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

A COALITION WITH YOUTH

In 1968 the young people of this nation felt shut out. They tried to make those in both major parties share political power and move more quickly toward solving problems they felt were urgent: ending the war, ending discrimination, and solving the growing problems of rural and urban slums and pollution.

But 1968 was frustration. They did not win, and some of them came to believe that winning was impossible. Their anger was real and apparent. The inadequacy of governmental response seemed plain to them, and they were impatient with those whose political experience taught that pointing out a wrong does not create an immediate solution. They felt betrayed by the complexities and hypocrisies of politics, of "the system." Their voices were joined to those of other struggling and frustrated groups: Blacks, women, Mexican-Americans, the poor.

Within the system, however, and almost without anyone noticing, things did begin to happen. The voices were heard, and some of those in government and in politics listened and began to act. Because of the seriousness of the accusations and the fury of the anger, change began to occur rapidly --as it always does in a free society.

In the Democratic Party that change has been dramatic, but is still not fully realized nor understood. We inaugurated revolutionary reforms to allow equal representation and grassroots participation in the pre-convention and primary activity in every state. We prepared for a convention in 1972 which would be open to Blacks, to women, and to youth. All three of these groups are now represented on the National Committee. We designed guidelines to make delegate selection more democratic for the ordinary voter. The unit rule is gone, so that each delegate can know his vote will be counted as he wishes it to be. Secret caucuses are banned. Proxy voting is ended. The timely selection of delegates in the year of the convention is assured.

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Other changes took place in American political life. Women's rights became a challenge to all of us, and many men were suddenly aware of the validity of women's demands and began to help in every way they could to make equality of the sexes a political reality. The Equal Rights Amendment is now being fought for by many members of the Congress, and will soon, I hope, become law.

Black voters achieved victories at the polls -- at city, state, and national levels. Although they did not win every campaign, they were able to demonstrate clearly that their power was real and growing. They are proving that a Black candidate can stand for election and win on the basis of ability and qualifications in places where a white majority exists. As has often happened in the past, the political inequality of an identified minority group was recognized and is going to be erased.

For young people the great change was the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, which became law this year, and which suddenly gave them the real power they lacked in 1968. The memory of frustration is still with them. The myth of an unbeatable or unworkable system has been kept alive and needs to be dispelled. It was a terrible thing to feel they had no tool to use in achieving the goals they felt were important. Many of the most articulate young men and women in America spoke out bitterly about change, about revolution, about the establishment of a new culture and a new lifestyle.

Most Americans have come to agree with young people in their criticisms of our mistakes in Indochina and their frustration with government secrecy. Some of their demands were unrealistic or the wrong approach to problems. Some of them demanded immediate cures for problems whose existence has been recognized but which must be approached carefully and systematically. In searching for answers to environmental problems, for instance, we must be sure that the cure does not cause a further aggravation of the problem or create a new one in another area. Every solution is not a final solution. The heady challenge of righting wrongs must always become the steady work of correction, of education,

and of preparation of legislation which is workable and which will be approved by Congress. It is difficult to accept the necessity for this kind of patient effort.

As we approach a new convention and another election year, with a reformed and renewed Democratic Party, and with women and Blacks firmly on the road to political equality, youth is still a question mark. They have won more than they know, and in 1972 they have the power to do what they wanted to do earlier: to effect change. For the first time in history the youth vote -- or the absence of a youth vote -- may decide a major American election.

Early indications are that at least 42% of youth will register and vote. They are registering preponderantly as Democrats and Independents. There are many ways to play with the probabilities and the statistics. In 1968, for instance, only one-third of the eligible youth voters, with a two to one Democratic vote among that one-third, could have changed ten states from the Republican to the Democratic column. That would have been enough for victory.

There are other ways to juggle the figures or to consider the impact of these new voters. But no matter how one juggles them, it becomes obvious that youth has the chance this year to help create a real turning around for this nation. They could help to achieve a realignment of priorities and policy. They could help to bring peace. They could signal the beginning of a real race against pollution, a successful war on poverty, innovations in education, medical programs, city-planning, and economic stability. Not all young people agree about priorities or solutions, of course. They can be effective only if enough of them are willing to cooperate with one another and with the rest of us in America who want change.

Will it happen that way? There are many who don't believe that young people will bother to register or to vote, who believe that they will be apathetic or that they have given up. But I've learned to listen to young people. I hear tough-minded questions from them. I hear them

demanding real answers and solutions. They are careful about committing themselves -- and they are wary of the hidden traps of doublethink and doubletalk, of rhetoric. But it is significant to me that, even this early in the election year, they are asking those questions, and that they are paying attention.

I think the Democratic Party has the opportunity this year to offer young Americans the honesty they deserve and the opportunity they need to achieve unity in the use of their new voting rights. Democrats everywhere must welcome this opportunity and open our party to both the idealism and the skepticism of youth. We must accomodate ourselves to their impatience and they must learn to use our experience. We have built the bridge with reform -- and now we must be willing to cross that bridge to form a coalition of the young and the old.

We have begun to help with the massive job of registering new voters. We must increase those efforts. We must make it clear to young people that their participation in primaries and pre-convention activities is imperative if they want to make the best use of their political tool, and that the Democratic Party is ready for that participation.

Young people have begun to experience the possibilities and probabilitites of political effort. We must increase that educational opportunity. They are developing the skills and persuasive powers and organizational abilities needed to achieve creative change in our society. We must persuade them that the Democratic Party is a viable instrument for that kind of change.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote a friend: "Cherish the spirit of our people and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to public affairs, you and I and Congress and Assemblies, Judges and Governors shall all become wolves."

If we can persuade the young people of America that we truly do cherish the spirit they exhibit -- that challenging, demanding, exciting, 'can-do' American spirit -- we can make 1972 the year when the Democratic Party, through a coalition of young and old, begins to bring the future alive.

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