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Organized Labor and the Democratic Party - Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the AFL-CIO State Convention

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Back in the days of the Pony Express, there was a rider who had a habit of flicking his whip as he galloped down the road. He took pleasure in clipping the wings of a horsefly or slapping a bumblebee to the ground.

One day, a fellow rider asked him why he didn't use his whip on a nest of hornets that was hanging by the roadside.

"Well, I'll tell you," he replied, "They're just too damn organized."

The working man has learned a lesson from those hornets. So has the Democratic Party.

Some say the partnership between organized labor and Democrats is over. I say they are wrong.

We fought the good fight for Social Security, for workmen's compensation, for the minimum wage. They were not easy ~~victories~~ victories, or quick ones. But we achieved them by fighting together.

We have a lot of fighting left to do, and we have to do it together. We have to fight together for a national health care program. We have to fight together for collective bargaining for farmworkers. We have to fight together for repeal of 14(b).

We have to fight together because the Administration in Washington today doesn't seem to care ~~about~~ what happens to the worker and his family. We have to fight together to make sure the next Administration does.

Whenever I pass by the White House, I think of a story I heard in Maine. An out-of-stater was walking down a country road after a rainstorm. He noticed an automobile with its wheels spinning in the mud.

"Are you stuck?" he asked the driver. "I would be," the driver replied, "if I was ~~going~~ going anywhere."

That driver belongs in the Nixon Administration.

For 27~~th~~ months, this Administration has been spinning its wheels. For 27 months, this Administration has deprived millions of Americans of the right to earn a decent living. For 27 months, this Administration has watched unemployment statistics climb as if they were numbers on a form sheet.

Well those numbers aren't very good bets, and they're not just statistics.

When unemployment in Louisiana climbs 32 percent in two years, it's not a matter of statistics. It's a matter of 21,000 more men and women looking for jobs. It's a matter of veterans coming home from Vietnam with nothing to do when they get here. It's a matter of families going on relief, not because they want to but because they have to.

The other day I received a letter from a lady in Florida. She said her husband had been laid off from work after 25 years with the same corporation. "We spent the past year," she writes,

"filling out countless employment applications, sending out countless resumes, and last summer, traveling 11,000 miles through twenty-three states seeking employment. Finally last fall my husband obtained a position at half his former salary. We can only afford rent, utilities, food, and medicine. Our planned purchases of a television, sewing machine, car, house, furniture items, are now impossible."

You know as well as she does that the Nixon economic record of the last 27 months is impossible too. It's dismal. It's unacceptable. And we won't take any more of it after 1972.

They keep telling us they have a game plan for the economy. But the only ones who can do any scoring are the bankers. I say there is no game plan. There is only a game the Administration has been playing with the American people.

We must tell this Administration in plain language: Stop playing games. Stop putting all the blame for inflation on

the backs of construction workers. Stop making organized labor a scapegoat for the failures of this Administration.

Harry Truman kept a sign on his desk. It said, "The buck stops here." That sign belongs back in the White House.

We need a new Administration. We need an Administration which cares enough about men and ~~where~~ women to do something about jobs.

Last year, A Democratic Congress appropriated dollars for housing and mass transit and water and sewer facilities. That money would put people to work.

The Nixon Administration has been withholding that money.

I say they should release that money, and release it now.

Last year, the President vetoed public service jobs on the State and local level. He said public service jobs were like the dole. If that is so, then I've been on the dole for twenty-five years, and so has the President.

The Democrats in Congress are fighting again this year for public service employment. Labor supports that legislation. I support that legislation. The Administration ought to switch and stop fighting that legislation.

The Nixon Administration is fighting for the wrong things. It is fighting to give business the kind of tax break business doesn't need, the economy doesn't need, and we don't need. The Administration says it wants to let businessmen depreciate their equipment faster. That wouldn't make them buy new equipment, not when they're operating at only 72 percent capacity with the equipment they already have. But it would make the Treasury lose three billion dollars in business taxes this year alone.

I oppose that tax break. I think you should oppose that tax break. We should spend those three billion dollars on education or health care or to help States and cities meet the growing need for public services. That money would put as

as many as half a million people to work, where we need people to work.

How much suffering does it take to force this Administration to act? How many men and women have to be thrown out of work? How many businesses have to close down? How many communities have to go bankrupt?

If this Administration won't act to create the jobs we need in a healthy economy, then the next Administration will.

There is something else I want to talk to you about, something that bothers me and for which I have no easy answer.

Several thousand men and women were laid off last month, because we decided to end government spending for the SST. That doesn't mean the SST should have been continued, but it does mean something should have been done for the men and women who lost their jobs. The Administration did nothing last month and has done nothing since.

I introduced a bill to provide new jobs in improving air safety, in developing short-haul aircraft, in ~~designing~~ designing and building high-speed ground transportation. These are useful programs. They would use the talents of the workers in the aircraft industry. The Nixon Administration should support these programs.

What is important is not just a single piece of legislation for a special case. What is important is the commitment to help those who are out of work because of a ~~major~~ change in government policy.

In a growing economy, these problems are not as severe. In a growing economy, finding a job is not as long or as painful a process as it is in a Nixon economy.

But even in a growing economy -- which we will have again -- even in a growing economy, there will be changes which could cause some people hardship.

There will be changes other than the SST. There will be changes in our national priorities, in defense spending, in our tariff policies, in setting anti-pollution standards which some companies may be unable to meet.

In the long run, we should all benefit from these changes, but working men and women should not be forced ~~to pay~~ to pay the whole price in the short run. Nor should they suffer when private management decides on its own to pull up stakes, or to shut down an obsolete plant.

I believe the government and private employers both have a responsibility, a responsibility the Nixon Administration has so far refused to accept.

First, I believe we have to ensure that men and women who are laid off don't lose the pension rights and fringe benefits they fought so hard to earn.

Second, I believe we have to make older workers eligible for early retirement under Social Security, when they can't

find new jobs.

Third, I believe we have to make certain that while people are looking for work, or while they are being trained, their income is not drastically reduced.

These are not all the solutions. We have to develop a sound program of relocation assistance. We have to offer manpower training which will lead to decent jobs.

We have to prevent the Nixon Administration from destroying the manpower training which already exists.

I intend to develop legislation in these areas. But we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal -- providing a job opportunity for every man and woman willing and able to work, offering every American a share in a growing economy -- that's the goal. That's the goal of this organization. That's the goal of its leaders. That's the goal of each of us who believes in the dignity of labor. That's my goal.

When working men and women suffer in America, then America suffers. We can't lick hard-core unemployment in a weak economy. We can't educate our children the way we would like, or clean up pollution, or improve law enforcement, or rebuild our cities, unless the economy is growing and people have jobs.

That's why we need a government which cares, not about a silent majority, but about a working majority. We need to turn this economy around. And together -- labor and Democrats -- we can do just that.