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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE EDMUND S. MUSKIE
DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY
OF THE UNITED STATES
IN AN INTERVIEW BY JOHN MARTIN

Wednesday, September 18, 1968

San Francisco, California

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Empire Room, Fairmont Hotel
San Francisco, California
Wednesday, September 18, 1968
5:55 p.m. (PDT)

Mr. Martin: Senator, somebody said recently that the main constitutional duty of a Vice President is to wait, and perhaps the Vice President could be called a gentlemen in waiting in the American form of government.

As Vice President, you would be getting continuous briefing and all sorts of duties of the Cabinet and be an understudy in a way. Is there a modern kind of vice presidency that you have in mind that we haven't seen yet?

Senator Muskie: Well, I think the concept of such an office is evolving. I think that the direction suggested by most people who have talked to me about it recently is the direction of greater authority to oversee and coordinate our programs in the domestic field, particularly with reference to the cities.

And where there is a place, of course, for such a responsibility and such a function, I have been urging it in legislation, which I have introduced -- not for the Vice President -- but I have been urging for a creation of an office of coordination as such, in order to make more effective use of the tremendous resources that are available in these programs but in a more effective way.

Others have suggested making the Vice President perhaps the Executive President, to do the administering, the executive work, and let the President sort of act as the chairman of the board, as a comparable corporate parallel. And there may be something here. We may need a little more time for evolution before the thing settles down, but ultimately, what it ought to do, of -course, from my point of view, is to relieve the President of some of the duties which he now has, and which could be performed by the Vice President, so that the President can concentrate more on the great policy decisions which he must consider from day to day.

1 Mr. Martin: The Vice Presidency is still a rather
2 powerless condition. Wouldn't the Vice President have to have
3 some degree of power, which he does not possess, to be an
4 effective man in the system you speak of?

5 Senator Muskie: Well, that would presuppose, I suppose
6 final authority within some areas of the presidential respon-
7 sibility.

8 Now, whether as a political matter, a President is
9 going to willingly give final authority to a Vice President,
10 who is his subordinate, is a nice question.

11 Secondly, it may be that in order to give the Vice
12 President effective authority -- in some of these domestic
13 areas -- needs congressional action to do it by legislation.

14 I think perhaps it is too early to do either one of
15 those things, consider either one of those things, but it is
16 not too early to get the shape of the office. The President
17 did give Vice President Humphrey some responsibilities in the
18 field of federal-city relationships. He has been working at
19 that and that stimulated his interest in developing the office
20 of the vice presidency in that direction.

21 Mr. Martin: This may seem like a rather blunt ques-
22 tion and of course, it is. Mr. Humphrey has been criticized
23 for not being more his own man now. If your ticket is elected,
24 are you going to be your own man, speaking out in terms of
25 your own conscience rather than of your party?

26 Senator Muskie: I think people don't make the dis-
27 tinction as to where the speaking out is to be done.

28 Reviewing some of the 1960 campaign recently -- I
29 just browsed at this material -- Richard Nixon said that he
30 was running four square on the record of the Eisenhower - Nixon
31 Administration in 1960. Nobody challenged him as to whether he
32 was his own man. It never occurred to anybody to challenge
33 him.

34 Mr. Martin: Of course, there was no war on at that
35 time.

36 Senator Muskie: Nevertheless, I assume when you
37 raise the question of whether or not the Vice President ought
38 to be his own man, it ought to be in every area of responsibility
39 not just in the area of foreign relations and in times of war.

1 The Vice President is part of the Administration. And
2 he is chosen presumably, not because he is a carbon copy of the
3 President, but because he has sort of a judgment making capacity
4 of his own, certain experience and knowledge which he ought to
5 bring to bear upon the areas of responsibility he is given.

6 And the President would value him more if he does
7 bring a different perspective and different slant, different
8 views.

9 The Vice President has made that very clear to me
10 in discussing it. So we are going to have different views on
11 these problems I assume. We begin, of course, with the fact
12 that we have a basic compatibility -- politically, philosophi-
13 cally -- we have worked together for 10 years, we know how our
14 views overlap and so we are compatible in that sense.

15 In starting out with that, why you know you are going
16 to be able to work together toward the same overall objectives,
17 but you can still disagree, and the Vice President welcomes
18 that; and I know that President Johnson welcomes it.

19 The question is when should the Vice President disagree
20 publicly. I am sure the Vice President has often disagreed
21 privately. But whether or not he should do it publicly and
22 thus jeopardize the integrity of the policy of his Administration
23 this is a serious question and I think ought to be done only
24 in instances where his conscience is violated by the policy of
25 his Administration.

 Mr. Martin: I would like to turn for a moment to
some of the personal qualities that you would be bringing to
the office. Your wife was quoted -- perhaps correctly, perhaps
incorrectly -- as saying that one of the few times she saw a
nervous husband was when you came in and told her of being
offered the Vice Presidential nomination.

 She was quoted at that time, quoted you as saying,
"Well, Mummy, I think we are stuck with it." And she said,
"I guess so."

 Is that a correct quote, and do you look with a
certain amount of foreboding at the vice presidency?

 Senator Muskie: Oh, no, that is a pretty accurate
quote, I think. At that point, of course, we both had been
waiting all day for the Vice President to make his decision.

 Mr. Martin: Where were you when you got the word?

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Senator Muskie: I was in the Vice President's suite at the Conrad Hilton. And I guess at that point, I was more sensitive to the (inaudible) of the campaign than the office.

No, it was a very momentary reaction. I found this a very exciting, interesting, and challenging assignment in the campaign, and if we are elected on November 5, I am sure --

Well, I don't know, there are some parts of the job I may not enjoy. It is an (inaudible) in some respects. But it will be a new experience.

But in politics, when you undertake a life career, which you do, I guess, when you run for the Senate, then you just go where it gets you. You take whatever experiences come, you take whatever responsibilities come as an opportunity to contribute to your country and perhaps to grow a little yourself.

Mr. Martin: Senator, you have been characterized as a rather shy man. I think someone in your family said you didn't date until your senior year in high school, and that you often didn't play with children your own age in grammar school.

You have been also, in a sense, criticized for being perhaps too self effacing in the Senate, passing up two different chances to become Majority Whip.

My question, is this a quality you think may in fact have been lacking in American politics until now, or something that you particularly pride yourself on, or is it perhaps a personal quality that you exhibit?

Senator Muskie: Well, it isn't an affected posture at all. I was shy. And I had to fight to overcome it.

I suppose that there is still a streak of it in me that comes out when I am asked -- when the occasion suggests that I ought to push myself as in competition with somebody else. In both of the instances you referred to, someone with greater seniority, whom I admired, also aspired to the opportunity, and so I felt they had a right to it.

But this doesn't mean that once I get an assignment, which would be an advancement, I won't fight for it.

Mr. Martin: I would like to turn rather abruptly to another side of you, and ask you if in a hundred Years when

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1 you and I are both gone, what kind of a man would you like to
2 be remembered as? What would your epitaph read if you could
write it?

3 Senator Muskie: I think before you came up with
4 anything like that, you would want to think about it a little.
5 If I am going to decide what my place in history ought to be,
I want to give it some thought, make sure I put together some-
thing good.

6 Mr. Martin: What are those personal qualities you
pride the most?

7
8 Senator Muskie: Well, integrity, I think, would come
first. That would be all-important.

9 The thing that I remember most, take greatest pride
10 in in connection with my Governorship in Maine, is the fact
that by building an effective Democratic Party, we stimulated
11 the development of wider individual interests and participation
in Maine public life and public issues, by Maine citizens, than
at any time I can remember in my lifetime.

12
13 I think the contribution I would really like to make
is somewhat presumptuous to suggest, particularly in a political
14 campaign, when I think it would seem more self-serving than
another time. I think the thing I would most like to be able
15 to contribute to public life are ways to make it possible for
different kinds of people to understand each other, and to work
together more effectively, and to achieve harmony in our society

16
17 Mr. Martin: You have been very successful at this in
the Senate. What is the key, what are the keys that you find?

18 Senator Muskie: That is a different sort of thing.
19 That is a way of getting people who are essentially of the same
background and the same positions in a relatively small legis-
lative body to work together and agree on pieces of legislation.

20 Mr. Martin: But there are great extremes?

21
22 Senator Muskie: Yes, there are great extremes, and
you have to breach them and you have to know when you have
breached them enough to get a majority, so that you don't have
23 to build too long a bridge, much less build a weak bridge.
So there are legislative skills involved in that.

24
25 I suppose to some degree there is also involved the
ability to get people who disagree to work together. But it is

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1 nothing like the kind of problems that we have in our cities
2 between the races, between ethnic groups, to a lesser degree.

3 Mr. Martin: Are you looking for the same -- not
4 necessarily the same quality -- but the same thing called
5 "consensus" that President Johnson is?

6 Senator Muskie: I am not talking about consensus.
7 I am talking about the ability of people who disagree with
8 each other to ultimately agree on some proposition that requires
9 action.

10 I don't mean consensus in the sense of conformity.
11 I think I may mean consensus in the sense President Johnson
12 originally meant it too, but it became something quite different
13 as the term got battered back and forth.

14 But it is the problem of -- well, I use it to say
15 this about my constituents, people asked me, "Well, now how
16 can you feel safe in the way that you vote?"

17 I perhaps have a more liberal voting record than any
18 Maine Senator has had. I have always said in reply that once
19 people have confidence in you, they will allow you a wide
20 margin of disagreement and still support you.

21 That is what I mean, that we need in the relation-
22 ships of different kinds of people in our society, the ability
23 to give others a wide margin of disagreement, still support
24 them, get along with them, trust them and agree with them.
25 I think that is really what I mean by it.

Mr. Martin: Thank you.

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