

Bates College

SCARAB

Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

2-25-1972

Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie in Sarasota, Florida

Edmund S. Muskie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/msp>

...But after visiting with you in this beautiful part of Florida, I can say that God makes everything in Sarasota-Bradenton including the weather. I've been warmed not only by your kindness but by your people, by your hospitality and by the kindness that all of you have shown me in the weeks that have passed.

I find the people of Florida are very much like my friends and my neighbors in Maine. They are good people. They are part of the land. And they are proud to be Americans. And as I travel throughout this country, I have learned that Americans everywhere feel the same way. And that's one of the reasons why I am running for President.

I believe that all of us, no matter where we live or what we do, all of us face the same problems, suffer the same disappointments, and share the same hopes. And I believe that all of us, if we work together, can solve those problems and make those hopes a reality.

You might say, of course, that that's an easy thing for a politician to say and of course you are right. It is easy to say that we can do better but it is far more difficult to be specific about the policies we should follow. Those of us in the Senate tend to see the Nation on paper alone. And we sometimes forget that behind each volume of statistics and analyses there are human beings facing some very real human problems.

For example, we've seen reports on crime in America. But no report can ever convey the fear and the pain of over five million Americans who are victimized by crime each year. We know the statistics. We know that the national crime rate has climbed 120% in the last 10 years. We know that every geographic region in the country has suffered crime increases. We know that crime in the suburbs increased by 14% in 1970 alone. We know that crime in rural areas went up by 15% in 1970. And we know that 2 of every 3 crimes do not show up in the statistics at all, because they are never reported. We know that as much as \$6 billion is lost to criminals every year.

But statistics, impressive as they are, never show the people behind the numbers. Cab drivers in New York City, for example, refuse to change anything larger than a \$5 bill, but they still worry that the next passenger may kill for petty cash. Merchants in Dallas buy Burglar alarms, safety locks and shatterproof glass. But repeated robberies still drain their profits and finally destroy their business. Retired men and women in Tampa can save all their lives for a condominium on the water, only to have one nighttime assault leave them with medical bills that shatter their dreams.

The same thing is happening to people everywhere in America. It has changed the way we live. No matter what else we do in the next four years, no matter what else I hope to do as President, we must make America safe for every citizen of every state.

That will not be easy. The questions we face are complex and changing and there is never a simple answer. The answer can be as far away as the slum

in Detroit where children learn to steal before they learn to read. Or the answer can be as near as the lock on the door of the liquor store around the corner which can be opened with a credit card or a paper clip.

The answers are never easy and we must stop looking for the magic answer in phrases like "Law and Order" or in candidates who talk tough. We need leadership, not slogans. We need hard work and not tough talk if we are to build a peaceful society.

And we need a new federal program to help the states and cities to fight crime. We need more federal aid to local police, aid which will enable them to hire better qualified men by guaranteeing them better pay, better equipment and better training. We need an all-out attack on the terror of drug addiction, which can ruin the lives of our sons and daughters, and which sustains itself through crime. And we need reform in our courts, to insure speedy conviction of the guilty and speedy release for the innocent. And we need a new commitment to an effective and humane penal system, where prisons are places for rehabilitation instead of the schools for crime that they now are. And we need special new programs to help those groups in our society that are most victimized by crime.

Last week I proposed such a program--a \$50 million project to protect the elderly. Older Americans, believe it or not, suffer a higher share of crime than most other citizens in our land. And women over the age of 60 are among the most vulnerable citizens to burglary, robbery and larceny.

The program I have proposed would grant funds to local forces for the specific purpose of protecting the elderly. It would provide special police patrols in areas where they live. It would establish special communications systems so the elderly can contact the police quickly. It would appoint special officers to work the communities where older Americans reside and it would help indemnify the aged for the losses they suffer from crime. Twenty counties in Florida would be eligible for assistance under such a program. And older Americans everywhere would have a better chance to live in peace and in dignity.

Programs like this one would do more to stop crime than all the speeches and all the slogans put together. That is why the Florida primary is so important. That is why I am running for President and why I need your help.

I didn't come to Florida to frighten people about crime. I'm here because I want to help solve these problems. And I'm here because I believe we can solve them. I think that this country has had enough of the politics of provocation and it's time for the politics of problem solving.

I know there are those who say we cannot solve our problems. They say that we will always have crime. They say that we will always have unemployment. They say that we will always have inflation and pollution and civil unrest.

I don't believe it. I've served in the Congress for 13 years. I've served in public office for 25 years and I have seen democracy work, and have helped it to work. I have seen public officials rise above politics. I've seen them reject special interests. And I've seen people join together to move their country forward.

Those are the moments that have made America what it is at her best. Those are the moments that have made this country great at her best. But those moments didn't just happen. They were made by men and women who believed enough in themselves, in each other and in our country to fight for progress. Those men and women were leaders.

The job of leadership is to make those moments happen again and again. That is what a President should do. That's his job. No American should ever have to settle for anything less.

We can solve our problems. We can stop pollution. We can fight unemployment. We can reduce crime in America. And we can do it if we work together. And this is why we must reject those who appeal only to fear and to prejudice.

This is no time for negative politics. That's the kind of politics which builds unrest and promotes crime and disorder. We don't need Southern strategy and panic calls for law and order. What we need, something that we understand in my part of the country, is common sense. That's what you deserve; that's what you ought to demand. Our people need help. The country needs help. And despite what some people in Washington have suggested, the Democratic Party does not need any kind of regional strategy.

There have been suggestions that we ought to ignore the South; that we are wasting our time and our money down here; that there are no votes for us in November. Well, I'm more concerned about people than I am about votes. I'm more concerned with the unemployment rate in Florida and in America than I am in building a political war chest. I'm more concerned with ending the war in Vietnam than I am with appealing to only certain sections of our country.

This country is more than a big state with a big electoral vote. It is all our people wherever they live, whoever they are, in every region of our country, in every region of every state. And our policies must reflect all their views, all their needs, all their hopes, wherever they are. And so I reject the idea of appeals to regions or appeals to classes.

If I am elected President of the United States, I want truly to be President of all our people, not just from my point of view, but from the point of each of them. I want each of them to believe that I am concerned with their welfare as an individual human being, and not simply the welfare of those states or those regions that can put together a majority in an election. And, if I can't be that kind of a President, credible to every American, I don't want to be President at all. Life is too short, and our country's needs too great, to settle for any such standards.

We are all Americans. We all need leadership. We all are searching for it. And that's why I am here in Florida. That's why I'm running for President. That's why I need your help, and your support, because together we can solve these problems.

And I want to put together a majority of Americans. I want that majority to include people in Florida, in Maine, in California, in Washington. I want that majority to include blacks and whites, minorities, men and women, Southerners, Easterners, Northerners, Westerners. I may not build a majority in every state.

I may not build a majority in every region. That doesn't deter me. I want that majority to come from every state and every region.

I won't promise to agree with all of you. That's impossible in a divided America, because not all Americans agree with each other. But unless those Americans agree with each other, not only over the easy issues, and the easy problems, but the more difficult emotional and controversial ones as well, we will never build a country again. We have got to find a way to submerge our differences and to enlarge the common ground upon which we must stand in this country. And if in this struggle I lose an election here or there, that will not deter me, because this battle will not be lost or won until we've concluded the fight.

I hope that at the end of that fight next November, we will have a President committed to unifying our country and that we will have a country which believes in his commitment. And, if we have that, then we can make a new beginning for our country and for each of us next January.

I am so tired, as a citizen, of all the divisions and the shouting and the doubts and the suspicions and the hatreds. This isn't the country into which I was born. This isn't the country in which I was raised as a child. This isn't the country which my father told me, from the belief that originated in the land of his birth overseas, as a country of hope. This isn't the country that built the foundation for broader human rights, for advanced opportunity, for deprived peoples, neglected people in the past. But this is the country that we want once again.

And I believe it can be that, and I believe it because I see it in the faces of all Americans I meet, whoever they are, whatever their color, whatever their background or origin, wherever they live; and reading this belief in the faces of my fellow Americans, I am prepared to fight for it, wherever I can, to the extent of my resources and energies and abilities, because the goal is so vital to us all.

So thank you very much for welcoming me this morning on this beautiful day in Sarasota-Bradenton. There is great work to be done, and I think we can do it. And, with your help, we will.

(APPLAUSE)

#