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Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Fairleigh Dickinson University

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY - TEANECK, NEW JERSEY
10:00 A.M., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1971

I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'VE HAD A NUMBER OF DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS ON THIS CAMPUS.

YOU'VE HEARD RECENTLY FROM MY FELLOW SENATOR, HUBERT HUMPHREY. I RAN WITH HIM AND SUPPORTED HIM IN 1968. . . AND NOW I THINK ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.

GENERALLY, I WON'T SPEAK ANYWHERE WITH HUBERT UNLESS I GET TO TALK FIRST. IT'S NOT THAT I OBJECT TO WHAT HE SAYS. BUT MY WIFE JANE INSISTS THAT I GET HOME BY MIDNIGHT.

TONIGHT, OF COURSE, JIM BOUTON WILL BE HERE. AND I THINK ANYONE INTERESTED IN POLITICS SHOULD GO TO SEE HIM. THE WAY HE USED TO PITCH REMINDS ME OF SCOOP JACKSON. . . HE COMES ACROSS FROM THE RIGHT AND LEAVES THE GAME EARLY.

BUT I DON'T THINK YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE SPIRO AGNEW AT FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON. WHEN HE WANTS TO KNOW THE OPINIONS OF THE YOUNG, HE STILL ASKS SHIRLEY TEMPLE.

WHENEVER I VISIT A COLLEGE CAMPUS, I EXPERIENCE A FEELING WHICH IS REALLY THE RESULT OF TWO VERY DIFFERENT EMOTIONS.

ON THE ONE HAND, I RECALL WHAT TEACHERS AND LECTURERS HAVE BEEN TELLING YOU SINCE KINDERGARTEN, THAT YOUTH IS THE HOPE FOR TOMORROW. . . THAT YOU WILL GUIDE OUR DESTINIES. . . AND THAT THIS GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IS THE GREATEST AND BRIGHTEST OF ALL.

AND WHILE MY PURPOSE HERE IS NOT TO EULOGIZE YOU BEFORE YOU HAVE EVEN HAD YOUR DAY, I DO AGREE THAT THE SHAPE OF WHAT WE BLITHELY CALL THE FUTURE WILL IN LARGE MEASURE DEPEND UPON YOUR INGENUITY.

AND THAT IS WHY IT EXCITES ME TO SPEAK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, BECAUSE I FEEL THE NEED TO HARNESS YOUR TALENTS FOR THE WORK THAT HAS TO BE DONE, TO TAP THE IDEAS AND ENERGIES THAT SEEM TO RADIATE FROM STUDENTS THESE DAYS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I FEEL A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF APPREHENSION. I RECOGNIZE THE DISTRUST AND CYNICISM THAT OFTEN DOMINATES YOUR PERCEPTION OF POLITICS AND THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT. I ALSO SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY CONCEDE THAT MUCH OF WHAT YOU FEEL IS TRUE.

BUT MOST OF US IN GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE THERE AT ALL IF WE DID NOT CARE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT THIS COUNTRY. AND I WORRY ABOUT OUR ABILITY TO CONVINCE YOU OF GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN. . . TO CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU SHOULD WORK FOR CHANGE THROUGH THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

THAT IS WHY I OFTEN CHOOSE A QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMAT ON CAMPUSES. IT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO TALK WITH YOU WITHOUT HIDING BEHIND A PREPARED SPEECH.

IF I AM HONEST, YOU WILL KNOW IT, AND THAT IS GOOD FOR ME.

IF I CAN ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO MORE FOR THIS WAYWARD PLANET, THAT IS GOOD FOR THE COUNTRY.

AND IT GIVES YOU THE CHANCE TO ASK ABOUT THE PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS WHICH ASSAIL YOUR SENSIBILITIES -- RATHER THAN BEING FORCED TO LISTEN AGAIN WHILE YOUR ELDERS SPEAK.

BUT BEFORE WE BEGIN TO TALK WITH EACH OTHER, LET ME TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO TALK AT YOU ABOUT THAT FUTURE WHICH IS YOURS TO CREATE.

WE CAN MORE PROPERLY CALL YOUR FUTURE THE END OF THE PAST -- THE TIME WHEN ALL THAT WE HAVE DONE CONFRONTS US WITH A VITAL CHALLENGE. . . TO RENEW AND TO CHANGE OUR SOCIETY OR TO SEE IT PERISH IN THE PAST. IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THIS WORLD OF OURS IS GOING TO CHANGE.

AND YOUR GENERATION CAN HAVE A DECISIVE INFLUENCE ON THE DIRECTION IN WHICH WE MOVE. THE 26TH AMENDMENT HAS GIVEN YOU THE RIGHT TO VOTE. . . THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD AND TO BE HEEDED. . . THE RIGHT TO CAST YOUR BALLOTS FOR LEADERS WHO SHARE YOUR BELIEFS.

NOW ALL OF US RECOGNIZE THE LIMITS ON THE POWER OF A VOTE AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM -- THAT'S EASY TO DO. BUT DO WE APPRECIATE AS WELL THE TANGIBLE DIFFERENCE A VOTE CAN MAKE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE? THE MACHINERY WE CALL POLITICS CAN DO SO VERY MUCH. . . IT CAN FEED A HUNGRY CHILD IN MISSISSIPPI. . . IT CAN STOP A BRUTAL WAR HALF A WORLD AWAY. . . IT CAN CLEAN THE POISON FROM OUR AIR AND WATERS. . . AND IT CAN ENHANCE THE STANDARD OF LIFE FOR EVERY CITIZEN IN THIS COUNTRY. IT CAN ALSO FAIL TO DO THESE THINGS. . . AND ITS ULTIMATE SUCCESS OR FAILURE MAY DEPEND UPON THE DECISIONS WHICH YOU AND YOUR GENERATION MAKE IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.

LAST WEEK, I WAS IN BOSTON FOR A VOTER REGISTRATION RALLY. SO WAS SENATOR McGOVERN AND SENATOR BROOKE AND CONGRESSMAN McCLOSKEY. THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING MISSING. . . 90% OF THE 30,000 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WERE SUPPOSED TO TURN OUT.

I KNOW THAT A SINGLE RALLY WON'T MAKE OR BREAK A MOVEMENT.

I KNOW THAT OTHER RALLIES IN OTHER PLACES HAVE DONE VERY WELL.

BUT I THINK THERE IS A DANGER THAT AFTER ALL THE GAINS AND PAINS
OF 1968, MILLIONS OF YOUNG AMERICANS WILL SIMPLY GIVE UP ON POLITICS.

SOME PEOPLE ARE HOPING THAT WILL HAPPEN. . . THEY HAVE A VESTED
INTEREST IN THINGS AS THEY ARE.

YOUR GENERATION CAN KEEP IT FROM HAPPENING -- AND YOU CAN CHANGE
THIS COUNTRY.

YOU CAN VOTE. . .

-- TO STOP THE WAR IN VIETNAM. . .

-- TO REBUILD OUR CITIES. . .

-- AND TO BANISH POVERTY AND HUNGER FROM THIS LAND.

YOU WILL NOT SUCCEED IMMEDIATELY OR COMPLETELY. BUT ARE YOU READY
TO TRY?

THAT IS MY QUESTION -- AND NOW I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ANSWER YOURS.

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