

Bates College

SCARAB

Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

7-21-1971

Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Meeting of Congressional Interns

Edmund S. Muskie

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

Recommended Citation

Muskie, Edmund S., "Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Meeting of Congressional Interns" (1971). *Speeches*. 117.

<https://scarab.bates.edu/msp/117>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Edmund S. Muskie Papers at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Speeches by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

SENATOR EDWARD S. MUSKIE
TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS
CONGRESSIONAL INTERN MEETING

JULY 21, 1971

You have already made it worthwhile to come. And I am glad to be here this afternoon. First, I do want to take this opportunity to say "Hello" to the interns in my own office. It gets to be rather a problem to get together.

I'm sure that the way Congress works, or doesn't work is strange to all of you, in spite of the fact that you've been here for several weeks. As I think of the way we do things around here, I'm often reminded of something that happened in a Maine town meeting years ago.

The town needed a new jail. So the town fathers adopted a resolution. It went something like this: Resolved that the town build a new jail. That the new jail be built out of the materials of the old jail. And that the old jail be used until the new jail is finished.

As I considered what I might say this morning, or noon -- this is in that uncertain period when I'm not sure which it is -- I was persuaded that, first of all, I not say too much at the outset but say enough for you to get ready to ask me questions. Secondly, as I try to put myself in the frame of mind of young people your age, I try to take myself back to the time I was the same age. And, let me hasten to add that I'm not going to spend a lot of time reminiscing. It's of no interest to you. But as I look back to the time when I developed a political awareness of my own, (this was in high school), moved through the 30's, and the 40's, and the 50's, and the 60's, to the present time, in the beginning of that period I had no political objectives or ambitions of my own, it seemed to me that the politics, by and large, has been the politics of insecurity -- insecurity arising from economic and social conditions;; insecurity arising from tensions between nations which produce war or the threat of war; and the insecurity or frustration of those who see no prospect for self-fulfillment in their lives or their circumstances. All of the great issues which confront us now are related to our insecurity.

These insecurities were the basis of the politics of the 1930's when I was a college student. They were the basis of the politics of the 1960's. And they will be the basis of the politics of 1972.

And our failure to deal effectively with them, I think, is the basis for the generation gap which exists now, and which has always existed between the young and those who are older. And the young now -- I think with greater intensity -- and greater sensitivity and awareness than earlier generations -- seek to improve our performance in dealing with the basis of those underlying insecurities.

And I think your frustration was expressed about as well as I've seen it expressed in something Walt Whitman said right after the Civil War when he said:

"Where is what I started for so long ago. And why is it yet unfound?"

I think that is what young people your age are saying to people my age who were also once young. How do we deal more effectively with the insecurities?

The number of issues with which this Congress has dealt and will be forced to deal before we adjourn toward the end of the year are all related to them. The war resolution, the draft, arms control, unemployment, health care, the cities, crime control, equality of treatment for the disadvantaged, and so many more. All of these are attempts, so better than others, to bring justice -- and stability -- and peace -- to our society and to the world by dealing with these insecurities. And I suspect that you will have to live with them for as long as we have had to live with them. I hope that out of the experience of failures and shortcomings you will find a greater wisdom with which to deal with them.

From time to time, there are developments which bring hope -- I can remember one when I was a student in high school, when the leading nations of the world signed a pact, a treaty, agreeing to outlaw war. Well, you all know what happened to the results of that one.

One of the recent developments, of course, is the announcement of the President's intention to visit Peking. A dramatic announcement, I think an important diplomatic initiative.-- and something to take some comfort from. But increasingly, as we look

at it, we're going to see its other sides and its other dimensions, the questions which it raises, and the doubts will be increasingly expressed in response to it-- some of which we are already beginning to read from the right and some from the left

What does it mean? What can it mean? What may it mean? No one knows. I think that with respect to the war, it means that the President has generated increasing pressures upon himself to end the war more quickly. That may not have been his intent one doesn't know, but I think that inevitably it unleashes such pressures so that, hopefully, it may mean that. It's inconceivable to me, for example, that all Americans would lightly contemplate a visit by the President to Peking to talk to the Premier of mainland China while American boys are still fighting and dying in Southeast Asia. In the same way I find it difficult to contemplate the possibility of Chou En Lai agreeing to anything substantive so long as our American presence means that in Southeast Asia. And I take it that the objective of the meeting is to achieve some constructive improvement and healthier relations between mainland China and the United States. The war and its status at that time will inevitably have a great deal to do with whether or not the meeting produces such substantive advances.

It's clear that the announcement has brought some benefits for mainland China already in advance of the meeting because such an announcement of intent-- an agreement to such a meeting indicates that the President of the United States is looking down the road toward recognition of mainland China. How we get to recognition, how long it takes and by what means and through what process of negotiations and what agreements has yet to be settled. But that the Chinese would read this initiative on the part of the President in the light of ultimate recognition must be clear; admission to the United Nations, another real gain for the Chinese. Because, whatever happens at the meeting and before it is held, the announcement of the meeting has added impetus -- and how do we persuade other nations who have otherwise been almost persuaded to vote for admission of mainland China to the United Nations to withhold any expression of that view? So, it seems to me, that the announcement of the meeting has added great impetus to the prospect that mainland China will be admitted to the United Nations at the next assembly this fall.

This has been a significant and important development. Its repercussions, if the meeting materializes as favorably as all of us pray that it will, then, of course, it will generate waves with respect to our internal affairs, our relations with each other, and the whole shape of foreign policy for years to come. So it is an important development. And it can be one of the hopeful signs that all too often, even in my lifetime have petered out without really dealing effectively with the international insecurities which have had such an impact on the rest of the world upon our ability to deal with our own problems here at home.

Well, having said that, I hope that I've talked long enough to give you time to think of whatever it is that you want to say to me or ask of me. I know that I could have tried to anticipate a whole host of issues to discuss, but I think that would have been a disservice to you and that I would rather respond to those issues which you would suggest.

QUESTIONS - ANSWERS

Note: In most cases, the questions were inaudible. However, the Senator generally repeated the question for the audience.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Population control? Yes, I do think we need to advance our concepts and our policies with respect to family planning. My position on the abortion question is a personal decision and, of course, the laws dealing with abortion are state matters and state issues and that the states will make their own decisions. But since I am and have been asked from time to time what my own personal view about it is, I've indicated my concern that what's involved is a possible dilution of our concept of the integrity of human life in a free society. And it troubles me. I don't find any difficulty with coming to grips with the concept of therapeutic abortion -- I think that's rather widespread. Beyond that -- to use it as a widespread method of population control -- I simply bring myself to do it. But there are other things we can do. Making available the information, the techniques, and the advice, and the services which will enable families to plan their own family sizes. More than that, I think we have to do much better than we've done in opening the options that are available to Americans -- especially those at the lower level of the income scale, those who are poor, disadvantaged and lacking in opportunity. Because, - our own history demonstrates that if we deal with that effectively, as we improve the standard of life for people, their capacity for understanding their options, and their capacity for taking advantage of their opportunities, not only economic but social and otherwise, that then they, themselves, will exercise the restraint on family growth that have an effect on population control. In other words, improvement of the life of our people as well as a role for government in making family planning the result of an intelligent process are the two, I think, sensible approaches that I could support, and support enthusiastically.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Do I file reports on contributions and so on at the present time in connection with my present efforts, with the clerk of the house?
I do not for the reason that it is not required and I know of no candidate who do. I did file last year, because last year I was involved in a campaign for the Senate and I wanted to avoid any suggestion that there was not full disclosure so I disclosed everything, including those expenditures and contributions which related to the operation downtown and not technically with the campaign operation in Maine. Now, I think that there needs to be public policy in this field to cover this period as well as the conventional campaign periods. We don't have it as yet. And I think we should.

QUESTION:

(clap) (Asks ESM to set an example in this way)

MUSKIE:

Well, let me tell you what happens when you do. Last year, for example, I did disclose and I found that I, rather than others who did not disclose, was the subject of widespread criticism. (clap) May I say that I think the star on the Democratic side of the aisle among the potential candidates an effort to agree on certain common approaches to the problems of campaigning which I hope might be expanded and developed. We have, for example, agreed on a limitation on campaign spending for media, television and radio, at \$4 per registered voter. I think that's a significant agreement, a significant limitation. We are also going to undertake to discuss whether or not and to what extent we will use spot advertising. Now there, again, the question of unilateral action to implement an objective. There is a resistance to eliminating spot advertising on the part of candidates who have not had as much national exposure and I've had -- I understand that. So they don't want to relinquish it -- they may want to use in a given state primary to get national exposure. I don't like spot advertising because it's not substantive, it's not enlightening on the issues, it's simply selling -- pure, plain, selling. But if I were to agree not to use it unilaterally, then I might find myself with my hands tied in a state like California where the exposure I got in '68 might well have faded by 1972, and if my opposition in the California primary used it, then, in self-defense I feel it ought to be available to me even though I don't like it. So, I think we need to develop policies that apply to everybody alike or you tend to get this one-sided effect.

³
We're also going to discuss the question of agreeing to debates in the primaries. Now, this would be my preference to the spot advertising but again, unless you get agreement from among all those that are participating,, then you get this one sided effect, but its agreements of this kind that I think we ought to develop among those who are candidates or potential candidates, and I think that can contribute to the building of public policy. Today for example, we're taking up in the Senate, unless it's set aside for another matter, the campaign-cost bill. The agreement by the potential Democratic candidates will, I hope, lend support and create support for that bill which will cover some of these points, that are of interest to you this morning. Not only immediate costs, but also limitations on spending and disclosure of spending; all of that is incorporated in this bill, and we have a chance to build on it.

I don't know how I can get a finger sharp enough to identify, . . . all right, go ahead . . . (laughter)

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Well, the question is, the statement first - that my record on the war has been subject to criticism lately, I don't think it's only been lately, but that's your phrasing of the question; and how do I respond? Well, I can't rewrite the record, but I think I might say one or two things about it . . . One, that agreeing to our policies any given year in the past sixty-five, doesn't mean a commitment to a hundred-year's war; so I might be for a policy one year, and against it two or three years later. That's the first point. The second, I detect very little consistency among those who have had any part to play in shaping that policy, over the five or six years that is usually the subject of discussion. Finally putting aside the view of what my past says about my view of the war, I'm clear about what my present view is. As I understood my initial objective, it was to help the South Vietnamese buy the time to settle their own future in their own way. We bought them considerable time, at considerable cost, to ourselves and to them; whether you measure it in lives, or treasure, or disruption in their national life and ours - divisiveness between our peoples - however you measure it, it has been at tremendous cost. Over that period of four or five years, they've had an opportunity to build up their political viability, which I don't think they've used, as effectively as they should have, and to build up their military viability which they may or may not have used. We won't know whether or not they've done that effectively until they've had an opportunity to test it on their own. But in any case, we've bought them time to build up these two elements of national strength, whether or not they've done so is something they've got to decide for themselves at some point. I think we've gone beyond the point where we can continue to buy them time and I have doubts now with the benefit of hindsight, which I did not have at the time, as to the wisdom and morality of our involvement in the first place. Now a public official whose goes on the record on issues over a period over a quarter of a century, always faces the question of consistency; I've never thought of consistency as a inflexible rule, I thought I always should be willing and ready to admit mistakes or to change my mind, when I am convinced that there are reasons to do so.

I think that Winston Churchill put it once in a very good way: when he was accused of inconsistency he said, "Well, I've made thousands of meals out of my lifetime out of words that I've eaten, and on the whole, I've found it a pretty healthy diet." (laughter)

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Well, how do you prove the negative? If somebody called you wishy-washy, how would you disprove it? I don't think I am . . . laughter . . . you know beginning in 1946, I began as a Democrat carving out a political career, in a very one-sided Republican state, and as I look where I am from where I came, it doesn't seem I could have done that by being wishy-washy or unwilling to come to grips with decisions. If that record doesn't speak for itself in characterizing me on those points, there's nothing I can say here today that would convince you otherwise.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I'm afraid I can't remember the shape of the issue -- I certainly don't hold any objective of exempting the Department of Defense from requirements to meet environmental values. As a matter of fact, I am the author of the legislation that is now on the books that requires all federal decisions and actions which have a potential environmental impact to be scrutinized by the Environmental Protection Agency and state environmental agencies in the light of their evaluation. In other words, I was one of the fathers and coauthors of the environmental impact statement so my objective is clear -- I just don't recall the particular issue that was involved in that amendment but, if you'll give me your name and address, later I will try to dig it out so I can recall why it is I had reservations about that particular way of implementing the objective. But my record on the objective is clear, I think.

QUESTION:

(question - laugh - clapping)

MUSKIE:

laugh, audience clap

Well, I suspect that any answer I gave to a question like that would not be regarded as objective. (Laugh) And it is the question that from time to time I am asked to answer and I've decided that the only way to treat it is not to answer it, but rather to say what I think the next President ought to represent if he is to get or deserve the support of his party and the country.

In a sense, the reason I haven't announced up to this point is that I am still evaluating myself. If I say that publicly then I would be accused by some of being wishy-washy. (laugh) But I really think it takes some time and exposure for a man to reach the point when he believes that he, and only he, or predominately he among the possibilities (laugh)-- you learn all these qualifying words after you've been around as long as I have -- but I think the next President needs, above all, to have the capacity to govern this country -- and by that I mean the capacity to establish his credibility with all of the different groups of Americans who are looking now for national leadership, national goals, and a national vision of what this country ought to be. So he's got to have the capacity to stimulate the confidence of all groups of Americans in his good will, in his intentions, in his capacity, in his understanding, in his determination to do what he has said he hopes to do. I would not seek the Presidency, and will not, unless I feel on the basis of the exposure I've had, the reaction I've had from people around the country that I have some ability to meet this test. And when I do, I'll make that decision not by comparing myself with others -- that's a decision for the electorate to make -- but, rather, because I think that I could. That would be the basis.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I don't really think, at the present time, the possibility of divisiveness and fragmentation of the Democratic Party has reached suicidal proportions. -- it is conceivable, of course, on the basis of 1968 that it might. But I sense that there is a disposition on the part of those who seek the nomination as well as grass roots citizens across the country to elect a winner this time and there will be vigorous debate, there will be a number of candidacies and the competition will be rough and tough, but we've had that in the past without fracturing the party so it couldn't win. So I think you ought to make a distinction between that exercise which is typical of the Democratic Party and will be this year, and the fratricidal or suicidal kind of tendency that we generated in 1968. I don't see, in other words, at this point another 1968. It may come.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE:

Well, I don't know that I can do it in any sweeping way across the board this morning, but let me suggest a couple of things that could at least give you the flavor of my thinking about it all. For example, with respect to China, I guess we've all made about a 180 degree turn in the last twenty-five years -- so I won't use that new development -- so of make that academic. But in Europe, for example, I think we ought to move and we are, at least we

have two opportunities to move in the direction of agreement with the Soviet Union on some of those areas which we regarded as areas of inevitable and unavoidable confrontation with the Soviet Union since 1946.-- in Berlin, -- the borders of eastern Europe, trade between east and western Europe, trade with the Soviet Union itself, agreements to limit arms, agreements to reduce our military forces in Europe on a multi-lateral basis, many of these have been regarded as unacceptable even as objectives for negotiations with the Soviet Union during much of the last twenty-five years. I think now public attitudes have changed-- I think it's wise that they have -- and I think we ought to give them impetus, and I think we ought to be willing to take some unilateral initiatives to stimulate it. For example, I am now chairman of the Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee on Arms Control and International Organizations. I've held some hearings already on various aspects of it and one set of hearings for a couple of days were devoted to this question: Do we, at times, by reason of our own unilateral decisions with respect to the development of weapons and their deployment and their funding stimulate and fuel the arms race? Should we not exercise restraint in that respect in order to take into account when we evaluate a new decision with respect to a new weapons system whether, by giving it support and funding it, we do not, or do, stimulate a reaction on the other side which represents an escalation of the arms race?

So I think we need to take -- and I think we are large enough, strong enough, -- safe enough, secure enough as a country-- to take initiatives in exercising unilateral restraints with respect to the deployment and funding of new weapons in order to avoid an escalation of the arms race. It seems to me that when we do so, we can realistically trigger a response on the other side, because I think obviously arms must be just as burdensome and expensive for the Soviet Union as for us. Up until this point, in the last quarter of the century, we've tended to invest in arms as fast as we have developed them because we have felt that we couldn't possibly overinsure our insecurity on this question. The result has been, I think, a triggering of the arms race.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Can I give any insights into the President's timing of his announcement of his Peking visit, especially with respect to the SALT talks and the war in Southeast Asia?

be tempted to

I am sure they will be those who will speculate whether his timing was political -- I don't think there is any way to answer that speculation -- with respect to the Vietnam war, whether or not he views this initiative, or timed it, to give himself another option on the Vietnam war is also difficult to answer. One can speculate and rationalize that kind of speculation because it obviously does give him another option on the Vietnam war -- it gives him a potential end run around the Paris talks, for example, it may conceivably buy him more time here at home -- more patience here at home -- because of its appearance as a possible answer to the Vietnam war -- so it might conceivably been timed. On the other hand, looking at it with a less suspicious perspective, it may be that the timing was dictated by recent developments in China indicating that such an initiative on his part might be well received. There was the ping-pong diplomacy exchange, for example, the increasing move of newspapermen into China, the obvious and what seemed to be increasingly receptiveness on the part of the Chinese to this kind of an initiative, and that may have dictated the timing.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I would want an evaluation of the military situation at closer hand than I have it, but my impression is, at this point, that we should at least commit ourselves toward giving her the jets that she needs to maintain the power balance. That's been my view right along, and I would insure that she did, of course. It is from the point of view of the Egyptians an unneutral act (clapping) but let me say to you that from my point of view there's only one way that we are going to work out an agreement or that the parties involved are going to work out an agreement in the Middle East, and that is to maintain a situation of military stability. If we allow instability to arise we are going to diminish the prospects for an agreement. This is why I think we must insure that Israel can hold up her end in the military balance in the Middle East. (clapping)

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I really think that's a question you should put to Senator Humphrey. (laughing) My feeling is that we would be moving out of it, if not out of it at this point, at a more rapid pace -- but that's such a self-serving answer to give you since we do not hold office, and it can't be disproved, that I don't like to give it. I really think our policy would be different and closer to an end of our involvement. But I can't prove that and so I'd rather not give you a self-serving answer. I'd rather give you my own answer as to where I stand now and I've tried to stay on top of it and to make my stand clear for the last two years constantly. That's on the record. And that's a reflection of what my attitudes would have been.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Well, I think the President's announcement is a political plus for President Nixon. Now whether or not it will be long range, of course, depends upon what now materializes from it. We've had summit meetings before and, by and large, the record of summit meetings hasn't been too productive. But, it is conceivable, this one might be -- so he has an initial political plus, I think. I expect we will begin to see some reactions against it, especially from the right wing of his own party, but it hasn't been very vocal except here and there in scattered voices but it will be and that's where he can expect the criticism -- from the right wing of his own party. So far as the populace as a whole is concerned, and I've made calls around the country to get some feeling for it, it's been a political plus. Whether it will remain so depends upon what happens now. He has raised people's expectations, now if they are dashed with respect to the war in Southeast Asia or with respect to constructive improvement with our relations with mainland China, then it could turn out to be a political minus.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I didn't ^{hear} ~~hear~~ all of it -- I think I missed the question part of it -- With respect to the bombing policy in Southeast Asia from the point of view of the Nuremberg trials and the precedent set there, I think that's a judgment to be made after more careful consideration of what is involved, who is responsible for the policies, what their objectives were, whether there was indiscriminate bombing, and all the rest of it. I think you need a searching inquiry of the fact before you make moral judgments that carry with them a penalty. Now with respect to overall justification of the bombing, I think that I would agree with an increasing number of Americans that they were not justified, that we should not have embarked upon them in the first instance, that they have been used immorally in that sense now, to annihilate villages, to destroy unintentionally, perhaps, but inevitably civilian populations, to desolate the countryside, to destroy its fertility, its life-giving capabilities which has been, I think, totally out of balance with the invisible, almost invisible, military values.

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: I think that we ought to do these things with respect to the economy. I think first, we ought to try, but that seems unlikely now, a strong incomes policy and I think that it is essential to have such a policy whether it is in the form of guidelines or controls if we are to be able to safely do the things we ought to do to stimulate the economy for the purpose of dealing with unemployment. And I think with respect to that we ought to add something like 8 - 12 billion dollars out of the federal budget in the form of accelerated tax cuts and federal spending in order to stimulate the economy in order to bring about some effective dealing with the unemployment problem. I think the spending ought to take the form -- as it has -- of public sector employment, the public service jobs concept which has now been signed into law by the President after he vetoed it last year, the accelerated public works program which he has just now vetoed and which was sustained and which will now be replaced by some other legislation, and so on. But these two things need to be done. I think the greatest economic mistake the President made was made his first week in office when he announced, in effect, that he was keeping hands off in the wage and price decisions which could have an inflationary effect and he has refused to change that policy in any effective way since.

QUESTION: Would you seriously consider a black running mate, and if so .(inaudible)
MUSKIE: Well, I haven't seriously considered any running mate at this point because I haven't yet selected the top of my ticket. (laughter, clapping)

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: It depends upon how you define our original objective. I never understood it to be the conquest of North Vietnam, for example -- that would be a win policy; I never understood it to be the reunification of the two halves of Vietnam on non-communist lines -- that would be another form of win policy, I always understood it to be and I discussed it earlier, and on those terms it is pretty difficult to define what a win policy would be. How would we achieve a result that would clearly guarantee for the indefinite future for the people of South Vietnam a government of the form that existed at the moment that we left it? We didn't pursue maximum military policies is clear -- we didn't drop the nuclear bomb, and I think that was right; we didn't try the conquest of North Vietnam, I think that was right -- I think you have to define what you have in mind -- a no-win policy before I can respond to it more specifically than that. You want to follow-up with another question?

QUESTION:

MUSKIE: Well, that is a step toward a wider and more intensive war -- (next question inaudible) --- looking to what objective?

Let me put it this way. There was some discussion in the papers recently of some of the considerations given to the port of Haiphong proper, for example To have embarked on that would have put us into direct ...

END OF TAPE