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7-15-1971

Opening Statement of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Drug Abuse Hearings of July 15, 1971

Edmund S. Muskie

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Recommended Citation

Muskie, Edmund S., "Opening Statement of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Drug Abuse Hearings of July 15, 1971" (1971). *Speeches*. 112.

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MUSKIE

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FOR RELEASE

FOR RELEASE:
10 A.M.
July 15, 1971

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE AT THE
DRUG ABUSE HEARINGS OF JULY 15, 1971

This morning we are continuing our hearings on legislation to create a White House office to direct our Federal effort against drug abuse.

The testimony of the first three days of our hearings gives us little encouragement that we are on the way to controlling drug abuse either here at home or among our servicemen in Vietnam and around the world.

During the first three days of our hearings, we heard from the Attorney General, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration, among others. From all of that testimony, however, I can find little evidence that the Administration's newly-announced drug program is adequate to do the job.

I am most concerned about the apparent inadequacy of the Administration's plans to cope with drug traffic and drug abuse in Southeast Asia. I am fearful that if the drug plague that infests our servicemen in Southeast Asia today is not eradicated immediately, we will feel its effects in our own cities and towns for decades to come.

We must act now and we must act decisively to end the wide-open drug traffic and high rate of addiction among our troops in Southeast Asia.

I am not satisfied that the Administration's program will accomplish those objectives. Last Friday we heard from two veterans who testified that they would be very hesitant to join a so-called amnesty program in the military service. And the reports this week of the continued wide-spread use of heroin in the American Mekong Delta headquarters at Canto despite the new treatment program can offer little encouragement of success.

As the example of Canto so vividly illustrates, the drug crisis among our servicemen in Vietnam will never be ended as long as the supply of heroin is so plentiful and the price so cheap that our soldiers scarcely have to turn around to buy it.

I believe it is the responsibility of the Administration to use all of the resources and influence it has to stop the traffic in illegal drugs in Southeast Asia and to treat all of our servicemen who have become addicted both before they leave South Vietnam and after their return to the United States.

Last week, the Attorney General admitted that some top military officials among our allies in South Vietnam, Thailand and Laos are involved in the heroin traffic that is infesting our servicemen in Vietnam, but he said that he could not discuss that involvement in an open forum.

I well understand that the revelation of some of the details of the drug traffic in Southeast Asia could affect the delicate negotiations about the future of Southeast Asia. For that reason, the members of these Subcommittees have invited top Administration officials to discuss those delicate questions in executive session.

But I think it is imperative that a false issue of national security not be used as a smoke screen to hide the corruption of officials our Government is assisting in Southeast Asia. I believe, for example, that the American people have a right to know

whether as Congressman Steele and Murphy have charged, South Vietnamese General Ngo Dzu is a principal heroin trafficker. Similarly, I believe the American people should know whether, as the Congressmen charge, Laotian General Ouane Rathikone, until last week the Laotian Chief of Staff, is deeply involved in heroin traffic. And the American people should know whether, as has often been charged, that opium has been transported on Air America flights throughout Southeast Asia.

In short, I think the American people have a right to know about the complicity of our allies in the heroin traffic in Southeast Asia. And our Government must take every necessary step to stop that traffic.

If our Government can take steps to halt the production of marijuana in Mexico and to stop the growth of poppies in Turkey, I cannot understand why we do not possess the power to end the production and trafficking of opium in Southeast Asian countries who have, during the past decade, received billions of dollars of American aid.

At the same time, we must establish comprehensive programs to treat our fighting men who have fallen victim to this nefarious traffic. That program must be more extensive than the 30-day treatment program now planned by the military for our servicemen returning from Vietnam. And it must include more extensive treatment for our veterans than can be provided in the proposed 32 centers of the Veterans Administration, which when they reach full potential will treat only about 10 percent of the addict veterans in our Nation.

This morning Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia, whose State has a substantial military presence, will explain how necessary it is that the military follow up its 30-day treatment program with additional efforts to treat our servicemen who return to this country from Vietnam and other parts of the world.

But first this morning, we will hear from Representative James Scheuer of New York, who introduced H.R. 6731 in the House, a bill similar to S. 1945. Congressman Scheuer has long been a leader in the efforts in the House to develop legislation for the fight against drug abuse, and it is our pleasure to hear from him now.