actually talking, and there is a possibility we can do something. I would hope that since we are talking that we make up the broadest kind of an agreement limiting as many offensive and defensive nuclear weapons as possible, because it is in our interest as nations to do this. Here's a way for us to begin."

Changing the status of Berlin is another. It doesn't make any sense to let that friction point which has now existed for a quarter of a century to continue. West Berlin has developed a life of its own. It should be united with East Berlin. The fact is it hasn't been for all these years. Why then, don't we deal with the situation as we find it, begin to establish relationships, economic, culture and others, between West and East Berlin, and between West Germany and East Germany? This is what Chancellor Brandt is trying to do in his so called Ostpolitik, or Eastern European policy. This makes some sense. Since we cannot restore a united Germany tomorrow or a united Berlin tomorrow, then don't we begin in a gradual way to establish normal relations between east and west. If we start with this beginning and build on it then eventually you get a broad outlook. So I emphasized the Berlin talks with Mr. Kosygin, emphasizing all the time that these are areas in which our natural interests can be identified and worked out and, secondly, to the extent that we do, we gradually begin to break down the tensions between us.

Now if their ultimate intention today is to destroy us, we are not going to change that intention today. But if in the meantime, in the next ten years we can break down these tensions, maybe their ultimate intention in ten years from now will be different. This is the only way, it seems to me, that we can ever hope to build any basis for a peaceful world. If we assume that from this moment on they're always going to want to destroy us, then we are all going to act as if it were the ultimate crunch -- just waiting for the other fellow to let their guard down so we can launch a nuclear bomb so we can destroy them before he can get back at us. Then what is going to happen is ultimate destruction. But if we build slowly and carefully, always alert, never letting our guard down but willing to take the minimal risk necessary to work out these small agreements, then I think we can build peace in this world.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE: ROUGHLY, THERE WILL BE SHUFFLING OF POWER WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. SOMETHING TO DO WITH KENNEDY.)

ANSWER: I think those who are watching from the outside ought to be conscious of the fact that these struggles are not always ideological struggles. In other words, it isn't a question of the liberals versus the conservatives, constantly waging a fight and the issue always decided on that basis. It isn't. So I think this result is more complicated than it looks, maybe tied up in personal relationships -- you know somebody's resentment over the position of Senator Kennedy took or something of that kind. It isn't clear cut. It was such a surprise to me and I think even Senator Kennedy that you can't sort out the reasons.

QUESTION: THEY CLAIM HE WAS NEGLIGENT IN HIS DUTIES, SIR. HE SPENT A LOT OF TIME ON THE ELECTION IN MASSACHUSETTS.

ANSWER: I don't really think that would be the decisive factor. It might have been with one or two Senators, but I think that most of us realize that when a Senator is running for reelection, he has to spend more time away from the Senate than he would ordinarily but then I don't think that most Senators would penalize him for that. I don't have the answer for that. I deeply regretted this happening because two years ago I nominated him because I felt that here was an excellent opportunity to bring young blood into the leadership of the Senate. I thought it could stand a little young blood. It would be good for the country, reassure the country that the establishment was somewhat open to young people. So I nominated him and would have liked to have seen him continue in service and I thought he was adding a very important note of vitality into the leadership and into the policy-making processes in the Senate. So I was sorry to see the change take place.

I don't think it is a setback, and I am sure that Ted would be the first to acknowledge that. I don't think it's a vital, crucial setback. He still has a great political future ahead of him and he is going to build it. But it is unfortunate, from the point of view of the Senate, that it creates the wrong impression as put by your question, and creates the wrong impression as to the ideological balance on the Democratic side of the Senate. I just don't think that it represents that significant a change.

QUESTION: I'LL GIVE YOU AN EASY QUESTION. WHAT IS YOUR ESTIMATE THUS FAR AS PRESIDENT NIXON'S LEADERSHIP?

ANSWER: Well, less than might be desired, to use an inane term. On the economy, he has failed on the standards he himself set two years ago. He promised to deal with inflation effectively without increasing unemployment and yet inflation has continued to climb beyond the levels that he predicted and unemployment has continued to climb beyond the numbers that he predicted. He has refused to adopt the measures that have urged upon him by Republicans including his own chairman of the Federal Reserve Board as well as Democrats, that is, the adoption of an incomes policy which would be implemented by the White House itself to restrain price and wage increases. The week after he took office, he announced that he would not use this kind of thing. It has been used increasingly by Presidents recently and his failure to do so, I think, just gave a blank check for price increases and wage increases which took place in across the board in

increasing numbers and so we have seen growing inflation -- and on the other side growing unemployment.

q Well, he's got to take responsibility for that policy. He's had it for two years. Here is where he can't say that the Democrats took the credit. This is a policy he initiated. He announced a week after he took office. These are the results and they are not good enough. There is too much unemployment and too much inflation and neither is under effective control at the moment.

QUESTION: NOW HE DIDN'T MENTION THE ECONOMY IN THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, NOR DID HE MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT THE WAR. HIS TIMETABLE OF WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, HAS IT MET WITH YOUR APPROVAL AND OTHER DEMOCRATS?

ANSWER: No, I think his so-called Vietnamization policy is the policy to try to find a military way to prolong the war under total South Vietnamese management. In other words, he is hoping to be able to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese themselves at some point so that they can continue it with the minimum of American help.

The two questions that I have about it are, first, what is that minimum American help? What is the level to which American help would be reduced by the President's own guide-lines? We don't know that. He tells us about withdrawing troops now but he hasn't told us at what point that will stop, or what the conditions will be to permit further withdrawal. He hasn't told us that. And as we see escalating of the fighting from time to time in Cambodia, as the Cambodians run into trouble here and there, one can only believe that this is going to be a continuing reflection of our policy in Vietnam, that is, as these association governments, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, run into military difficulties with North Vietnam or whatever communist, to use the word, enemy they have, that we are going to be tempted to move in and to put that fire out because it looks as though we might be able to do it with a few more helicopter gunships or a little more military assistance here. With that kind of temptation constantly pulling at this Vietnamization policy, the threat always exists that the military will escalate and we'll find ourselves bogged down for a few more months or years.

I think we need to set a date for withdrawal, to say, as of this date. A year ago last May, I introduced a resolution that we will have withdrawal in 18 months, that would be a year from now. Set a date. Allies in Saigon will then know that they must be ready for whatever the situation produces. The enemy in Hanoi will understand that as of that date, we will be out and if there is any advantage to them prior to that time to work out a settlement with us, they've only got until that time to work it out. After that, it is conceivable that the war will continue with the South Vietnamese. I think that this would create the best possibility in stimulating both the South Vietnamese and Hanoi to work out an agreement, especially on two key points, one of which the Administration is hitting very hard, that is on the point on bringing home all prisoners of war back.

I think that if we set a date and work to negotiate the conditions for withdrawal, that we can do so including the withdrawal of our own prisoners of war and the safe withdrawal of our other troops. These, at the very least would be viable subjects for negotiations in Paris. And in addition, it seems to me there would be a possibility, none that you can guarantee, that both sides would decide, well, let's work out a political settlement within that time frame.

But in any case, whether or not they did, we would have said that as of January 1972 -- and incidentally on that date we would have been in the war for as long after the '68 elections as we were before -- as of that date our commitment is finished. We will have given to this war all that we can conceivably afford, that we have got to turn our resources back home and our attention back home. I think that's a clear cut commitment. It would give the Saigon government ample notice that's when our lease runs out and they've got to take over.

QUESTION: THERE NEEDS TO BE AN IMMEDIATE DECISION ON THE CAMBODIA SITUATION, RIGHT NOW, DOESN'T THERE?

ANSWER: I would think so and I would think that the Congress is really going to put the pressure on this one. Technically, the President may not -- I don't know until we get all of the facts -- may not have done anything in violation of the so-called Cooper-Church amendment. As it passed the Senate, the Cooper-Church amendment would have prohibited this sort of thing.

But there had to be a compromise in conference with the House and technically this may not be prohibited. And the reason -- and this might have been in conference -- was that the Administration itself in June and July (of 1970) indicated that air power would be used only to interdict, that is, interrupt, the movement of supplies across the border to South Vietnam. And now the kind of air power we are using here has nothing to do with that sort of interdiction. It has to do with protection, of helping Cambodians to protect their important supply road. That goes beyond the policy announced. But now, since the Congress has discovered that the Administration is using this as a loophole, I would think that there would be pressure upon us to close it.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE, ROUGHLY: ABOUT CANDIDACY. NOT THAT I AM SUGGESTING THAT YOU ARE A CANDIDATE FOR ANYTHING.)

ANSWER: Well, I think that the very least I can ask of you that you give me as much time as Kosygin did.

QUESTION: BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE COMMERCIALS....
YOU'RE CATHOLIC?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: THAT'S NO LONGER AN ISSUE, IS IT?

ANSWER: No, that's interesting that it isn't. When I ran for Governor the first time, or when I was elected, I was the first Catholic ever elected Governor of my state. You know the old cliché about religion. In 1960 President Kennedy pretty much eliminated the issue on a national basis. It's never raised. I never see it discussed. When you consider that I am a Catholic, Kennedy is a Catholic and the question is never raised. The Pope is a Catholic.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: You mean he's running, too.

QUESTION: DOES ONE HAVE TO CHECK WITH THEIR WIFE OR THEIR FAMILY? DO YOU HAVE TO HAVE A FAMILY CONFERENCE ON YOUR POLITICS AND YOUR POLITICAL FUTURE?

ANSWER: The interesting thing is that we haven't for a long, long time sat down and made decisions, you know, are you going to run again for a third term in the Senate? We just sort of -- we have been together now for so long in making these decisions that I think we communicate silently and we take each challenge as they come.

After all, I committed myself to a full-time career in politics in 1954 when I ran for Governor and once you do that, it is sort of inevitable that you go on to each challenge as it comes just as you know, if you commit yourself as a life as a doctor, it requires skills. You take on little more complicated operations if you are a surgeon, and so on, and move on from challenge to challenge and that's the way it is. We never expected, of course, in my family that I'd ever be on a national ticket, a Senator from a small state. This just doesn't happen. And after being a vice-presidential candidate, even as of election day in 1968, we knew what the result was, when Hubert and I lost, it didn't occur to us, that, I might be considered as a potential candidate in 1972. It wasn't until some days and weeks passed that it began to sink into our consciousness that other people were beginning to think about it. So we began to think about it and almost automatically began to respond to it in a positive way. Now I am not about to go beyond that in making any announcements today.

QUESTION: HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE THERE?

ANSWER: Five.

QUESTION: YOU ARE A CATHOLIC AREN'T YOU?

ANSWER: The way I put it is that we have three queens and two jacks and that is a full house. And we also have a grandson who was born in July. You know you talk about how politics influences a family: when I took office as Governor, we had two children; I ran for reelection in 1956, we had another child; I ran for election to the Senate in 1958, we had another child; went to the Senate and had a son who was born on the Fourth of July. Last July, I had a grandson whose name is Ethan Allen. Now isn't that pretty good?

QUESTION: IF YOU ARE ELECTED PRESIDENT, YOU OUGHT TO HAVE TRIPLETS.

ANSWER: I might.

QUESTION: ARE THE SENIOR MUSKIES LIVING?

ANSWER: My mother is. She is going to be 80 years old this March. I found it incredible when one of my sisters called to tell me it was her 80th birthday and we ought to do something special about it. She doesn't look 70, really.

QUESTION: DOES SHE ACT IT?

ANSWER: No. A friend of mine from New York who I used to know very well in high school wrote to me the other day -- he hadn't written to me in a long time -- saying that he received a letter from my mother. He said he was touched and amused by one question she asked. She said, "Do you want Ed to be president?" Because she doesn't. She wanted to get some supporting arguments. I'm sure she would have sent it on to me if he replies.

QUESTION: HOW LONG HAVE THE MUSKIES BEEN IN THE STATE OF MAINE?

ANSWER: My father came from Poland about 1901 and he came to Maine by way of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Buffalo, New York met my mother and married her. So he must have come to Maine about 1906 to 1910, that's over a half a century, which isn't enough to qualify you to be a native of Maine.

QUESTION: IT TAKES A LOT LONGER?

ANSWER: It takes a lot longer.

QUESTION: SENATOR, WE WISH YOU WELL, I KNOW YOU'RE ANXIOUS TO GET BACK TO CONGRESS.

ANSWER: It was a pleasure to be here. As I think of this California audience I think of an old political slogan I used to know. I am thinking now about, "So goes Maine, so goes California."

QUESTION: THAT'S VERY NICE. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.