

Bates College

SCARAB

Congressional Records

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

5-12-1971

Press Conference - Douglass College - Questions on Calley Case, Vietnam, Election

Edmund S. Muskie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/mcr>

1. What is your reaction to the outcome of the Calley trial?
Do you feel the president has a right to intervene under such circumstances?

I was distressed that an American officer had been charged and found guilty of murdering defenceless Vietnamese men, women and children. This is a hard blow for a society which has proclaimed the sanctity of life. The trial carried with it not only questions of personal guilt, but grave questions about the war in Indochina and what we are doing to ourselves and to the people of that area by our continued prosecution of the war.

Lieutenant Calley's guilt or innocence was a matter for the jury of his peers to determine. He was found guilty by that jury, and now his case has been appealed. I do not think any one of us should do or say anything to throw the fairness of the original trial or the appeals procedure into jeopardy. That is why I have been critical of President Nixon's actions in the case. As Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces the President has the ultimate power of review. He did not need to assert that right following the initial verdict. By his announcement he suggested, whether he intended to do so or not, that he was prejudging the merits of the case. By so doing he undermined the integrity of the judicial procedure.

2. If you were president, what would be the first thing you would change in this country, and how would you go about it?

If I were president, today, I would move to end the war in Indochina by announcing our intention to withdraw our troops by the end of this year. That is the only way to end the fighting and the killing, and to lay the groundwork for negotiations to bring home our men who are prisoners and to insure the safe withdrawal of our forces.

Ending the war in Indochina and ending the arms race are two of the most important steps to be taken to release our resources for the tasks of restoring the health of our own society and meeting the obligations of building a peaceful world. Most Americans want to be reassured about the values of a democratic society, and they recognize the importance of change to achieve the promise of a democratic society. Even as we move to end the war and the arms race we need to be busy expanding educational and job opportunities, to insure every American an equal chance to achieve his or her potential. We need to turn the economy around, to invest more in education, health services, housing, public transportation, and environmental improvement programs. We need to feed hungry children, reduce the threat of crime and violence, and insure equality of justice. We need to make government and private institutions work for people and not manipulate them.

We can't achieve all those changes overnight, but we can begin; and we can best begin with an affirmative step toward peace.

3. In line with the feminist movement which has been hard felt at Douglass, to what extent do you think women should be liberated?

I'm never quite sure what is meant when individuals ask "to what extent" they should be liberated. If, by your question, you mean to ask whether I would support the removal of barriers to equal opportunity for women in education, jobs and pay, and the elimination of discrimination against women, my answer is, "yes."

4. Have you definitely decided to run for president in '72? When will you know for sure?

I haven't decided, and I don't know when that decision will be made. Much remains to be done before that decision can be made.

5. During your "off duty" hours in Washington, what do you most like to do?

There are very few "off duty" hours in Washington these days. When I am free, I like to spend time with my wife and children, to relax at golf, to work in my garden, or to read.

6. What is the role of the media today? Do you feel it is treating you fairly?

The role of the media today is to inform, by accurate and vigorous reporting, by thoughtful commentary, and by the presentation of differing views. The techniques are different from those of the eighteenth and nineteenth century press and magazines, but the role is the same.

The impact of the media on individual citizens is enormous. That underscores the need to reaffirm the fundamental values of a free and vigorous press, including radio, television, newspapers and magazines. A democracy cannot survive without an informed citizenry, and citizens cannot be informed without a free press. A free press will not always be right, and it will not always be fair, but its continued exercise of the freedom of inquiry and reporting will insure the opportunity for individual citizens to find the truth and to make fair judgments.

I do not agree always with what the news media say about me, or don't say about me. That is true even in cases where they praise me. So long as I am in public life I expect a certain tension will exist between me and the press. That is natural and it is healthy; it keeps both of us on our toes. That, after all, is what the electorate needs and deserves.

7. What do you think of today's concept of education?
How and by whom should students who create disturbances
be dealt with?

I have not detected any single concept of education as I have traveled around the country. In fact, I have the impression of a tremendous ferment over the objectives of education. Some see our schools and universities as training grounds for better jobs; others see them as places for individual fulfillment; still others see them as centers for social change. To a greater or lesser degree, this has always been true of our institutions of higher learning. There is nothing wrong in the controversy over those different views, so long as it does not lead to the intolerant imposition of one view.

Expanding educational opportunities for more individuals must, of necessity, lead to a greater variety of educational experience. That calls for more flexibility and self-discipline for college administrators and faculty, and for students. Intellectual freedom cannot flourish in an atmosphere of disruption, fear or repression.

Disturbances on the campuses should be dealt with, wherever possible, within the campuses. The ideal discipline would come from the students themselves. Failing that, where the rights of others are threatened, the school administration must act. Civil authorities should be involved only in those cases where public laws are being violated, and where internal discipline is no longer sufficient.

8. Many people have a villainous picture in their minds of what a politician is like. How do you conquer that image and what is it that keeps you going in your increasingly unpopular profession?

The political profession has always been the subject

of suspicion and derision. It is made more difficult today by the feeling of despair over the capacity of our democratic system to meet the needs of its citizens.

I view the challenge for a politician not as a need to restore the politician's image, but to restore faith in the democratic system by helping to make it work. That cannot be done by cheap rhetoric and campaign promises. It cannot be done by selling candidates as media commodities. It cannot be done by using political office to appeal to the worst that is in people.

I believe Americans want their political leaders to listen, to be responsive to the real needs of their constituents, and to work with their constituents in solving the problems of our society. They are tired of endless verbal duels which reflect no policies, but the calculus of re-election campaigns. Most important, I believe Americans want leaders who will inspire them and will give them vision. To try to provide that kind of leadership is challenge and motivation enough.

9. Whether you run for president or not, who would you choose as your vice-president if you had your choice of anyone?

That is, as President Roosevelt would say, a "very iffy" question. He wouldn't answer such questions, and I think I should follow his example.

10. To many college students, there is no end to the world's problems. Since it will be our world soon, the problems included, could you tell us what problems you think should be given priority and any suggestions you have for us to begin solving them?

I suspect there will never be an end to the world's problems. If there were, then the world would have arrived at a state of equilibrium, where there is no life. That is not to say that we should not try to solve our problems; it is only to say that we should not be discouraged that we cannot solve them all, or that we can avoid creating some new problems.

As I indicated in an earlier answer, I believe the first problem for us to try to solve is the war in Indochina. We also must begin to halt the arms race, and to turn men and women's energies to the tasks of peaceful development.

At home we have the problems of health, housing, malnutrition, environmental protection, education, public safety, urban and rural decay, and the underlying problem of unequal opportunity.

Before you can begin to tackle these problems effectively, you must develop qualities of self-discipline, courage and perserverance, learn the skills to persuade others, and expand your capacity to understand and relate to others in our society. With that as a start, and with a willingness to work, you can make freedom work.

11. A large issue on campus has been whether to extend our now 12 hour male visitation policy to 24 hours. How do you feel about establishing a 24 hour visiting policy in an all woman's institution?

Having expressed my support for ending discrimination against women, I would not presume to turn around and propose codes of behavior for them, or involve myself in their decision-making about personal privileges on their campuses.

###