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Press Conference - Tiger Bay Club, Tallahassee, Florida

Edmund S. Muskie

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TRANSCRIPT

SEN. EDMUND S. MUSKIE
PRESS CONFERENCE - TIGER BAY CLUB
TALLAHASSEE, FL
JANUARY 7, 1972

JAN. 7th

- Q: What is your view of what our policy ought to be toward mainland China, in light especially of the fact that mainland China is now a member of the United Nations?
- ESM: I think that we ought to move in the direction of normalizing relations with mainland China. I think it's inconcievable that we can frame the policies which govern our role in the world and our relationships with the rest of the world and exclude contact with a country of 800,000,000 people. So I've expressed support for the President's proposed visit to Peking. I'm not sure that's the best way to take the initiative; but since he chose that way, with all of my misgivings about what can come from such a summit meeting, I support it because I think it's necessary to begin the process of normalizing relations with mainland China, and I think that if we move in that direction we can have some prospects there. At some point down the line achieving normal trade relations, achieving diplomatic relations which will enable us to come to grips with such difficult problems as nuclear arms. At the present time mainland China is excluded from any international discussion of that problem and so on down the line I think that in order to move into a rational world, we've got to establish contact with mainland China. I'm not sure that this particular way was the best way. The gentleman down in the corner.....
- Q: Unclear
- ESM: I voted....the question is: in June of 1971 Sen. Mondale (TAPE WAS TURNED OFF)
- I supported it for this reason. I think the shuttle program has merit. I'm committed to a continuation of our space program. My question relates to this. To what extent can we commit resources to this effort while at the same time we have all these problems here at home. Of supporting public services in our cities, of developing adequate public transportation here at home, of educating our children, of clearing up the environment and so on. Our natural resources are not unlimited and we must parcel them out in a way that has some reasonable relationship to the high priority problems, jobs for our people, security for our old people, opportunity for our young people and in that balance, it seems to me that the space shuttle program at this point, June of 1971, was not of the highest priority.
- Q: Senator Muskie, Senator Jackson has been going through this area recently as you know and he's been giving his views on busing, picking up votes on some elements I suppose by those views, could you tell us your views on busing.
- ESM: Well I think that the question on busing I think that busing is the least desirable way of coming to grips with the problem of descrimination and the quality of education and racial segregation. But it is a tool that the courts have said is legitimate and I think used within the limits of reasonable time and space consideration that we need to use it from time to time. So I do not exclude as an answer to this problem and I think that the problem is broader than this answer. I don't think the broad problem can be solved with this answer

and I think we need to develop more desirable ways of dealing with the problem.

Q: How do you feel about revenue sharing as between federal and state and local governments?

ESM: I am for it. I've been for it for a number of years and I introduced legislation of my own last year which I think was better than the President's because it would have used the proceeds in a way that's related to the real need in our cities and in our states and I think we must get into this kind of sharing of resources if we're to begin to level off and eventually reduce the pressure on the property tax payer. The property tax payer is simply being asked to accept unacceptable versions to support public services that are related more to social needs than property needs. And the result is for example, I'm sure, this is true in the communities in Florida. I know it is true in the communities of Maine, that many old people that saved all their lives to pay for their homes are being forced to give them up because of the heavy property tax burden, part of the proceeds which are to provide services to those old people. Now that simply makes no sense. And so I think there are various ways of sharing federal resources which must be used, and I think revenue sharing is a very legitimate one that we ought to enact into law.

Q: How do you feel about the granting of amnesty to Vietnam war protesters who have gone to another country and are in another country at this time?

ESM: I don't think that you deal with that problem when American boys are still dying and fighting in Vietnam in response to their decision to accept that obligation. It is simply not equitable. Now when this war is over, and I hope it's over soon as we can combat a withdrawal from South Vietnam, as soon as it's over, we will have to deal with many of the injustices we've imposed on our young people in connection with this war. The problems of those who have died, and their dependents, and the problems of those who have gone and come back to find a lack of opportunity either to continue their education or get gainful employment, the problems of those who went to jail in order to escape the draft obligation as well as those who have fled the country. Now I think as a country, we have a responsibility to try to find a way to repatriate young people that have left the country. On what terms, I think we have yet to decide. And I think we have to decide those terms in the relatively unemotional climate we can hope to get when the war is over. We've never had the massive problem before. We've had a similar problem but on a much smaller scale.

Q: What is my point of view on deficit financing?

ESM: First of all, let me say I assume the question is asked in connection with the federal budget. Now I have a different view of deficit financing in connection with the federal budget than I do about state budgets, local budgets, and personal budgets because the federal budget is not only an instrument for supporting public services, it is also an instrument for influencing the economic health of this country to a greater extent than any of the other budgets. And so you cannot arbitrarily say that deficits are good or bad. At some point, for example, at the present time, I supported tax cuts, different ones that the President proposed to stimulate economy. We need those cuts as a function of federal budget policy to stimulate the economy. We learned in 1965, for example, that cutting federal

taxes can have the kind of stimulative effect that promotes economic growth and increases government revenue. So deficits at the federal level, I think, have been abused over the years, but I do think that from time to time they are necessary in order to perform that function of a federal budget. May I say one other thing about this? Differently than at the state level, and in corporate business, and in private life, the federal budget is put together differently, if, for example, when we compute our personal deficits, we don't take into account what we own on our house or on our car on a current basis. In the case of the federal budget, we pile into the budget each year, expenditures not only for ongoing operating costs, but also for capital investment. Even though those investments will have life over a period of years, so that the current deficit is not a deficit in a sense, that is, at the state level, for example. As governor of a state, I insisted on balanced budgets, but was able to separate, as we do not in the federal budget, spending for operating programs and spending for capital programs. The state continued to borrow money for the latter group, and if you put the two together, the state was in deficit. But when you take into account that for capital purposes you're investing in schools, hospitals, in roads, and equipment and so on, that they ought to be treated differently, then I think you have a different perspective on the federal deficit that ought to be taken into account. But that's not my principle argument in response to the question. My principle argument is that the federal budget has to be used in a stimulative way, and sometimes restraining way, in connection with the health of our economy.

Q: Senator Muskie, Can you address yourself to the kind of individual you would appoint to the Supreme Court; and also address yourself to the reason why Carswell failed to be appointed to that body?

ESM: First of all, I think the first consideration in appointing people to the Supreme Court is excellence. In the tradition, I think we should look for the best men we can find. Men, women, Americans, we can find to serve on this court. The primary qualifications are to be breadth of view, and, in my judgement, humanistic in appreciation of humanistic value, commitment to the constitution of the United States. Not in any particular construction, but in the sense of its meaning as a document in the life of our people, a living document, which has to be interpreted in a living way, by men who have the real insights not only as lawyers, into the language of the document, but as Americans, with insight into the life of our people; into its history, into the needs of our people, and into the future. Now the whole purpose of the constitution of the United States was to create a society in which different kinds of people could live together. Now the function of the Supreme Court is to interpret that document and to apply it in a way which makes that possible. This requires the broadest possible view for men and women of depth and understanding and legal background, if we're to make the constitution that kind of document. So I would look for the best men and women I could find, men of true excellence. I'd be concerned with the philosophy of dissent, but I would want to be sure that they had this broad view of American life and the place the constitution plays in that life. I'd look for people like a Holmes, like a Brandeis, like a Marshall, to take three people far enough in the past so they are not caught up in the controversies of today's issues. These are the kinds of people who ought to

be on the court. The fact they agree or disagree with a particular President about a particular decision in a particular case ought to have nothing to do with it. Presidents, at best, serve eight years; Supreme Court Justices can serve as long as thirty. Now in connection with Justice Carswell, I think he fell short of these standards on two counts from the point of view of those of us who voted against him. One, qualification in terms of the "excellence criteria." And secondly, he had made statements of commitment with respect to views and philosophy in his public life that ran counter to my views as I've already expressed it—as to what the constitution ought to be, and what it is.

Q: Senator, How well do you think you'll be received in central Florida when they know your stand on the space shuttle?

ESM: They'll be unhappy people about it. I suspect. You know, I'm familiar with pork-barrel politics. I've seen it practiced all my life; and the President is just undertaking to practice it. It's a legitimate, old, American tradition, and may I say to the people of Florida who are involved in the space industry: that I regard their skills and their problems as vital and important. And I think that there is a place for them and their skills in developing the kind of country I have been speaking about briefly here, this noon. Their skills and their know-how, systems approach techniques are desperately needed in developing the answers to our environmental problems, in building the hardware, supplying the technology; desperately needed in connection with the development of mass transportation, public transportation; it's desperately needed in connection with our requirements for adequate and decent housing for our people. There are so many areas that people like this with their skills and know-how can be put to work here, and in Florida, as well. The question really isn't whether we can use them, and put them to work and pay them decent incomes, the question really is, in terms of the nation, what are the most important jobs that they ought to be doing. Now, are we going to continue, for instance, to neglect housing, to neglect transportation, to neglect the environment simply to keep people in jobs they are doing even if those jobs include building defense weapons that are no longer necessary after the war ends, or building other hardware that's made obsolete by change in national policy. It seems to me, we've proven in this country, that when we develop people's skills and give them an opportunity to apply them, that the next step is always there. What does the community need? What does the state need? What does the country need to have these people do? And in those terms there's so much we need them to do. Here, in the healthy areas of public development and growth, that they ought not to be hung up on one piece of hardware, a space shuttle. What does it involve? A hundred and thirty million dollars. Now how many people is that going to put to work? Useful work, yes, for those who are, but you've got to decide where you're going to spend these scarce natural resources and what comes first in your order of priority. You know when I go down through the central cities of our country, and go by the decaying houses, in Newark, for example, let me give you one city. In Newark, property taxes on a ten thousand dollar house in today's market value are over nine hundred dollars a year! In eleven years, that house is consumed by its own taxes! And you can guess what's happening. You drive thru the streets of Newark and you see property after

property abandoned. The owners walking away from it. They don't want to touch it. Well, what do you do about these problems? Build a space shuttle? I 'm for that kind of development in space, I've supported the space program over a dozen years and now that a man has stepped out into space, it's inevitable that we keep moving. But the question now is how much do we spend on this, as against what we spend on some of these other problems? How can we tailor a space program, and we must have a space program, to this requirement? And that question is a tough one. Once in a while you have to say no to somebody.