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## **The Majority Who Are Women - Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at a Freedom Forum**

Edmund S. Muskie

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1971

REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

FREEDOM FORUM -- SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK

"THE MAJORITY WHO ARE WOMEN"

I understand that you hear from a number of speakers every year. And it is fitting for this Freedom Forum to meet frequently because we must meet such frequent challenges to the future of freedom. For a society like ours, change is the condition of survival -- change to counter new outbreaks of intolerance -- to push out the frontiers of justice -- to build a country equal to the full meaning of liberty. And so it has been throughout our history.

The first Americans signed a charter of freedom called the Declaration of Independence, but they also treated a whole race of human beings as private property. It was left to their descendents to see the wrong of slavery and change our country in four years of bloody civil war.

The Americans of the 1860's fought to free the slaves, but they also permitted monopoly power to chain twenty million workers to jobs of relentless toil for little reward. It was left to another generation to see the wrong of sweatshops and drive them from our nation's industry.

In 1933, our parents voted for a New Deal to guarantee basic economic decency, but most of them also stood by while "whites only" remained stamped on the promise of American life. Then we saw the wrong of racial discrimination -- and we are still working to end it.

This has always been the way people have fought for freedom -- not only in America and in our time -- but everywhere and for all time. Each generation confronts a deprivation of liberty unseen or unsolved by the last generation. And each of us is called upon to build something better than the imperfect freedom we have inherited. Of course, we will not reach perfection either. Our children and their children after them will advance the cause of liberty in directions still beyond our vision. And in the sum total of all the advances before us and after us will be written the history of freedom on this planet -- from the first days of the Athenian Agora to the last moment of human existence as we know it.

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But our part in the struggle is larger than the part entrusted to other ages. The pace of change has accelerated -- and we are now deluged by new demands for justice in a short span of time. Abraham Lincoln counted fourscore and seven years between the first and second great trials of American freedom. But just between 1951 and 1971 . . . in a single score of years . . . we have been asked to answer the threat of McCarthyism -- to confront the crisis of black inequality -- to wipe out poverty and hunger -- and to answer the urgent, unmet claims of chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and ethnic minorities.

We have been challenged to change so much and so fast. It is a difficult task -- but it is also a task that we should welcome. We have the chance in our lives to do more for freedom than any other generation in the history of human life. And in recent years, we have learned the true dimensions of our responsibility.

We have learned that we must fight, not only for the minority who are not white, but for the majority who are women. And their cause should be the cause of every American. The struggle for women's rights is nothing less than another chapter in the long and ceaseless struggle for human rights.

Some of us -- especially those of us who are men -- sometimes find it difficult to take the women's movement seriously. Perhaps unconsciously, countless men respond to the fact of sex discrimination in a way which proves the case against them. The same reporters who write with passion and conviction about racial injustice frequently react to sexual injustice with detachment and even derision. Television comedians who march on Washington or at Selma still tell insensitive jokes about feminine intuition and male realism. And there is a subtle but pervasive sense of condescension in the typical male attitude toward the struggle for women's rights.

In 1963, John Kennedy summoned white Americans to the cause of black equality with this question: "Who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed . . .? Who among us would be content with the counsels of patience and delay?" Now in 1971, it is time for American men to ask: "Who among us would be content to trade status and rights with American women?"

Would men accept a situation where they earned only \$60 for every \$100 earned by women?

Would men be content with an unemployment rate twice as high as the rate for women?

Would male college graduates settle for an annual income \$5,000 lower than their female counterparts'?

Would men stand silently by if they were only 7% of all doctors, 3% of all lawyers, and 1% of all federal judges?

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Yet that is what women are and what women face in American society. And they have more grievances than mere economic inequality. Our culture offers women self-cleaning ovens, but often withholds the self-respect. That can come only from excellence and achievement. Why have law schools and medical schools acted as though educating women was a waste of resources. What has happened to the female citizens who should be sitting in the Senate and the House? Why was no woman present when the fate of the world was decided in the Cabinet room during the Cuban Missile crisis?

Not because women are less talented or less stable -- but because a male-dominated society long ago decided that this was the natural order of life. The decision may have been unconscious. Through the early years of my public career, I just assumed that political leadership was not the right role for most women. Like millions of other men in other professions, I inherited and accepted a cultural bias which was seldom questioned or even understood for what it was.

But there is no excuse now for a failure to see the facts and the wrongs of female inequality. The women of America are telling the rest of America about the devastating impact of sex discrimination. Some men may dismiss their complaints or deride their tactics, but no man can claim not to know. So if the bias against women is passed on to another generation in this land, the cause will not be ignorance, but a conscious decision to deny full freedom to more than half of our fellow Americans.

We can make that choice -- and we can disguise our failure to expand the scope of liberty, perhaps even from ourselves. Or we can respond as our parent responded to other challenges in other times. We can make women's rights a reality and not just a rallying cry. That is our task -- yours and mine -- at every level of government and in every part of our private lives.

We must stop assuming that all married women are better off at home than at work. Every woman should have the chance for a rewarding career as a wife and mother and a rewarding career in the outside world. And each woman should have the right to decide -- to choose one of those careers or both of them.

That goal is so easy to say, so hard to achieve. From their first readers in school to their daily toys and games, children are taught to regard boys as more active and more creative than girls. The same pattern prevails through adolescence and into adulthood. And we cannot change the resulting perceptions until we change the way we raise our sons and daughters. That is our special responsibility as parents, teachers, or school administrators -- and our common responsibility on local school boards across America.

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And we must remove other, still steeper barriers to sexual equality. Even if a woman wants a career, she often cannot find a university willing to train her or a company willing to employ her on the same terms as a male competitor. But there are no professions less fit for women, no positions too important for women, and no judgments a woman cannot make as well as a man. And we must make it possible for every woman to reach her full potential.

Private institutions must change their attitudes and their policies. Universities -- especially graduate and technical schools -- must stop admitting or rejecting applicants on the basis of sex. Business and industry must stop paying women less for the same work and promoting women less for the same talent. And reform is not a distant goal, but an immediate priority. For example, here in Schenectady, General Electric has already made notable gains in a new program to insure equal opportunity for women.

Unfortunately, many universities and most corporations have not moved as fast or as far as G.E. Since the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, violations have been charged against industrial giants such as Wheaton Glass, American Can, and R.C.A. And women still have trouble entering advanced science or engineering programs in American universities.

If we have learned anything from our still unfinished struggle for black equality, it is that the fundamental issues of freedom cannot be left to private institutions and private individuals alone. They require the kind of moral leadership -- at the highest level -- that John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson provided in the effort to right the wrongs of racial discrimination. But the administration in Washington has not been leading in the fight for civil rights or women's rights. And in the field of women's rights, it is even hard to give the President credit for merely following.

In 1968, Richard Nixon pledged to "add equality between the sexes to the freedoms and liberties guaranteed to all Americans." But in 1971, we can look back on three years of failure under this administration. Only 1.7% of the policy-making positions in the federal government are occupied by women. Of the 200 appointed to advisory boards, only 27 serve in leadership roles, while 62 serve on the advisory committee of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. At the same time, the agency assigned to carry out the executive order on fair promotion and hiring has little to show for its efforts except an occasional newsletter.

Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution.

That would be the single most vital victory for the cause of women's rights. We have just been confronted with a crippling modification of the Amendment during subcommittee debate. But the Senate will have the time to fight for the original version when Congress reconvenes in January -- and we must take the time to write complete equality between men and women into the law of this land.

And even when we accomplish that much, we still have to do so much more. We cannot root out overnight the accumulation of centuries of prejudice against women. But we can begin in every aspect of our endeavors.

Any politician who talks about women's rights should be prepared to work for women's rights in the political year ahead. The National Women's Political Caucus must be heard and heeded by both parties. And in the Democratic Party, we must do better than one state party chairman who is a woman -- better than the 13% of national convention delegates who were women last time -- and better than the low level responsibilities assigned to most women in past campaigns. Women should have equal representation on every state delegation to the convention and a maximum role on the staff of every candidate for the nomination. And the next administration must practice in power what it preaches during the political season.

For some time, I have been planning a speech on women's rights. My first instinct was to give the speech to an exclusively female audience. Obviously, I decided that my instinct was wrong. Most women already understand the pain of sex discrimination. They are living with it everyday. And most women are ready to claim complete equality in our society.

But most men -- here and everywhere in America -- are still not truly committed to women's rights. Most of us have not yet said to women that we agree with their demands -- that they should have the same chance we have -- that they are not second class citizens but full partners in the common enterprise we call America. And only when we say that can we insure the future of freedom.

For a free society cannot become static and remain free.

Who would call America free in 1971 if black people had to follow the rules of 1951 and sit in the back of a bus?

And who believes that after 50 years, we have done enough when women can vote in elections, but not on the Supreme Court or in the Cabinet?

We must ask more of ourselves -- and we must commit ourselves to building a country equal to our hopes and our boasts.

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There is sexism in American society, just as there is racism. But there is also a tradition passed down from democracy to democracy through recorded history -- a tradition which tells us that we can see and change each successive imperfection in the fabric of freedom.

The first Americans started this country off with the declaration that "all men are created equal." Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy tried to teach us that the phrase meant black men as well as white men. Franklin Roosevelt told us that the phrase included the forgotten man as well as the rich man. Now, after almost two hundred years, we must rewrite the phrase again. America must hold this truth to be self-evident: that all people are created equal -- black and white, the powerful and the powerless, women and men.

And if we meet our responsibility, freedom can survive to meet other challenges in the next generation or the next century. It is an endless process -- and it is the most rewarding way of life humanity has ever known.

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