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## Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Democratic State Chairman's Association

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS OF SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE  
DEMOCRATIC STATE CHAIRMEN'S ASSOCIATION  
QUALITY COURT HOTEL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
MARCH 26, 1971

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Last evening I had an opportunity to meet many of you for the first time and to get to know all of you better. And I hope that you feel the same way about the evening and our meeting together.

Some of you asked if there was anything you should know about me, such as, "Do I have a temper?"

Yes, I do have a temper because I'm an impatient man. I'm impatient with the Nixon administration's failure to come to grips with so many of the real issues which confront this country.

I'm outraged by hunger when we are a nation of surplus food and great productive capacity.

I'm outraged by poverty when we are a nation of immense wealth.

And I'm outraged by sickness when we are a nation capable of delivering adequate health services to all of our people.

And I'm outraged by ignorance when we are a nation with the greatest free public education system in the world.

In a time when we should have prosperity, ill-conceived economic policies cause unemployment. Shouldn't someone get angry about that?

In a time when we are re-evaluating our national priorities, we have no program to ease the effects on the working man. Shouldn't someone get angry about that?

In a time when we have a full-scale farm recession, the nation has no farm program nor a President who mentions the problem in his State of the Union message. Shouldn't someone get angry about that?

And at a time when the country is divided against itself because of the most devastating war in our history, there is no deadline to end that war and to heal the nation. And shouldn't someone get angry about that?

Yes, I am impatient as are so many Americans.

You are chairmen of the various state Democratic Parties. I would like to compliment you on organizing yourselves in this way, to develop a national voice for the party through the leading political organizations of our states and to make your political efforts more effective and uniform across the country. An organization is important and having a voice is important. But that voice is important only to the extent that we use it and it's effective only to the extent that it is responsive to the felt concerns of our people.

There are two overriding issues which affect the climate of public opinion and concern in this country at this time, and out of which are likely to come the issues which determine the results of the 1972 elections. The first of these, of course is the war and the second, of course, is the economy. I'd like to say something just briefly about each.

First of all, with respect to the incursion in Laos, which I take it has just ended --

We were told with respect to Laos that that effort, initiated and to be implemented by the forces of South Vietnam, was designed to cut the flow of supplies from North Vietnam into South Vietnam and Cambodia. And we were told that our own military leaders were convinced that it was a viable operation, that we could, with the South Vietnamese forces available, cut the Ho Chi Minh trail -- and it is not a single artery, it is a collection of jungle trails. But we were told that we could cut that trail and that we could hold that position until May 1 when the rainy season would start and that the enemy could not effectively oppose that effort.

This is what we were told in the early days of that invasion. There was nothing but optimism about the prospects, nothing but optimism about the retaliatory capacity of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

What has happened? Six weeks before May 1, the South Vietnamese army has been forced to pull back across the border. They did not hold long enough to seriously interrupt the flow of supplies from North to South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese casualty rate is estimated -- for the 20,000 South Vietnamese troops which were involved -- as something between 25 and 50 per cent. Casualty rates of that scope indicated nothing less than a serious military defeat.

And the reports we are beginning to get from Vientiane, the capital of Laos, are to the effect that from the point of view of responsible Laotian leaders, Laos is now in a more precarious situation as the result of an incursion which stripped away whatever pretense of neutrality there was to our involvement in military activities over Laos.

The credibility of Vietnamization has been diluted and cast into doubt by the performance of the South Vietnamese forces, which can mean nothing more than a prolongation of the war and our involvement in it. If this limited or allegedly limited incursion had been successful, the effect of this and of the Cambodian incursion a year ago would have been a spreading out geographically of the responsibilities, the military responsibilities and capability of the South Vietnamese Army which are obviously limited as we've learned from the Laotian experience. It is evident that they will have problem enough protecting their own country without the additional geographical responsibility of their neighbors in Cambodia and Laos.

Surely it must be apparent that we must make the decision that our involvement must end and end totally. It would be better from a logistical point of view and a tactical point of view if that decision were made by the Commander-in-Chief. He's in a better position if he willed it to arrange an orderly withdrawal.

But whether or not it is made by the President, it must be made. This is the intent, I think, of growing numbers in both Houses of the Congress as is evident by the policy decisions that have been taken in the Senate and pending in the House.

What are the benefits of such a commitment? If we are to make such a commitment, immediately our own people would know that an end to this involvement is in sight and that we can begin the healing process which we must have if we are to unite our country and that we can begin the reallocation of resources we must have to deal with our problems here at home.



If we were to make such a commitment to end our involvement, our friends around the globe, the nations of the free world, would breathe a collective sigh of relief that at long last their great friend and ally is willing and has decided to cut himself off from this involvement which has diluted his ability to influence the affairs of man in other sections of the globe in a beneficent way.

Finally, such a commitment would make it clear to those disposed to be hostile to the United States -- in the Soviet Union and in Red China -- that we had decided to end our involvement and that our credibility of exercising our influence in other trouble spots in the world -- the Middle East and elsewhere -- was accordingly enhanced.

This is why we must take this step. This is why we must make this decision. And let me suggest that there couldn't be a more appropriate time. We have said from the beginning that our objective in South Vietnam was to buy time for the South Vietnamese to build their own future. What that meant, I take it, is that they should acquire the economic and political and military viability necessary to conduct their own affairs.

The President has said recently that with respect to their military capability they can now "hack it." Whatever doubts the Laos adventure casts upon that conclusion, the fact is that we have enabled them to assemble an army of more than a million men, the largest in Southeast Asia. We've equipped that army. We've helped train that army. If that army has the will to build a nation, it has the capacity to do so.

With respect to political viability: because of our involvement, the South Vietnamese have held one election in 1967. Another election is coming up this fall. Two elections we have bought them with 45,000 American lives, 110 billion American dollars, over 300,000 American casualties. They tell us that the countryside in Southeast Asia, in South Vietnam, is sufficiently stable to make that election meaningful.

What else then is necessary? I suggest that the other ingredient is a clear-cut understanding that the leaders they elect this next fall would have the responsibility to lead a country on its own. And if they're not capable of using a free election for that purpose after the contribution we've made to their country, then the question we can legitimately ask ourselves is: can they ever do it and must we stay there forever because they cannot?

It's been clear from the beginning that at some point, the South Vietnamese must govern themselves, must be able to fight for themselves, must be able to build their own country. I think the time to test their capacity to do so is here.

The other great issue is the issue of the economy. We ought to remind our people that President Nixon inherited 90 consecutive months of continuous growth from a Democratic administration, that he has given us more than two years of steady decline.

There have been two outstanding features of the Nixon economic policy: inflation and unemployment. In the latter connection, I know of no statistic that is more revealing of our distorted priorities than the fact that 300,000 Vietnam veterans are unsuccessfully seeking employment at the present time. War apparently is the only occupation that we've been able to find for them.

With the exception of bankers who have profited from the highest interest rates since the Civil War, no one -- but no one -- has benefited from the Nixon economic policy.

Finally, Mr. Nixon has refused to reckon with the desire of people to change the priorities of this country. He has refused to recognize that changes in national priorities will require new policies and new programs to make transitions practical. One example of this reluctance should suffice to make the point. Last year the Senate rejected the SST. This year, with the Congress committed in a majority to oppose the program, the

Nixon administration pressed forward, using the Boeing workers as hostages to demand that the SST be funded. The Nixon administration has not suggested a single alternative to relieve the people of Seattle and the employees of Boeing in the certain event the Congress rejected the SST.

The Nixon administration has proposed no alternatives to ensure that people displaced by trade agreements receive assistance to retrain them, to relocate them or to help them to find new sources of employment.

The Nixon administration has proposed no program to provide assistance to workers who would be inevitably displaced by environmental control requirements.

The Nixon administration has proposed no program to ease the transition for workers who are displaced because obsolete plants may be closed.

This is an administration with no relocation assistance programs, no temporary unemployment programs, no short-term emergency loan programs, no corporate programs, no public service employment programs designed to serve the twin purposes of meeting important public service needs while meeting the job requirements of hundreds of thousands of our people.

These three issues I think reflect the growing doubt and lack of faith and confidence that is evidenced on the part of our people with respect to this White House. You find it in every one of your 50 states, in every region of this country. People want an administration of leadership which understands what this country lacks, which has some vision as to what we must do to fill that need, which has the courage and the determination to move in that direction.

What I'm speaking about imposes heavy responsibilities on the Congress but also upon you because you have the responsibility more than any other level of leadership in the Democratic party to do two things that must be done if we're to do what the country asks of its political process:

--First, you must broaden the base of this party. Realization of that fact has come somewhat painfully to many in the party. But the reforms have been laid out; the movement to implement them has begun. Five states, however, only have met the McGovern Commission guidelines up to this point. It's reassuring to note that three of them are in the South.

I realize that from the point of view of those who've become accustomed to managing the political system, it's not going to be as easy to get one's way with a broadly-based party truly within the control of its rank and file citizens. But this is the inevitable wave of the future and we are farther advanced along the road to building this kind of party than any other party in American political life today.

It can be an exciting and stimulating process. It can be productive in terms of the prospects for success in the next Presidential election. It will be painful. There will be times when we will think that we are at each other's throats in the process of doing the reconstruction job but it can be done. And if it is done, it'll pay off politically.

--The other thing that we've got to do -- and its prospects can be enhanced by the success we achieve in the first drive--is to strive to become the instrument of all our people.

There is no group of Americans large enough, with enough political clout of its own to have its own way with respect to any of its needs or any of its convictions or any of its hopes. This of course has been the nature of this diverse country from the beginning. We've always understood the need to make a free political process work, to identify shared values with other groups than our own and so the word "coalition"



has come into our political lexicon.

It isn't the same coalition in every election nor should it be. But the need of developing such a coalition at this point in our history is urgent because there are groups of Americans who cannot talk to each other. And this is our great danger.

And if the Democratic Party can find a way to communicate with groups of Americans who cannot communicate with each other, we will have found the answer to rebuilding the essential unity of this country. Oh, not unity in the sense of conformity, not unity in the sense of automatic agreement, but unity in the sense that we understand that the fundamental goals of our country must still be what our founding documents said they must be -- peace, justice, and equality, that we can be diverse in the ways we move toward those objectives but that we are united in our determination that they be achieved.

Different groups of Americans, understanding each other, talking to each other, working together, achieving together: this is what has made America great in the past. This is what can make America great in the future. It is doubt as to whether we can do it again that creates most of our problems in our country today.

So the Democratic Party must become the instrument for creating this kind of coalition -- not a coalition made up of labor, interested only in labor's particular interests; not a coalition made up of business and industry, interested only in the particular interests of those groups; not a coalition made up of young people interested only in the privileges of the young; or of the old or the black or the white or the South or the North. I think we are mature enough as a country to understand that our special material or economic interests are not as important as our non-material, idealistic purposes which after all can give more meaning to life than anything material that America has ever built.

I think this is the message that the country wants to hear from the Democratic Party.

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