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5-3-1971

Floor Statement on Peaceful Protest Against the Vietnam War

Edmund S. Muskie

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Recommended Citation

Muskie, Edmund S., "Floor Statement on Peaceful Protest Against the Vietnam War" (1971). *Speeches*. 65.

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U.S. Daily

MUSKIE News

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May 3, 1971

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

Mr. President:

Last week's April 24 march in Washington once again proved that thousands of Americans -- young and old, students, workers and businessmen -- can express their deep opposition to the War in Southeast Asia peacefully and in the best tradition of freedom of expression and assembly.

I was proud to be an early endorser of that march, and I congratulate its organizers for their successful efforts to keep the gathering peaceful and constructive.

I especially congratulate the Vietnam Veterans Against the War for their conduct in Washington last week. Their participation lent dignity and moral force to the occasion and their commitment to peaceful dissent set the tone for the march which was to follow.

I hope that last week's outpouring of opposition to continuation of American military involvement in Indochina will help convince the Administration to set a deadline of no later than December 31, 1971, for the withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel.

However, I am deeply troubled by the tactics of confrontation and disruption employed by some in Washington over the past few days. If the goal is to speed the pace of U.S. withdrawal, you cannot achieve that goal by stopping auto traffic

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SENATOR MUSKIE
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or seeking confrontation with police, which could lead to violence. And I deeply fear that such tactics may impede that goal.

Exponents of nonviolence must use reason and persuasion to make their case. The Vietnam Veterans and the people who marched on April 24 peacefully stated their case with great eloquence.

Public opinion polls throughout the land now support their views.

I am concerned that the politics of confrontation and provocation may well alienate the millions of Americans who otherwise support setting a deadline for withdrawal.

Under the circumstances, the professionalism and sensitivity of the District of Columbia police force deserve the highest praise.

If the history of the past few years proves anything, it proves that when thousands of Americans raise their voices in peaceful dissent, the country can be turned around. Our task now is to turn this Administration around, to persuade it to adopt the Indochina policies which a growing majority of Americans support.

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