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Press Release - Muskie Criticizes Administration's Opposition to Water Quality Act

Edmund S. Muskie

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IMMEDIATELY

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Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Me.) released the following statement today, January 17, criticizing the Administration's opposition to the Water Quality Act which passed the Senate two months ago. He issued the statement in connection with an inspection he made of the Cuyahoga River, Cleveland, Ohio this morning;

This is the first river in history to be officially declared a fire hazard. A generation ago, we would have found that statement almost impossible to understand. Today, the people of Cleveland are not even surprised to hear that the Cuyahoga's water will burn.

What we are seeing here and across America is more stark proof of a vital truth about our lives and the life of the world. The environment in which we live has definite limits. Some of our resources can be used only once because they cannot be replaced. Other resources can be renewed, but even they are limited. We are unlikely, for example, to invent a larger supply of naturally clean water. So the only choice we have is to save the only environment we will ever have.

The voters of Cleveland have already approved a \$100 million bond issue for sewage treatment plants. This city approved the bond issue after an implied promise of federal assistance. Most of us in the Congress believed that this promise should be kept -- and we authorized a billion dollars in federal grants for sewage construction.

Then President Nixon announced that he was withholding almost \$800 million of that money. In other words, he decided to spend just twice as much on cleaning up the nation's water resources as the voters of Cleveland were willing to spend in a single local area.

And this failure is sadly typical of the administration's entire record on environmental issues. Three years ago, the President promised us an all-out attack on pollution. The Congress has tried to arm him with tough and far-reaching legislation. For example, last November, the Senate passed a new Water Quality Act by a vote of 86 to nothing. But now the White House is opposing that bill in the House, just as it has opposed similar legislation in the past.

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The Water Quality Act includes a four year program of federal grants for the construction of municipal sewage plants. It authorizes \$720 million for the state of Ohio alone. The President is requesting only half of that amount -- for the nation -- and for Ohio. But half of an adequate water pollution control program is not good enough. Washington is telling your state and your city to pay a full share. The President should ask nothing less of his own administration.

Lake Erie is dying. The Cuyahoga River pours more poison into the lake every hour of every day. The only answer is a total commitment of ourselves and our resources to the struggle against pollution. The administration gives us rhetoric, but rhetoric will not clean our air or water. In 1973, the federal government must act, as your city already has.

The Environmental Protection Society has a simple motto:
"Today is the first day of the rest of our lives on this planet."

Now we must begin to live as if there will be no tomorrow. We must remove rivers like the Cuyahoga from the list of fire hazards.

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