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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Mercer County Democratic Dinner

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

MERCER COUNTY DEMOCRATIC DINNER

GEDAR GARDENS RESTAURANT, TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

8:00 P.M., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1971

I am proud to be here tonight.

I am proud to be in New Jersey, which is on the way to a great Democratic victory in 1971.

And I am proud to speak with men and women who will help us put a Democrat back in the White House in 1972.

I am here to talk about that effort. . . to give you my help this year. . . and to ask for your help next year.

But I didn't come just to talk about politics. . . about the yearly total of wins and losses. Instead, I want to talk about the people of New Jersey and America. . . about people who have seen hope turn to frustration. . . people who are living with doubt, and distrust, and sometimes even despair.

Perhaps I'm not the right person to focus on the mood and disposition of this nation. A politician has to wrap his thoughts in words and speak in euphemisms. Perhaps a painting by Andrew Wyeth could convey far better the feeling I want to describe.

A politician can talk about a spreading numbness in the face of recurring tragedy. But words cannot paint a picture of the machinist in Cleveland reading the morning newspaper. Today, the paper tells him that Willie Stargell was 0 for 4 yesterday. And it tells him that another two hundred people have lost their lives in rice fields half a world away. His expression never changes. He has read a thousand times of death in rice fields, and he has nothing left to give.

A politician can talk about the alienation of people. But he cannot paint a picture of the secretary in Memphis who got on the bus this morning and struggled with the others to become invisible. Averted eyes and lowered heads told her that everyone would be more comfortable if she would look at the floor, and not at the people. And so she looks at the floor -- afraid -- afraid to take the chance of being hurt, even by a small slight.

A politician can talk about credibility gaps. But he cannot picture the stockbroker in New York City who last week watched the President of the United States in living color instead of Marcus Welby. The stockbroker heard the promises. . . he examined the proposals and he listened to the words of inspiration. And then he turned off the set. He had heard it all so many times before.

In 1961, John Kennedy challenged our people to ask what they could do for their country. And the American nation paused for a moment. . . and smiled. . . and followed.

That was ten years ago. But a lot can happen in ten years. Hope can struggle with doubt. . . and doubt can yield to pain. And we have seen so much pain in the last decade.

We have seen children going hungry in the richest nation in human history.

We have seen a race of people still struggling in a free country to be treated as part of the human race.

We have seen soldiers and civilians die in a war no general can win and no reason make right.

We have seen hope killed near an underpass in Dallas, on a motel balcony in Tennessee, and on a kitchen floor in Los Angeles.

And with each new pain, Americans seem to have cried a little less and forgotten with a little less effort. Some people just stopped reading the newspaper. Some stopped voting. And others have even stopped caring enough to be hurt again.

What more can the American people do for America than bury our dead, cry our tears, and endure our setbacks? No wonder Americans have grown inward -- farther and father away from their country. And their country can go no farther without them.

We cannot simply ask Americans for more trust and more faith. . . . Our people have lost too much and too often in the last ten years. No inspiring speeches will erase the memories. . . . only a patient, honest effort to rebuild hope. [Not the hope shouted from behind a podium in a political rally... [Not the false hopes which come from telling people that the system always works... [But the hope which comes only from actually making the system work. . . . from giving hungry children a decent meal, instead of using them as a perennial image for political rhetoric.

This is not the time to look for words. . . . to search for an eloquent way to tell people we have work to do. They know that -- and they want to see something done.

We must stop the killing in Southeast Asia. . . . and we must stop now.

We must launch a war on poverty which does not make the poor its only casualties. At the very least, we must never accept another year

like last year, when the number of Americans living in deprivation increased. . . for the first time since 1960.

And we must create a country in which people can begin to see cleaner air and cleaner water. . . in the sky over Newark and in the Delaware River. It is encouraging that everyone wants to be an Environmentalist. It would be more encouraging to see the signs of a clean environment.

Americans are tired of promises. They want results. . . results they can see, and feel, and touch. And they don't want to be told that we can instantly create a world of peace, instantly banish poverty from our borders, and instantly make every man a brother just by electing a new President. They don't believe it. . . and that's because it isn't true. But what we can do is get to work and make change happen.

And the best way to do that is to start being honest with the American people. That's why I have spoken so often in recent weeks about the politics of truth. Not only because telling the truth has always been an ideal of the American heritage. . . but because the American people have been through too much to be conned anymore by political rhetoric. Honesty is the first step toward renewing their trust. And their trust is what we need to forge an alliance that can move this country forward once again.

I don't believe that President Nixon has faced the truth or shared the truth with the American people.

In 1968, I warned that Richard Nixon represented policies that could lead to recession and economic decline. I remember his response. He said the only unemployment that would follow when he took office was the unemployment of President Johnson's Council of Economic Advisors. And he promised this nation full employment, and stable prices, and economic prosperity.

And we waited. We waited for three years while the unemployment rate in this country climbed from 3½% to more than 6% -- to 7% in New Jersey. . . while 5 million skilled workers lost their jobs. We waited. . . while prices skyrocketed and purchasing power plummeted. And instead of prosperity, we got inflation and recession at the same time. No wonder the stockbroker in New York turns off the President's speech on his television set.

And what would he hear if he left it on? He'd hear the President tell us that he has a Job Development Program, which used to be called an Investment Tax Credit. Whatever you call it, its nothing more than an \$8 billion giveaway to big business.

And it won't even create jobs.

Industry needs markets and customers, and sales, not special privileges and tax breaks. And America's workers need the kind of economic policy the Democratic Party has always provided -- one that puts dollars into the wallets and pocketbooks of families, not just in the coffers of corporate treasuries.

In 1968, Richard Nixon promised this nation a secret plan for peace in Vietnam. Twenty thousand American soldiers have died since he made that promise. Sixty thousand South Vietnamese soldiers have died. Countless civilians and North Vietnamese have died. And no political symbolism -- no rhetorical euphemism like "winding down the war" can now keep the promise of peace for those people. No wonder some Americans have stopped caring. Six years of failing protest could still the voice of almost anyone.

And in early 1971, Richard Nixon promised this nation a Second American Revolution -- revenue sharing and welfare reform. On August 15, that revolution ended when those programs were postponed. Is that any way to run a revolution? What if George Washington had announced a "slight delay" to the troops at Yorktown? We'd all be British subjects in 1971.

And so the President broke the promise of revenue sharing. . . and local governments and local taxpayers in every state are paying the price

Here in New Jersey, you face the highest property tax rates in the United States, rates which will probably climb to \$960 a year on a \$20,000 house by 1975.

You walk the darkened streets of cities and towns hand in hand with a fear born of night and rising violence. The crime rate in Trenton alone has increased by a third in the last year, over twice as fast as the national average.

And you send your children to public schools, where they struggle to learn from overworked teachers in overcrowded classrooms.

Who's going to finance the public services our citizens so desperately need? Local taxpayers can't afford to -- and the Administration now refuses to help. The President told the nation a week ago that 1972 was going to be a great year for the American people. Which people? The people in New Jersey who have no jobs? The people in Southeast Asia who will lose their lives? The people in New York City who are victimized by crime? No wonder "credibility" is a word everyone knows.

We have to start telling the truth to the American people. And we have to start making some hard choices. I can tell you one choice that I would make. I would choose to finance revenue sharing, to end the war in Vietnam, to create jobs directly -- before I'd give an \$8 billion bonus to big business. And I think the American people would make the

A politician can talk about the choices he'd make. He can list the broken promises, the postponed programs, and the tragic neglect of this Administration. And he can chronicle the tangible human consequences --

-- The five million American workers who will not find jobs tomorrow. . . .

-- The men and women who will lose their lives in Vietnam. . .

-- The public services which will go unfunded here at home. . .

But not even an artist could paint the children of America, who are growing up -- reaching political consciousness -- in an atmosphere which often makes it impolitic to tell the truth.

And no one could paint a people who are mostly tired. . .

-- Tired of causes which lose popularity but not importance. . .

-- Tired of commitments which yield no change. . . .

-- Tired of the fading hope that, maybe this time, someone who can do something will listen.

Renewed promises will not reawaken America's spirit. . . nor will inspired eloquence -- not any more -- nor growing descriptions of what is right about our country, masking what we know is wrong.

Only the truth can move America -- the whole truth -- the truth from our government and from each other. . . about our collective wisdom and our collective shortcomings. . . about the strengths we still have, and the tasks we must all face.

Here in New Jersey. . . and throughout the nation. . . a politics of truth can build a leadership of trust. . .

-- The kind of leadership Mercer County can elect in November of 1971. . .

-- The kind of leadership America must elect in November of 1972.

Let's tell the truth to the American people.

Let's trust people to hear the bad and face the wrong and make things right.

Together, let us do that much -- and then, together, we can do so much more.

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