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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Democratic Reception in Houston, Texas

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

DEMOCRATIC RECEPTION - RICE HOTEL - HOUSTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER 9, 1971

(Following is the text of the introduction of Senator Muskie by Senator Ralph Yarborough)

"I know why this vast throng is here. You're not looking for a Governor or a Senator. You are looking for a President of the United States.

I want to take just a minute to tell you where this man must have first impressed himself upon my consciousness as a coming leader of America. In 1958, I was out in California with many other Senators campaigning for the re-election of a United States Senator from California. I was new in the Senate, but they had the great names out there like Wayne Morse and others. But everywhere I went they would say "Governor Muskie is coming." I said, "Who?" Governor Muskie of Maine. Before he got there he was on the tips of people's tongues more than the famed Senators like Morse and others. So I knew then that this man Muskie had something they were looking for. Way back in '58, why, he did have that appeal before he got there -- before we saw him.

Well, for one thing, he was elected Governor of Maine at a time when the registration was three-to-one Republican. . . when there was only \$18 thousand dollars in the budget for Governor, Senator, and three Congressmen the Democrats had in Maine. And he was elected. Already they knew him. He had served in their legislature. He had been a city attorney. When he finished law school -- where he finished college with a Phi Beta Kappa and then finished Cornell Law School -- he enlisted in the Navy. He started at the bottom. He came out as a full lieutenant with three battle stars. And Maine knew him. And so he broke all kinds of precedence. When he was elected to the Senate he was the first popularly elected Democratic Senator in the history of Maine. And then, when he came to the Senate, he surprised people. He was already nationally being looked at, but he wasn't pushing. He didn't go in and fight with the Senators to get a crucial committee. He took what was there on seniority. He never went around and lobbied with the leadership to get put on a prized committee. So they put him on what people regarded as a dead sub-committee -- the Chairman of the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations. . . relations between states and the federal government. It happened. This shows a man's vision -- how a man can see in advance what is coming. It wasn't long until that was one of the key committees passing on urban problems. That was the one committee in the Senate -- the subcommittee that had most jurisdiction over urban problems and mass transit and the great problems of the cities.

Well, Senators with more prestige and better known in the cities then tried to create special subcommittees for themselves to take those urban problems away from Muskie's subcommittee. And then you saw the gloved hand when the chips were down. He didn't back away. He tackled the toughest in the Senate and kept his committee's jurisdiction.

He took the Chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Pollution Control. It was little known and little seen. Within five years it was a major subcommittee within the city. . . . How to protect this environment from pollution. . . and he fought the fight for clean air and clean water.

Another subcommittee he took that others didn't want. A subcommittee on foreign finance. Pretty soon -- with the Secretary of the Treasury and the President having stopped foreign trade and talking about devaluation of the dollar -- that's the key subcommittee of the city today. And foreign affairs are more important in many respects than the foreign relations committee. This man had the vision to look into the future and see what was coming and know in advance where the problem was going to be.

That's why it was such a thrill for me to serve for 12 years in the Senate of the United States with this great man from Maine. It's an honor to be here with him. You've honored me by inviting me to be here to be with him, and I want to say, fellow Texans, you show that you have the perception in coming to see a man that he had in picking the subcommittees of the future where the great problems of this country were coming. He could look down the road and see that the problems were coming in foreign finance, that it was coming in the pollution of our environment, that it was coming in the field of urban problems. That's the kind of man we need for leadership in America. The man with the vision to see in advance what's coming. . . not wait 'til the crisis hits him on his desk some morning and wake up to find out it's there. Ed Muskie showed in that twelve years I had the pleasure of serving with him in the Senate that he could foresee problems coming and organize in advance to meet and solve them.

Thank you for the privilege of inviting him here this afternoon.

MODERATOR: "Thank you, Senator Yarborough. Let me take a pause here to introduce to you Mrs. Karen Patman, our national committeewoman from Texas. Mrs. Patman, would you stand?

Also, I want to introduce Mrs. Bob Casey.

Now once again, ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to introduce to you our Congressman from Harris County, Bob Casey -- who will introduce Senator Muskie."

B.CASEY: "Fellow Democrats. . . and don't you forget it! . . . to know a man you really need to livk near him. My near neighbor ever since I've been up there is our guest of honor tonight. You get to know a man when you get a little tired of working out in the yard and you meet in the street and start talking about your family and also about what happened at each end of the Capitol. You get to know a man when you go duck and goose hunting with him. You get to know a man when you just sit around in the backyard sometimes, what time he and I have to do that, you get to talk. You know, it reminds me of the story of the man who had just been bailed out of jail by a friend for being in an altercation. And they hadn't been but two blocks away when they saw two men scuffling, and before he could stop him, the man who just came out of jail jumped in there -- got in the fighting. His friend said, "I just got you out of jail. What in the world are you getting in that for?" "Damn a man who won't take a side."

I want you to know I've already taken my side. And I want to introduce to you my neighbor -- a man who can keep this party together, keep it strong and bring this nation back to where it belongs. . . Ed Muskie -- the next President of the United States."

SENATOR MUSKIE: "Thank you very much. .. Thank you very much Bob, Ralph, Hazel, Mrs. Patman, and my good friends in Texas. I'm glad to see the doors opening up at either end. We want to make plenty of room in this party for anyone who wants to join. I've enjoyed my day in Texas and look forward to another day in Texas. I've met with young people on the campus at Houston. I've spoken to the people from this area over television -- you won't know that until tomorrow or the next day, or sometime thereafter through the miracle of videotape. And I've met with leaders in the business and political community of this state this afternoon. And I must say that the most stimulating part of any campaign visit is that part which gives me a chance to meet the people of the area -- Black and white, young and old, both poor and rich -- whoever they are.

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) "We're interested in turning out to talk about the problems we face in this common enterprise we call America. Poor people are concerned about the state of this country...Its policies, its influence here at home and around the globe. And I'm asked constantly, you know, my view of this Administration and its policies. The mistakes are becoming so many that to cover them all takes more time than I have in a single speech most of these days. But I have a favorite Maine story I like to use to start my description of Nixon's policies. It's the story of an out-of-stater who was traveling down a little Maine side road -- a dirt road -- after a rainstorm. He came to an automobile spinning its wheels in the mud. So he stopped and asked the driver -- who was a native -- "Are you stuck?" The driver said, "Well, I would be if I was going anywhere."

That, it seems to me, describes this administration's policies -- whether we speak about the war or the economy or any problems affecting our cities, or the country, facing our farmers, the poor or the young. Just today, you know, the President did something. He did it while I wasn't looking. And I looked long enough so that I wanted to tell you about it. "Give 'em hell." he said. That's the advice Harry Truman gave me in 1968.

You know, before I get to talking about Mr. Nixon I'd like to discuss a couple more pleasant subjects for just a moment.

First of all -- my good friend, Bob Casey. It is true that we are neighbors-- across the street in Washington. And so we've come to know each other as friends and neighbors. And I know his ten children and he knows my five. We're getting to know each other's grandchildren. And I treasure this friendship, and I know how year after year he comes back here to serve his people and to fight for renomination and re-election. How he's been able to maintain a family life and produce ten children has been a great mystery to me. And I think it's a tremendous testimony to his vision, his thinking of the future and his staying power that he's been able to do all these things.

I knew Ralph first by reputation, because I was a fairly new Governor when he ran successfully for public office. It took him quite a while -- not because he lacked qualifications, but because it took him so long in this one-to-one campaigning that someone of Ralph's political philosophy has to undertake here in Texas to get his message across to Texans. And they finally did. And I remember sitting beside him in a great Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Washington that went on until midnight.

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) Ralph never did get to make a speech. Now that's something. When you've got a democratic meeting that lasts for five hours and Ralph Yarborough hasn't found an opportunity to make a speech, it's a long meeting. But I watched him in the Senate, and I want to say to you that we miss him in Washington and that we want him back in the Senate. Now I want to make it clear -- perfectly clear -- that I'm not authorized to make any announcements for Ralph, and I understand he's considering a position he hasn't made yet. That's for him to make, but so many people in the business are making announcements for me -- announcing decisions for me -- that I thought I'd indulge in a luxury a little bit at Ralph's expense. So whatever he has in mind, we'd like to see him back in the Senate of the United States.

Now I'd like to tell you what Mr. Nixon did today. And I choose to do it after referring to Ralph Yarborough because what the President did today -- appeared at the very top of Ralph Yarborough's priority in the Senate. Ralph was concerned with the problems of people, especially the problems of people at the lower end of the social and economic scale -- the poor, discriminated against, and the deprived. He was concerned with children and mothers, fathers who are unable to advance themselves in these families out of their own resources in the light of the opportunities, or lack of opportunities that they have. This is the cause to which Ralph Yarborough dedicated his Senate career. Today President Nixon vetoed another bill. And the bill was the OEO Day Care Bill. He vetoed it with a stroke of his pen. He undermined -- in the words of the Congress -- both houses over this long and frustrating legislative year, the work of the Congress and the Conference for the House and Senate in putting together a bill which would, in a meaningful way, come to grips with this problem of working mothers and the need of poor families and poor households -- indeed, middle class households and families supplementing the income of the principle breadwinner with the income of a working mother, opening up careers to mothers now closed to them, providing better care for children who are deprived of that care today.

That conference at the House and Senate went on for weeks, undertaking to compromise the differences between the House and the Senate and trying to meet the objections raised by the Administration through its spokesman. All that work went down the drain today with one stroke of the Presidential pen. He blocked, at least for the time being, a problem that would provide helpful food, health care, and educational training to the children who need all three.

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd,) Now this bill was built upon the principle and the experience of the Head Start Program -- one of the most popular programs initiated out of the poverty program that was launched by President Johnson a few years ago. The Head Start has been hailed as a landmark in terms of its symbolism of a nation which cares about its children, which cares about the objectives of breaking its children out of the cycle of poverty from one end of this country to another. There isn't a piece of legislation before this Congress more symbolic, more reflective of our determination to build a better future in this country for our children than we've ever been able to build before. This was a bill oriented to the future of our country, and this President blotted this out with one stroke of his pen. Let me tell you something that he had to say in connection with this veto. He vetoed the bill and at the same time had the colossal nerve to say this. He said "We owe our children something better than good intentions. Neither the immediate need nor the desirability of a national child development program of its character has been demonstrated." What does that language mean? He said, in words that are all too clear, that the need for this kind of program hasn't been demonstrated. I ask you who are mothers here in this group, whether you are poor or affluent or middle class, whether or not you haven't made it clear -- eminently clear to your Congressmen, to your Senators, to your community leaders, to those who are concerned with upgrading the quality of life across the grass roots of America -- whether or not this need does not exist. You know it does. I know it does. And so I say to you that the President of the United States knows it does, too. But let me say to you that the President has done something today that is a consistent pattern of his whole administration for three years.

I'm asked from time to time to define the issues which will face us in 1972. And so I say they would include the war, they would include the economy, they would include foreign policy. But I'm saying cincreasingly that the principle issue in 1972 will be the credibility of the office of the President of the U.S. And I say to you that the people of this country want as a basis for leadership, as a basis for government, as a basis for public policy. . . what the people of america want is the truth. They want to know the truth about themselves. They want to know the truth about each other. They want to know the truth about their leaders. They want to know the truth about the leaders' intentions. They want to know the truth about their governmental policies. They want to know the truth about their weaknesses, their shortcomings, their stress. They want to know, in other words, the full dimensions of the problems we face and what it will take to correct them. . . what it will take to unite us again. . . what it will take to set up goals, shining clear cut

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) inspiring goals for the future of our country. The American people want to know the truth about our past, our present, and our future. And this President has contributed nothing to that objective in three years of public office. No one knows or remembers more clearly than I -- unless possibly it's Hubert -- what this President promised in 1968. He promised to end the war. You remember that. He never told us how, but he promised to end the war. What has happened to that war? Forty percent of the American lives lost in Vietnam have been lost since he made that promise. Three years almost have passed since he made that promise that the end is in sight. And the President, in his latest pronouncement, indicated that he favored the concept of a residual force of Americans in South Vietnam in an open-ended commitment to the continuation of our involvement. And so I ask you, if instead of promising to end the war he had said to the American people -- I will end the war after 19,000 Americans have died. . . I will end the war three years or so after I take office. . . I will end the war only after I've ended it on my own terms. The American people could have taken that as the equivalent of his promise to end the war. You know they would not have done so and you know they will not do so in 1972. And what they hold against us is not so much the manner of his winding down the war as the fact that he promised one thing and has delivered another in connection with the war.

He promised to end inflation and he promised to do it without unemployment. Two-and-a-half years later, after a disastrous two-and-a-half years, after Nixon's economic policy, he pronounced a new economic policy. And what is his target? What is his target? Something better than when he took office? Something as good as when he took office? No. His own target reflecting optimism as to full achievement of his new policy is neither of those things. His target is an unemployment level 40% higher than when he took office and a price level 17% higher than when he took office. This is the achievement that President Nixon promised us, and this is the man who told us in the last year of a Democratic Administration that our economic performance wasn't good enough! Well, I say to you that it's better than anything he promises in 1971 before election year 1972. And it isn't going to be good enough to re-elect him as President of the United States!

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) But then the next thing, and the thing I hold against him, and the thing I think most Americans hold against him, is his promise to bring us together. He didn't originate it. He picked it off a sign held up by a little girl. And I applaud him to being receptive at that time to the ideas of others. Because whether or not it was his own instinct or his own evaluation of the political value of that message, he picked it up, understood it, but his difficulty was he didn't know how to do it.

And consider, if you will, the act of the Democratic National Convention of 1968. The polls showed him with 43% of the vote. . . showed us with 29% of the vote. And he almost lost the election. I mean, it's an incredible performance on his part. I mean, when one remembers how he let his own political prospects go down hill in two months from September to November of 1968, we should have been forewarned that he would do the same thing to our country. And that's exactly what he has done. He doesn't know how. He doesn't know how to build a bountry. He doesn't know how to build public confidence. He doesn't know how to lead people into a belief. . . to believe in each other. Americans if they have demonstrated anything that's unique in the history of nations, Americans have demonstrated the capacity through a great deal of trial and tribulation. . . many setbacks. . . but nevertheless in the long run, what Americans have demonstrated is the capacity to reach out to each other, to submerge differences, to submerge our shortcomings in a common effort to respond to the best instincts in each of us. That's what we've been able to do in our best moments as a nation. And we've been able to do it especially under the stimulus of inspiring leadership. . . leadership like Roosevelt and Kennedy, for example. Leadership like that of Hoover. And who will forget -- and I'm saying this in Texas, I'm saying this to a mixed audience -- who will forget the inspiration of Lyndon Johnson's promise that "We will overcome."

I've marched to the words of that song, "We will overcome." I marched through Atlanta when Martin Luther King was buried. And I say to you that the inspiration of that song, the inspiration of those words, is its command. . . its command to overcome human weaknesses and to respond to the potential for human nobility. That's the magic of that song. And that's the magic of America. . . more than any other song identified with our country. . . including the Star Spangled Banner. "We Shall Overcome" represents the American history, the American story of the best moments of our first two hundred years.

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) We know -- and especially here in Texas -- this lesson is driven home that we have assembled in this country the greatest resources ever assembled by any nation in the entire history of man -- great wealth, great economic power, great military strength. But more important than all of these are the great resources in spirit and tradition and goals and values and confidence in our ability, at our best, to use the forces of a free people and democratic institutions to do what we must do. This is our strength.

I often ask why, why of all people we were blessed with this kind of resources? And I say to you that I am convinced, I'm convinced, whether by accident or ordinance, we've been given the opportunity to demonstrate that, at least on one place on this earth, it is possible for any member of the society -- even the least member of the society -- to achieve all justice. That's our challenge. That's our opportunity. And I say to you that we shall do it, that we shall overcome, that we shall make this country measure up to its greatness. And that greatness will be an inspiration, an example, to all our people here at home and for deprived and hopeless people around this globe. That is our American destiny.

We've been misled in recent years into a belief that American influence elsewhere is somehow equated with power -- material power, economic power, military power. Well, usefull as that kind of power is in a hostile world, that really isn't the source of America's greatness. America is most influential when America measures up to her own ideals.

I travel somewhat. Last March I visited Nigeria and Africa. I had a chance to meet with African leaders and people. And I was interested in probing what is their view of America today, what was their view of America in the past, what they would like America to be today. I say to you that at the bottom of all of this one dominating feeling I had about their attitude is that they would like to see America again as a symbol. . . as a symbol of hope, as a symbol of hope because, if hope exists here for even the least of our people, then they can be sure that somehow there is hope for them as well on this planet. Hope is the great healing force that should bring people together, that can erase doubts about our national purposes, that can inspire our best leaders to the kind of effort we need to exert in the years ahead. I say to you, there is every reason for hope in America. . . every reason to believe that we can become the greatness that all of us as children understood we represented, the greatness that can

SENATOR MUSKIE (Cont'd.) make us an example elsewhere as well. It's a great year that lies ahead of us. It's going to be tough. I personally face challenges the likes of which I've never faced before. I'm not sure I can measure up to them, but I'm going to try. I'm not sure that I can measure up to the test of leadership which all of you ought to apply to those who seek the Presidency next year, but I'm going to test myself. And I ask only one thing of you. I ask only one thing of you. That, if you decide to support me -- or anyone else -- that you do so on the basis of your determination to put above everything else the objective of raising idealism, human value, and hope as the standard for our country, beginning January 1973, and to accept nothing less, nothing less. Let's make 1972 the year of the people in this country. . . all of the people. . . whoever they are from coast to coast, black and white, rich and poor, or young or old. . . the year of the people. And if we do that, we'll not only defeat Mr. Nixon, but we'll demonstrate once and for all that the kind of policies and divisions that have marked his Administration will never again get the support of the American people.

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