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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Winthrop Memorial Day Services

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY
SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
MEMORIAL DAY SERVICES
ALFRED W. MAXWELL, JR.
WINTHROP, MAINE - MAY 25, 1970

ABRAHAM LINCOLN STOOD AT GETTYSBURG,
AS WE STAND TODAY, HONORING "THOSE WHO
HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES".

THEN, AS NOW, THE COUNTRY WAS DIVIDED.

THEN, AS NOW, OUR CASUALTIES WERE
GREAT.

THEN, AS NOW, AMERICANS DESIRE AN
END TO WAR.

TODAY, I BELIEVE, WE CAN HONOR OUR
BRAVE MEN BEST, BY PRACTICING QUIETLY THE
FREEDOMS THEY CHERISHED. THAT MEANS

TALKING TOGETHER AND SPEAKING OF PEACE.

WE MUST REALIZE THAT THE CITIZEN -
SOLDIER OF AMERICA HAS NEVER FOUGHT FOR
TREASURE...OR EMPIRE...OR VAINGLORY. HE
HAS GONE TO BATTLE, WHEN CALLED TO DO SO,
IN THE HONEST BELIEF THAT HE WOULD HELP
PROTECT LIBERTY AND ELEVATE JUSTICE. AND
HE HAS DISPLAYED THE FINEST QUALITIES OF
CHARACTER WHICH YOUNG MEN CAN POSSESS.

OUR HEROES ON MEMORIAL DAY ARE NOT
WARRIORS. THEY ARE G. I.'S -- THE WILLIES

AND JOES...THE DOUGHBOYS...THE YANKEES
AND JOHNNIE REBS...AND THE UNKNOWN
SOLDIERS.

IT IS THIS COMMON QUALITY OF HUMAN-
NESS THAT MAKES OUR MEMORIES OF WAR...OF
YOUNG MEN DYING...SO POIGNANT IN AMERICA.
AND IT MAKES OUR OBLIGATIONS TO THE FUTURE...
THE FUTURE FOR WHICH THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES...
BOTH COMPELLING AND SACRED.

AS THE POET LONGFELLOW WROTE, "YOURS
HAS THE SUFFERING BEEN, THE MEMORY SHALL
BE OURS."

THAT IS WHY ALL OF US, ESPECIALLY
THOSE OF US IN PUBLIC LIFE, MUST SPEAK
OUT NOW ABOUT OUR CONVICTIONS RATHER
THAN ABIDE IN SILENCE.

FOR THE UNION WHICH SO MANY MEN
HAVE FOUGHT TO ESTABLISH, TO PRESERVE,
AND TO DEFEND IS IN DANGER. IT IS IN
DANGER BECAUSE WE ARE BITTER WITH EACH
OTHER...OUR LEVEL OF TOLERANCE IS LOW...
WE GROW INCREASINGLY ANGRY. AND THE
DANGER TO AMERICA WILL NOT DIMINISH UNTIL
THE FIGHTING STOPS 10,000 MILES AWAY.

PERHAPS THE CONFLICT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED IF FREE AND OPEN
ELECTIONS HAD BEEN HELD THROUGHOUT VIETNAM
AFTER THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IN 1954.... OR
IF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTH HAD REFRAINED
THEREAFTER FROM THE ADVOCACY AND USE OF
ARMED FORCE IN THE SOUTH....OR IF OTHER GREAT
POWERS HAD AGREED WITH THE UNITED STATES TO
USE OUR COMBINED INFLUENCE TO PROMOTE A
REASONABLE AND PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE
DIFFERENCES DIVIDING THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM.

BUT THESE EVENTS DID NOT HAPPEN.
RESTRAINT AND REASON DID NOT PREVAIL. AND
THE CONFLICT WAS NOT AVOIDED.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, MANY AMERICANS
HAVE FOUGHT AND DIED IN HOSTILE JUNGLES.
THEY FOUGHT AT THEIR LEADERS' COMMAND...
TO PREVENT A VICTORY BASED ON VIOLENCE...
TO KEEP THE CONFLICT FROM SPREADING...
AND TO HASTEN THE TIME WHEN REASON MIGHT
PREVAIL.

IF ANYONE HAS FAILED AMERICA, IT HAS
NOT BEEN THESE BRAVE MEN. THEY FOUGHT...
NOT SO THAT WE WOULD BLAME EACH OTHER

FOR OUR NATION'S PREDICAMENT... NOT SO THAT WE WOULD CONTINUE FIGHTING IN ORDER TO SAVE FACE. BUT THEY FOUGHT SO THAT WE WOULD FIND A NEGOTIATED, POLITICAL WAY TO END MILITARY ACTIONS...TO RESTORE CIVIL RELATIONS...TO GET ON WITH ACHIEVING A WHOLE SOCIETY.

THERE ARE MANY AMONG US WHO ARE CONVINCED THAT THIS WAR IS NOT WORTHY OF AMERICANS WHO WOULD THEMSELVES, I BELIEVE, NOT HESITATE TO DEFEND AMERICA IF AMERICA ITSELF WERE THREATENED BY FORCE OF ARMS. BUT WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE RIGHT

ABOUT THE PRESENT CONFLICT DOES NOT AND
CAN NOT DETRACT FROM THE VALOR, THE DEDI-
CATION, AND THE FIDELITY WHICH SO MANY
YOUNG MEN HAVE SHOWN SO FAR AWAY.

IF WE ARE TO REMOVE THE AWFUL BURDEN
ON OUR MEN IN THE FIELD...TO STILL THE
SOUNDS OF REVELLE HALFWAY AROUND THE
WORLD...TO END THE PLANTING OF CEMETERIES
FOR THE YOUNG...THEN, I SUBMIT, WE MUST
EXHIBIT A "NEW SPIRIT" IN AMERICA...A SPIRIT

WITHOUT RECRIMINATION OR RANCOR...A

SPIRIT OF DETERMINATION TO BRING PEACE.

THIS WILL REQUIRE US NOT TO CONFUSE
HUMILITY WITH HUMILIATION...PATIENCE
WITH PANIC...OR REASON WITH FORCE. FOR
SUCH CONFUSION DOES NO HONOR TO THOSE
WE REMEMBER TODAY, OR TO OURSELVES.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE WILL RE-
QUIRE US TO EXERCISE THOSE AMERICAN INSTINCTS
OF FAIRNESS, COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING AND
COOPERATION WHICH TRANSCEND DIFFERENCES
IN LANGUAGE, IN COLOR, IN POLITICAL PERSUASION.

AND IT WILL REQUIRE US TO DEMONSTRATE
THE NEGOTIATING INITIATIVE, THE NEGOTIATING
CREDIBILITY AND THE NEGOTIATING SENSE, OF
WHICH FREE AND REASONABLE MEN ARE CAPABLE.

ADLAI STEVENSON ONCE ASKED THE
QUESTION, "WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PATRIOTISM
IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR TIMES?" AND HE
ANSWERED IT THIS WAY: "A PATRIOTISM THAT
PUTS COUNTRY AHEAD OF SELF; A PATRIOTISM
WHICH IS NOT SHORT, FRENZIED OUTBURSTS
OF EMOTION, BUT THE TRANQUIL AND STEADY
DEDICATION OF A LIFETIME. THESE ARE WORDS

THAT ARE EASY TO UTTER, BUT THIS IS A
MIGHTY ASSIGNMENT. FOR IT IS OFTEN EASIER
TO FIGHT FOR PRINCIPLES THAN TO LIVE UP TO
THEM."

THE VOICES, THE FOOTSTEPS, THE GRAVES
ARE SILENT. WHETHER THE MEN WE HONOR TODAY
WILL CONTINUE TO REST IN A LAND OF DESPAIR
OR ONE OF HOPE, DEPENDS ON OUR WISDOM
AND OUR COURAGE TO SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE
ON THE LESSONS OF OUR REMEMBERED PAST.
