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Press Release - Muskie Criticizes Highway Program and Proposes Diversion of Funds

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

Maine

(202) 225-5344

FOR RELEASE

IMMEDIATELY
OCTOBER 1, 1970

MUSKIE CRITICIZES HIGHWAY PROGRAM AND PROPOSES DIVERSION OF FUNDS

Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) today criticized the "harsh either-or choice" presented by the Federal highway program, and said that next year he would propose "major revisions in the Federal highway program--intended to make the program more responsive to the transportation needs of all Americans."

In individual views filed with the Public Works Committee report on the Federal-Air Highway Act of 1970, Muskie pointed out that the National Air Quality Standards Act of 1970 would require drastic changes in the nation's transportation system. Muskie noted that the Public Works Committee report on that legislation said that new transportation programs and systems would be required in many areas. The Air Pollution report urged that the highway program be reexamined in that light.

When the Public Works Committee considered the highway bill, Muskie offered an amendment which would have given any state the opportunity to divert highway trust funds to the construction of alternative transportation systems in urban areas. The amendment was rejected.

"It seemed to me," Muskie said in his individual views, "that the highway program should be flexible enough to permit states not only to build highways with proceeds from the trust fund, but also to build other forms of transportation which may serve their needs more effectively and more wisely, I felt that the Committee had a responsibility to recommend changes in the highway program which would be consistent with the requirements of the National Air Quality Standards Act, unanimously approved by the Committee only a week earlier."

Muskie criticized the "harsh either-or choice--between the freeways that can be purchased with the highway trust funds on the one hand, or no transportation system on the other. This choice is inconsistent with efforts to alleviate the transportation, housing and employment problems of our urban areas. This choice complicates the urban crisis and threatens continued deterioration in the quality of life in our cities."

Muskie also said that the argument that gasoline taxes should not be used for the construction of alternative transportation reflected a "narrow-minded perspective." Muskie said he did not agree "that taxes derived from the operation of the automobile should be used to perpetuate the automobile as the only form of transportation for many Americans."

"Unless we intergrate our Federal transportation policies and begin to provide states and cities with the ability to offer the kinds of transportation systems that their citizens need, we will never achieve a liveable urban-suburban environment."

Muskie also urged repeal of Section 23 of the 1968 Act, which required that the District of Columbia build certain segments of its highway program. "The citizens of the District of Columbia, like the citizens of any state, should be free to plan the transportation and highway systems with which they must live."

The Senate will take up the highway bill (S. 4260) on Friday.
