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A Strategy for Americans - Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie to Democrats

Edmund S. Muskie

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**A STATEMENT TO DEMOCRATS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
NOVEMBER 15, 1971**

A STRATEGY FOR AMERICANS

Americans have faced many severe problems in recent years, and we have been divided on solutions to those problems. Arguments have been angry and heated. Suspicions and fears have been aroused.

Steps to provide equal opportunity for black Americans have changed social and economic patterns and pressures for many Americans, particularly blue collar workers and Southerners. The problem of ending a war which no general could win and no reason could make right has plagued all of us, but the problems of that war have been most apparent and most troublesome to the young men who were asked to fight. The problem of how to maintain hard-won economic growth and security -- a home half paid for, a decent wage for a difficult skill, retirement, an insurance policy -- in the midst of run-away inflation has worried all of us, but has been most trying for working men and women. The problems of how to provide decent medical care, excellence in education, clean and healthy cities in which to live, a strong non-military economy have troubled all of us, but have especially worried the professionals among us who were working in the hospitals, the laboratories, the universities, and the board rooms, trying to plan real answers to concrete problems. To each American the problem of his own region or group has been and continues to be pre-eminent.

The Nixon Administration believes that the differences between us about these problems can and should be used to divide us and that appeals through a "Southern Strategy" or with the use of "hard hat diplomacy" will work politically to the advantage of the Republican party.

I reject that approach to politics. It is wrong, and I don't believe the American people want to be used that way. I don't believe the American people are hungry for falsehoods or platitudes or rhetoric that appeals to them as self-centered groups. I think Americans have had enough of the politics that invents a "silent majority" to pit against "effete snobs" and "radical bums." I think most Americans are bothered by a politics of name calling which seeks

to exploit fear and division among us instead of serving people's needs.

Americans know that the long-haired youth of this nation are not freaks, they are our children. Americans know that most welfare recipients in this nation are not lazy men who do not understand the President's "work ethic" but people in need -- for the most part children or people who are very old or ill. Members of the Congress of the United States are not flocks of birds -- either doves or hawks -- but patriotic men and women who have been chosen to represent their constituents in deciding difficult and serious questions of government policy.

The problems of clean air and clean water and a protected earth are not the problems of conservationists and college students alone -- they are American problems we all want to see solved. The Clean Air Act, passed in 1970, and the Water Pollution Control Act which is now before the House are partial answers to pollution problems -- and no American wants them to fail. No Senator voted against the Water Bill, but the Nixon Administration opposes it.

The blighted cities of this nation do not only shame city dwellers or blacks or the poor, they shame all Americans. The Model Cities program inaugurated in 1966 was a beginning, and there is a continuing urgent need for solutions to this problem through some form of revenue sharing, aid to mass transit programs, special help for housing and education in our inner cities. No American really wants the problems of the cities to go unsolved, but the Nixon Administration has decided to "postpone" solutions.

The problem of providing high quality and universally available medical care for every American is not a doctors' problem nor an insurance man's problem, nor a senior citizen's problem, it is an American problem. The medical bill of rights legislation I have proposed is one suggested solution to this problem. There are others, but the Nixon Administration has discouraged action on any solution.

The problems of equal rights and equal opportunity are not southern problems nor city problems nor black problems, but a problem basic to our most central American dream. We cannot solve this problem with "benign neglect" and appeals to fear and prejudice.

The strategy which insults one group of Americans with the implication that they can be persuaded to vote for themselves and against the nation insults all of us. Southerners must reject mediocrity on the Supreme Court just as they must reject inequality of opportunity for black Southerners. American businessmen must reject a special strategy which implies that the pollution of this nation or the hunger of American children are acceptable to them as long as profits are protected. American parents must refuse to be part of a silent majority who, it is implied, have been willing to be silent while their sons fought an unnecessary war in order to protect a corrupt foreign government, as though their silence would somehow make our mistakes in Southeast Asia disappear. American youths, American blacks, American women -- all have special problems that they are working to solve, and that they want solved. And they want them solved because they are national problems, not special interest problems.

In America we have come from many places and we come in many colors. Most of us are here because of the promise of a government people could create themselves for themselves, and a place where dignity and freedom would be our legacy to our children. We all still want that America and we must get back on the road to building it.

I believe the first step in that direction is a realization that the goals which unite us must overcome the things that divide us. That offers Democrats a new strategy to combat the politics of fear and division. I think of that as The American Strategy. I believe it should be the only strategy Democrats accept or use in 1972.

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