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QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD - SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
FARLEIGH-DICKINSON UNIVERSITY - TEANECK, N. J.
OCTOBER 14, 1971

Senator Muskie: I am conscious of the fact that there are a number who are outside this room who -- speaking to them may I say that if you can find any way to send your questions in, I will be happy to consider them as well.

Question: (unclear -- Democratic Committee. How do you feel it will effect the performance of the party?)

Senator Muskie: From what I know of Mrs. Harris as I consider who she is and what she is, I would be amazed if she were not committed to opening up the political process. Her position on it is not a matter of public record. I think that those who supported Senator Hughes -- and that included myself -- supported him not because they were against Mrs. Harris but because we believed that Senator Hughes was the most visible and trusted symbol of reform that we could have chosen. Mrs. Harris is a black woman -- on both of those counts I think the action of the Democratic National Committee yesterday was a plus. Because neither a black nor a woman as I can recall has ever held that position before. That's a gain. And in itself it is a reflection of the fact that the political caucus is opening up to those who could not find entry before. And so I think that with the effective and organized support and prodding of those who are interested in reform that we should find --and I believe we will find -- in Mrs. Harris someone who will seek to advance the objectives that the reform movement seeks to achieve.

Question: (unclear -- on the possibility of a black vice-president.)

Senator Muskie: Well, let me give you the full context of the discussion. I've seen so many reports -- many of them inaccurate -- of what I said, that rather than say to you that what you've read is accurate, I'd rather say what happened and then let you judge the incident for yourself. I'm aware of the fact that among blacks across the country I'm largely an unknown quantity. And so two or three years ago I resolved whenever I could to mingle with blacks in their own community -- mingle with black leaders and to talk with them for the purpose of understanding their problems and their viewpoints better, and for giving -- to give them a chance to get to know me better. And this meeting in Los Angeles -- in the Watts area of Los Angeles -- was arranged at my request, for that purpose, and fell in that series of meetings. And as in all the others I undertook to solicit their views and their questions -- and we very quickly moved into a discussion of black grievances, of the inequities and injustices

of blacks across the country, and what we might do effectively to deal with those problems. It was in that context that I was asked would it be possible to consider a black as a vice presidential candidate in 1972. And I said that if our objective was to defeat Mr. Nixon and to elect a president and an administration committed to dealing effectively with these inequities, that that would be a course that would bring us defeat. I did not think that the country was prepared at this point for such a case. Now that answer was accepted by that group. It was not challenged -- although I'm sure that all those there did not agree. Because it's not easy for us to agree with something that runs against what we hope is true for ourselves especially. But it did not erupt into any hostility, and we continued the discussion on a very constructive note of the other black grievances. So, that's the situation. Now what I was undertaking to do -- and I believe, you know, that if you really want to make politics work to advance the cause of humanism in this country you've got to find ways to be effective. And so effectiveness -- and I suppose a Democrat from Maine is particularly imbued with this point of view -- effectiveness means how do you win not only the final battle, but the battles that will lead to it. So what I've been saying ever since to blacks -- and I've been asked about this incident in subsequent meetings with black leaders -- including very militant ones, who publicly don't find it possible to endorse what I said -- I've made these additional points to them, especially to those who say "Well, Senator, wasn't it a political mistake to make such a statement, even if it's true?" I said: Well, you blacks have been telling me that us white politicians lie to you too much. So which would you rather have? An answer that I know is a lie-- at least from my point of view? Or an answer that I believe to be true? Secondly, ever since the Kerner Commission came out, black leaders have been drumming home to other Americans the facts of black inequality in this country. The fact that a black child has a ninety percent (greater) chance of dieing before his first birthday -- that's a fact. Should we utter it? Should we mention it? Is it bad to face it? The fact that a black has a ninety percent (greater) chance of being unemployed than a white. Should we conceal that? Or should we put it on the table? So we can see it, acknowledge it, work to correct it? Well, if you talk about all of the other inequalities frankly, so that you can correct them -- why do we turn away from an acknowledgment of black political inequality? You can't correct these injustices unless you face them, bring them to the attention of Americans who are not aware of them or haven't focused on them, who are not concerned about them, who feel no sense of urgency about them. Obviously it is wrong in this country that Americans --and they include not just blacks, they include others in improper combinations -- are not

freely and equally within reach of the presidency or the vice-presidency. Every election year sees a balanced ticket. Why? Because it is presumed that one combination may be more electable than another combination. Whether it's a Catholic on the ticket, or a Jew on the ticket, or a Black on the ticket, or an old man on the ticket, or a Southerner on the ticket, or what have you -- now what we're moving toward in this country, and my whole life has been committed to it, is a political system of complete political equality. I'm the first Catholic ever elected Governor of Maine -- and I was told all my life that I couldn't aspire to the governorship because I was a Catholic. But I finally made it. But not because the people of Maine knew I was a Catholic. For some reason the Republican party chose not to rock the boat. They didn't make it evident. When the lead paragraph of a story after my election announced to the people of Maine that I was the first Catholic, the first Democrat, the first son of a Polish immigrant, to be elected Governor of Maine the shock wave across that state was visible. If the election had been held the next day chances are I'd have been defeated. But they've gotten used to me, since. But in 1960 we made the breakthrough on the national level. And we're going to make these breakthroughs -- we're going to live to see the day when any American, including blacks, is considered eligible for the highest offices in the land. (applause)

Question:

(unclear-----no matter who is President, whether he is white or black or Jew or Catholic or Protestant, will I ever see my grandchildren have peace on earth, and no wars, and no _____ we ever get a strong enough man to fight all this so that they can live in peace and have everything _____) (loud applause)

Senator Muskie:

You turned the lights out with that question! Wait -- I'm asked to repeat the question so that those outside can hear it. I'm not sure that I can repeat the question verbatim, but if I get the sense wrong, please feel free to correct me. As I understand the question, it was from a lady who describes herself as a grandmother --that's hard to believe -- but she said, and I think that those outside ought to hear what she did say -- she said I don't care who is elected, but will we ever live to see the day when we will have peace, no drug problems, and all the other inequities and injustices of our society corrected. Well, I suppose that if we ever achieve a full millenium that we will no longer be on earth but elsewhere -- but nevertheless, let me say to you, that it is not an easy thing to do -- to get all Americans, free citizens with a right to vote, to agree on how to achieve or work toward these

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objectives. Secondly, it isn't easy for leaders to identify the best policies and courses. And finally, leaders, even at their courageous best, can move only as far as an enlightened public opinion will give them support. Now it's the problem of putting these three ingredients together that we face at any time in American history, but I think that we especially face it at this time. Because Americans want, if I sense their mood -- they want to believe that we can, once again, in America, pursue what we believe to be the truth. And I think that most Americans believe that the truth requires that this society be so open that every member of it have a place and a future in it. I think that's what Americans believe America represents at its best, and they want that best to be the truth. Secondly, I think that Americans want their country to be a force for peace and justice around the planet. Our policies haven't taken us to that objective in the past. They've fallen short, they've failed, they've made mistakes. But I think the thrust of American wishes and hopes and desires is in that direction. So in this next year and one half we must identify not the objectives, which I think are clear -- I'm satisfied, I've talked to Americans of all descriptions in all areas of the country -- and I believe that Americans want to move in the direction you articulate. So what we've got to identify are the courses that we can agree upon which are likely to take us in that direction and then you choose the men you think have the vision and the courage and the plain guts to move in that direction.

Question:

(unclear)

Senator Muskie:

The question was who would I like to see as the choices for the Supreme Court nomination. Well, I don't have the list that the President has this morning, and I think that if I were to produce a list it would look much different from his. Because I believe that the Supreme Court should -- to the extent that it is possible to find the men or women to fashion a court that measures up to the tradition of a Holmes, or a Brandeis, or a Black -- a court that understands that its function and purpose is to advance the cause of humanism in this country. I would try to find people to put on the court who would not regard their responsibility as one, that of making a neat political balance between competing and conflicting values. I think that the court should move this country in so far as it can, by wise interpretation of our laws, by the wise application of our laws in the direction which will guarantee equal rights and which will insure a vigorous policy designed to achieve that as quickly as possible -- and I think you need a great human being on the court to do that. (applause)

Question: (unclear - regarding Church and State)

Senator Muskie: Well, I think we've got -- and we're in the process I think of developing ways of providing aid that do not run hard up against the separation of church and state doctrine. I believe in the separation of church and state, not as a way of avoiding responsibility for our children wherever they go to school, but as a way of protecting religious groups and the individual citizen against any governmental interference with his right to worship as he pleases. Now I think we're getting some interesting experiments in this connection. I think it was in Vermont as a matter of fact, over the week-end --there was an experiment which is underway to give state and community support for non-religious oriented courses -- paying teachers out of public funds, devoting a part of the day to religious oriented courses and part of the day to non-religious oriented courses. And I think it's in those ways that we must carve out the distinction between what represents a solid support for the non-religious education that these schools are providing. I think the Vermont experiment is worth looking at and pursuing.

Question: (unclear)

Senator Muskie: I understand that. And it's happening in my state. We have a great many Catholic schools -- and other schools of other denominations. We are searching for ways to give them support without breaking down this barrier. I would be reluctant to see that barrier broken down. I think it would be a disservice to others. So what we have to do is to make breakthroughs in the concepts of what kind of separation we need to maintain. It is clear that the present course will mean an accelerated closing of these schools -- and that would be bad. So I think we have to find a way to do it without crossing that barrier.

Question: (unclear)

Answer: Yes, but there's a view -- and then we'll go to other questions, I'm not concerned about pressing this one--but let me give you this one question. You know the view within the Catholic church and Catholic laymen has changed considerably since I was a young man. Catholics were in the forefront of those who resisted public aid, when I was a boy. I can remember my father speaking on this subject, and saying we don't want you know, to see this broken down. Well, now, under the economic pressures which bear upon Catholic as well as non-Catholic schools, the view is changing. Well, with that change in view, we've got to examine public policy and I think we are in the process of doing that -- it's going to involve an emotional struggle in many communities and in every state. But I think that out of it will come a sensible division of responsibility.

Question: (unclear - on birth control)

Senator Muskie: The question is what is my view on federally enforced population and birth control. I don't know what is meant by federally enforced -- but if by that you mean that the government ought to dictate the size of families, no. I think that -- you know -- this is one of the fundamental freedoms that you take away from man or from parents their own decision as to family size--why, that's the ultimate, it seems to me, of authoritarianism. But I do think that we need to get into birth control, and I've supported legislation to do that. I think the government ought to develop the information, do the research, to make it possible for families to make these decisions. Now I assume the follow-on question -- I might as well put it now, since it will inevitably come -- is my view of abortion. I don't approve of abortion as a form of population control. I have no difficulty with abortion as a therapeutic means of dealing with pregnancies produced by rape or incest or where the mother's mental or physical health is involved -- but as a sweeping instrument for population control, no. I am concerned about the integrity of life in a free society, and I think once you begin to dilute it you run into great difficulties and I'm not prepared to go that far at this point. But birth control and family planning, yes. Secondly, making it possible for people to break out of the cycle of poverty and disadvantage under which so many of them make family planning decisions, that run counter to their interests and run counter to the interests of society, yes -- we've got to focus our policies more effectively on that problem as well. The statistics indicate very clearly that as you bring families out of the cycle of poverty and disadvantage and discrimination that they acquire the ability to make their own decisions wisely and effectively -- and the statistics demonstrate that.

Question: Senator, because of the war in Vietnam and the draft, a lot of people have left the country. What is your opinion on amnesty for them?

Senator Muskie: Let me put it this way: one, I don't think this is the time to consider amnesty, for this reason: I would classify the groups of young men who have been subject to the draft into three: and all of them, by and large, have conscientiously objected to this war. Some of them, out of a sense of duty, chose to go, notwithstanding their objections. They went to Vietnam and died. Others chose to go to jail rather than submit to the draft. And others left the country. Now amnesty lifts the burden of the decision from the third group. It doesn't lift the burden from the first. It may, in some cases, from the second -- except for the prison terms they have served. But in any case, I think the time to consider the amnesty question is after this war is over, when we can consider it objectively, dispassionately, and with a full understanding of the equities involved.

Question: (unclear)

Senator Muskie: I want to get more young ladies. Right here.

Question: What is your opinion on John Lindsay's switch to the Democratic party? _____ (unclear)

Senator Muskie: The question is what is my opinion of John Lindsay's switch to the Democratic Party and what do I think his influence to -- will be. Well, many people have wondered why he switched. My answer at the moment is that when he saw what five years of Republican rule had done to New York City he decided to change. (laughter) But let me say, seriously, beyond that, that -- you know I have a personal liking for John Lindsay, and I've had some opportunity to know him personally, and I have great respect for what he stands for -- and whether or not he's administered the affairs of New York City is a question we can consider in due course but so far as the values he represents and his concern about the problems of the cities and his real comitment I think that his can be a very influential voice across America in focusing public attention on the need to do something effectively to change conditions and the way we govern cities -- and so I -- I know he's been in my corner on many issues in the Congress that deal with the urban problem, and he's given me help. And I certainly join my voice with his in promoting this cause.

Question: (unclear) on Phase II.

Senator Muskie: What is my feeling on Phase II of the economic policy? Well, I'm looking forward to Phase III. (laughter) Which I hope will be presided over by another President. (applause) On Phase II all we have at the moment in all frankness and objectivity, is a structure. And it's a complicated structure. And I think it might have been put together better -- but I'm not interested in nitpicking on structure. But you can't really judge it until you see the policies as they begin to emerge. And with the Payboard operating separately from the Price Board -- and then with the rather vague responsibilities over dividends and interests and profits, it's hard to see at this point how they're going to be put together so that they will relate to each other and form a cohesive economic policy. So it's going to be quite a trick to put together, and I don't think that we can judge the results until they begin to come. We need first of all a firm policy that imposes effective restraints across the board. Secondly, it has to be a fair one, and it has to be perceived as a fair one, if you're going to get the public support without which you cannot make it work. And thirdly, it has to be one that deals effectively with the inequities now existing and which largely exist among groups who have not had the economic and political power to protect themselves against the impact of inflation -- older Americans, Americans of the rural areas of the country, the poor Americans in the cities. And these groups have had no effective muscle to protect themselves. And so we need an addition to the wage price restraints of Phase II -- we need an effective program of economic stimulation to deal with the problems of people who do not have what it takes to provide for their day to day needs. And they are the people who have born the brunt of the administration's economic policy up to now -- the policies that have produced inflation and unemployment and hardship for five million Americans who find no work to do on Monday. So you have to consider the whole thing. May I say -- contrary to the impression of this administration -- a speech is not by itself a solution to a problem. The economic problem has not yet been solved. (applause)

Question: (unclear -- draft, war, _____)

Senator Muskie: The draft and the war -- and -- did you have another one? Well, what's yours, and I'll try to cover them all in one.

Question: (lengthy - unclear)

Senator Muskie: Well, I thought I had indicated already I would answer that...the draft and the war?

Question: (unclear)

Senator Muskie: AND President Nixon's _____ (unclear)? Now, by God, if I pull off this answer I'm going to have it transcribed and sent out around the country! (laughter) Well, on the war. One, I am committed to withdraw. And I am committed to a date to withdraw. And I have been for two years. I came to that conclusion later than some. Because I was not sure that that was the effective way to get out. When I finally came to it, I came to it for these reasons: one, that whatever the rightness or wrongness of our original involvement in the war -- and I now believe it to be wrong -- that we had committed all that we could afford to commit as a country; to this country -- that it was draining us of resources and draining us of belief and confidence in our own system, that it was time to turn to our tasks here at home. Secondly, I came to that conclusion because our original commitment was to buy time for the Vietnamese to develop their own political, economic, and military viability so that they could make their own decisions about the future. Well, we bought them five years -- at a bitter price, and I felt the time for them to test their ability to do so had come, and that they should be forced or required to meet that test, whatever the results. There is no way for us to guarantee their future. From both counts, I came to the conclusion that we ought to get out. And, finally, I believe and have believed for some time -- that a definite commitment to a withdrawal by a date certain would then make it possible and begin the process of negotiation to negotiate such things as the safe withdrawal of our remaining troops, the return of our prisoners of war, and even a cease-fire which might be the basis for political arrangements between the Vietnamese themselves.

Now, with respect to the draft. As between what I conceive it to be--the concept of a volunteer army and the draft -- the back-up of our military manpower policy, I choose the draft. Now that doesn't mean I'm against volunteers. That doesn't mean I'm against improving the compensation of those who serve in our military forces so that compensation and perquisites are comparable to private life. I see no reason why anybody who serves in the military ought to serve at a sacrifice as against what he might be able to do in private life. So, to the extent that we can make military service comparable in pay, perquisites and what have you, we ought to do that. And I can see that in times of peace that kind of a manpower policy would produce enough volunteers to meet our requirements. But what I think the real issue is, is what do you do at a time when for real reasons that the public can support -- involving our national security--we need military manpower beyond those peacetime requirements? Now, in my judgment, the back-up to our military procurement -- manpower procurement policy -- at such a time should be the draft and not the volunteer army. Now, let me

give you my reasons for that. One, to permanently isolate the more affluent, well-off members of our society from any possibility of military service at any time whatever that the requirements of our country -- supportable by our country -- is to change the whole concept of citizenship in our society. It goes back to arguments made in the constitutional convention by people who understood how a society changes when its military functions are handled by a professional military army. Secondly, I think that the burden of such a policy would fall upon the lower income groups of our country and exacerbate divisions that now exist. I think that would be unfortunate. Finally, I just think that a volunteer professional army made up of people devoting their lives to military service would be too tempting an instrument for future presidents to use. In the whole Vietnam war, it represents --and public reaction to it -- represents our revulsion against what many people perceive to be a presidential decision to involve us in a war that has cost us 55,000 American lives, over 300,000 casualties, over 125 billion dollars in American treasure. Well, now with the Vietnam war experience behind us, I think any future president is going to be inhibited whenever he has to go to the country to draft the sons of citizens to fight in a similar war. But if he has at his disposal a volunteer professional army it seems to me that restraint will be less -- and will be removed.

And it is for this reason that as a back-up -- not as against the concept of volunteers, but as a back-up policy, the draft is preferable. I hope that we won't need to use the draft when this war is over. That our policies will be enlightened enough so that we will get the volunteers necessary to do the job. Now the third part of the question -- is the President's visit to Peking. First, I applaud the initiative. And also, while there may be some questions I'd raise about the Moscow visit, I support the initiative. The preparation of both is very much a part of it. The reasons I think are rather obvious. I just think that if we're going to proceed to developing the peace that our grandmother talked about earlier that we've got to find a way to live with the rest of humanity and that includes China and behind the borders of the Soviet Union. And we can only accommodate our differences by talking and negotiating and establishing relations. Now whether or not the President's visit to Peking will produce progress in this respect, I think will depend very heavily upon what our policy in Southeast Asia is, at the time he visits Peking. And so it may be that the visit to Peking may be a way for President Nixon to have signaled to the rest of us that he is looking for a way out of Vietnam that is graceful. I hope so. But in any case, I hope that the visit to Peking is productive of at least a small step toward progress in improving or normalizing relations with China. I think that the prospects would be enhanced if we made clear our commitment to withdraw from Southeast Asia. Now, I am afraid I do have to leave. I have tried to answer three questions in one---and I have enjoyed it. (applause)

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