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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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**Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Fundraising Dinner,
Washington Hilton Hotel**

Edmund S. Muskie

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IMMEDIATELY
April 17, 1972

Attached is a copy of Senator Edmund S. Muskie's text for tonight's fund-raising dinner in his honor in the Washington Hilton Hotel.

More than 1,000 supporters are expected at the \$125 a-plate affair.

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

WASHINGTON HILTON
April 17, 1972

Today, I introduced a resolution in the Senate to stop the bombing of North Vietnam and to withdraw all our troops from Indochina in return for our prisoners. As President, I would do exactly that within sixty days of my inauguration. I would end this war for America.

Yet tonight we seem so far from peace.

Tonight, our planes are over North Vietnam, just as they were four years ago.

Tonight, South Vietnamese cities are under seige, just as they were four years ago.

Tonight, a Communist offensive reveals the moral and military disaster of American policy in Indochina -- which is exactly what happened in the Tet offensive four years ago.

It has been written that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. Our tragedy is that we remember the history of this war and yet we are repeating it now.

President Nixon has just adopted the same bombing policy which

was started and later discarded by President Johnson. In recent days, he has unleashed massive air strikes against the North Vietnamese port of Haiphong.

This course is foolish because it has failed before.

It is dangerous because hitting or sinking a Russian ship in the harbor could carry us to the brink of a world crisis.

And the President's decision is an outrage because it was made without the consent of the Congress and against the will of the American people.

But the bombing of Haiphong is only the most visible sign of a frightening escalation in Southeast Asia. In a brief span of weeks, our leaders have taken us further away from peace than at any time in the last few years.

The Secretary of Defense has admitted that we are raising our commitment of air power to a record level.

Official sources have hinted that we will postpone the next withdrawal of ground troops.

The President has broken off negotiations in Paris.

He has doubled our sea forces off the coast of Indochina. And now we learn that among those forces is a helicopter assault carrier with fifteen hundred Marines on board.

We are moving ominously close to the situation which led us during the last decade into the longest conflict in our history.

Once again, most of our soldiers and pilots are protected only by the South Vietnamese army -- and if recent events are any indication, that army cannot even protect itself.

The stated aim of the Nixon administration's Vietnamization plan was to prepare the South Vietnamese to carry their own burden; yet in the current offensive they have relied heavily on overwhelming American air support.

So what will happen if our men and our bases are threatened by Communist attacks? What will happen if Communist anti-aircraft weapons continue to shoot our pilots out of the sky? Will the President rush in more troops to defend the troops it has refused to withdraw?

On March 5, 1968, Richard Nixon said: "I pledge to. . . end the

the war and win the peace." When?

In 1969, he ordered our planes to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos -- yet the war did not end.

In 1970 and 1971, he ordered our men into Cambodia and Laos -- as though the way to peace in one country was to invade two more -- and yet the war did not end.

I say end the war now for America.

Yet we read reports from Saigon that South Vietnamese officials expect this conflict to drag on for years. No wonder General Thieu says that he favors the re-election of President Nixon. He understands that the Nixon administration is willing to fight on for years.

But more fighting will not work -- and it is wrong.

It is wrong to bomb the innocent women and children of a thousand Asian villages. . . people who may not know the name of their nation, let alone the cause of their dying.

It is wrong to send more young Americans to Vietnam as bargaining chips for the freedom of prisoners of war who would be free if our troops were not in Vietnam at all.

And we have paid so high a price for being wrong. The Bible says: "What father, if asked by his son for bread, would give him a stone?"

Our sons have asked for jobs -- and we have given them war.

Our sons have asked for an education -- and we have taught them how to kill.

Our sons have asked for life -- and fifty-five thousand of them have come home from Asia in coffins.

It is a tragedy that Americans are still being lost in Vietnam -- not for a cause, but for a mistake. It is a tragedy for their families and their friends. It is a tragedy for the communities in which they would have lived and laughed and raised their children. And it is a stain on the soul of America that an estimated 340,000 Asians have been killed, that 600,000 have been wounded, and that 4,000,000 have been made refugees since President Nixon promised us peace.

This is what we have done -- and this is what we must stop.

And we have paid another terrible price for Vietnam. Each

of us and all of our cities are unlisted casualties of this conflict.

Every day in 1971 we wasted \$7 million in Indochina. . . \$7 million that was not available to build a school in your neighborhood.

Everytime a Huey helicopter is shot down we lost \$250,000. . . \$250,000 which cannot be used to open a neighborhood health center in Washington.

And the three weeks of renewed bombing against North Vietnam have cost us at least \$300 million. . . which is three times as much as the government will spend to cure cancer in the next twelve months.

I say end the war now for America.

Richard Nixon was elected because he promised peace. He has broken that promise. Twenty thousand Americans have died in Southeast Asia since he took office. Let me repeat that, because it is the hard and bitter truth behind the official claims about the success of our policy: Twenty thousand of our sons have been killed in Southeast Asia during the Nixon administration.

If the President will not change course in 1972, it will be up to a new President to settle the conflict in 1973. I want you to understand how I intend to do that.

-- Within two months of my Inauguration, I will withdraw all of our forces from Indochina. The only condition will be the release of our captured soldiers and an accounting of those missing in action.

-- I will cut off military aid to the government in Saigon if it is not making substantial progress toward peace. If it is wrong for Americans to fight in Indochina, then it is wrong for us to give weapons to others so they can spurn the chance to end the fighting.

It is not an easy thing for a great nation to admit a mistake -- but it is perhaps the definition of greatness in a nation that it can.

And unless we admit our mistake in Vietnam, we may face a generation of war, even as the President talks about a generation of peace. In the name of peace, the President travelled to China and in May he will travel to Russia. We hoped that in Peking he

would make progress toward a settlement in Vietnam. It is a bitter disappointment to all of us that since then, the conflict has not diminished, but intensified. For the China trip left untouched the grim reality of events in Indochina. At that very moment when the President was negotiating across the table with Communist Chinese leaders, they were co-operating with Hanoi to prepare the offensive which is killing American sons at this very moment.

In Shanghai, the President called his visit to China "the week that changed the world." It was in fact the week before the greatest escalation of the violence and the dying since the beginning of the Vietnam war. The President may say peace, peace -- but there is no peace.

Now we must be willing -- you and I -- to say to the President: "The only week that will really change the world will be the week when you make the decision that will end the war."

We must say to him: "End this war now."

We must say that this war is not worth the life of one more American boy -- or one more Asian peasant.

And if you and I persevere in this campaign through the difficult days ahead, finally, after four years, we will elect a President who will keep the promise of peace.

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