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**Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie Before the Committee on
National Priorities of the Democratic Policy Council**

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY U.S. SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES
OF THE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COUNCIL
CAUCUS ROOM, OSOB
FEBRUARY 24, 1970 11:00 A.M.

The Committee on National Priorities is engaged in a bold and difficult experiment: whether it is possible for a political party to examine and define those issues which are of most immediate importance to a complex and rapidly changing society--and to translate those issues into a set of priority actions which are responsive to society's needs and realistic in terms of our available resources

I do not underestimate the difficulty of the task, and I do not underestimate the talent of your committee. You must lay bare the tough choices we must make if we are to restore our national sense of purpose, and if we are to show some progress toward achieving the promise of our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution.

As American society has become more complex, our political institutions have reached a critical turning point. It is more and more essential that the political process work for all Americans, but it is harder and harder to make it work.

The time has come for Democrats to make a choice--between a party where the decisions are made at the top and passed to those below, or a party where those at the top listen and respond to the goals and aspirations of all its members.

Only political leadership that listens and responds will be able to pull America together and make democracy work. We must recognize the value and vitality of diversity. We must be sensitive to the human problems and aspirations of all Americans. We must find ways to bring out the best in all of us.

These are the tasks that face a responsive and responsible political party. These are the promises that the Democratic Party has made. And this Committee on National Priorities is proof that we mean to keep those promises.

The environmental conscience which has gripped the nation holds great promise--not only for our air, our water, and our land, but also for the future of people searching for a better life together.

We have realized the meaning of life in a world of limited natural resources. It is a small step to the realization that we also live in a world of fragile human resources.

We cannot survive the continuing strain of an undeclared war on our future. We must lay down our weapons of self-annihilation.

Martin Luther King once said that "through our scientific genius we have made of the world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual genius we must make of it a brotherhood."

We must forge a wholesale change in our priorities and our values. We must redefine our standard of living, reflecting the knowledge that both our human and natural resources are at stake.

Our time to meet this challenge is short. We must reorder our priorities--and, in doing that, we must abandon the snail's pace of the present administration.

Too many Americans receive health care in shamefully meager doses--and at prices they cannot afford. But here the budget gets cut.

Too many Americans live in the misery of substandard housing in teeming urban ghettos or desolate rural slums. But here the budget gets cut.

Too many children fall farther and farther behind in the learning race, while 28 per cent of our young people never graduate from high school. But here the money is vetoed.

And too many Americans are laid off from their jobs, while the cost of living continues to climb. But here the President says "hands off".

The President has vowed to stop the abuse of our natural resources. But his vows are not matched by the figures in his budget.

Our air is clogged with dirt and choked with poisons, yet the budget request for air pollution control is less than last year's appropriation.

Our water supplies are contaminated, our marine life is imperiled, and some of our rivers have become fire hazards. But the budget request for water pollution control is less than the program authorized by Congress in 1966.

While rats prey on uncollected garbage in our cities and abandoned cars deface the rural landscape, this year's budget request for solid waste disposal is less than last year's appropriations.

As our gross national product approaches one trillion dollars, the relentless, vicious deterioration of our human and natural resources continues. It is a sham to say we cannot afford the protection of our environment--just yet; or the fight against hunger and poverty--at this time; or homes and medical care for our people--for a few years. We can afford these domestic programs now--and fight inflation at the same time--if we admit that there are less important priorities we cannot afford. The administration's balanced budget reflects unbalanced priorities. Look at this "balanced" budget for fiscal 1971. That budget "balances" \$275 million for the SST against \$106 million for air pollution control. It "balances" \$3.4 billion for the space program against \$1.4 billion for housing. And it "balances" \$7.3 billion for arms research and development against \$1.4 billion for higher education.

These 'balances' are not sacrifices we are forced to make in the battle against inflation. They are examples of the wrong money, at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

National priorities are meaningless if the national budget does not reflect them. We must revamp the budget itself.

First, we must make more than token changes in the level of military spending. We cannot have guns and butter in the manner we have always thought possible. We must examine every request for military spending with a new skepticism, asking not whether there is a less expensive military substitute, but whether there is a more effective non-military substitute. We must replace the spiraling costs of new weapons and greater overkill with genuine, persistent efforts at arms control. We must take honest risks in pursuit of peace and disarmament.

Second, we must set priorities which protect total human environment--our air, water, and land resources, our health, our homes, and our communities--not priorities which lead to faster planes, mightier weapons, and more ventures into space.

Third, we must make it clear that the unemployment caused by recession is no cure for the rising prices of inflation. Wage and price guidelines are preferable to having men and women thrown out of work.

Finally, the Democratic Party must insist that the Federal Budget reflect the priorities we proclaim. There is no room in our society for empty promises and false commitments.

These are the issues of people and peace. They are good ideas, they are good priorities.

But good ideas do not keep forever. Something must be done about them, or they become the seeds of revolution.

In 1976 America will mark its 200th anniversary. Two centuries ago Americans fought a revolution---not for the sake of hollow promises and empty slogans, but to insure for themselves and their children the opportunity to build on the basis of their common dreams.

We have built a great nation on the basis of those dreams, but we have not yet built a society where each citizen has an equal chance to reach his own potential, where life is acceptable for all Americans.

We may not reach those goals by 1976. We may never reach them at all. But at least we owe that chance to ourselves and to those who gave birth to this nation. At least we must help to insure that we are moving again in the right direction.

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