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## **Press Conference - Columbus, Ohio - On the 1968 Election and Campaign**

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P R E S S   C O N F E R E N C E

THE HONCRABLE EDMUND S. MUSKIE

DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY

OF THE UNITED STATES

Saturday, September 28, 1968

Columbus, Ohio

**WARD & PAUL**

OFFICIAL REPORTERS

25 K STREET, N. E.

Washington, D. C. 20002

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## 1 PRESS CONFERENCE

2 THE HONORABLE EDMUND S. MUSKIE

3 DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY OF THE UNITED STATES

4 - - -

5 Governors' Ballroom  
6 Neil House Motor Hotel  
7 Columbus, Ohio8 Saturday, September 28, 1968  
9 11:50 o'clock a.m.10 BY SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, I guess it has been too many  
11 days since we have had a press conference. I am beginning to  
12 feel like Nixon.

13 QUESTION: How was that, Senator?

14 ANSWER: I said there have been too many days since  
15 the holiday press conference -- I hadn't realized -- it has been  
16 at least two. If we had kept on going, we might have adopted  
17 the Nixon schedule of press conferences.18 QUESTION: Senator, most of this week in the middle  
19 west, you have been talking, it appears to us, about George  
20 Wallace. You said that you feel he is getting an awful lot of  
21 attention and support in the Labor Movement.22 Could you tell us what your assessment is of the impact  
23 of this sort of campaign? Is there any evidence that there is  
24 any fluidity in this so-called Labor vote for Wallace?25 ANSWER: Well, I don't know that I have any evidence  
to indicate how deep or how committed or how extensively Labor  
is responding to Wallace. I have to depend pretty much on what  
other people tell me and what the polls tell me.And so on the basis of that evidence, I think it is  
essential to confront the Wallace threat directly in front of  
them. When I speak of it as a threat, I speak of it not only  
interms of the impact upon the Democratic Party. I don't know  
originally really whether its impact on the Democratic is greater  
than that of the Republican Party. I think I read a column  
either yesterday or today which undertook to set out in quite  
some detail the proposition it is hurting Nixon more. But I  
don't know.

1           The reason I am hitting it frontly is, of course,  
2 because we want to turn as many people in Labor away from Wallace  
3 as we can for our own purposes. But also because I think he  
4 represents a course that is very dangerous in America.

5           His whole answer is to appeal to the fears of people,  
6 the need to stir up those fears, and this can only promote  
7 division in our country -- a divided America, and an overreliance  
8 upon simplistic formulas. They are dangerous. You can't deal  
9 with complicated, sophisticated problems in that way. When you  
10 deal with them in the simple way, you simply provoke them, and  
11 generate tremendous risks of explosions.

12           So I think the Wallace thing has got to be stopped,  
13 not so much in the interest of either Party, but for the interest  
14 of the country. That is why I have been talking about it.

15           QUESTION: Senator, I listened to your answer last  
16 night when the gentlemen asked you what assurances you could  
17 give that the Humphrey Administration would do anything differ-  
18 ently in Vietnam, and I didn't quite understand your answer.

19           Could you tell me what assurances you can give the  
20 American people that the Humphrey Administration will do some-  
21 thing different in Vietnam than what the Johnson Administration  
22 has done?

23           ANSWER: Well, again, I could give you an over-simplis-  
24 tic answer, which would be inconsistent with what I just said.

25           Nobody has offered a guaranteed solution to the war.  
26 Nobody, I think presumes to, except possibly Wallace. He said,  
27 "Either win it or get out." And by winning it, if I read  
28 correctly an interview he had in this week's edition of U.S.  
29 News and World Report, he is receptive to the idea of putting  
30 in up to a quarter of a million additional men, if necessary,  
31 to win a military victory.

32           Now, that is his answer. The simplistic answer. He  
33 says he would go to his military people if he were President  
34 and ask them what it took to win a military victory, and he  
35 would do whatever they told him it would take to win a military  
36 victory. That is his concept. That is very clear.

37           Mr. Nixon said in the Spring that he had some ideas  
38 about how to get peace in Vietnam, that he would talk about  
39 after the election. Well, he has never yet undertaken to disclose  
40 what those plans are, and last week Mr. Agnew said they had no  
41 peace plan.

1           So, that is the extent of the assurance the American  
2 people get from the Nixon leadership in advance. He offers no  
3 formula, no specifics as to what he would do after January 20.

4           Now, with respect to us, I think we have discussed the  
5 details of our whole approach, whole attitude, toward Vietnam  
6 and what our goals are to be, in far greater detail than either  
7 of these other two candidates or tickets.

8           All you can do here is to spell out your policy. You  
9 can't in advance apply it to hypothetical fact situations that  
10 you might face beginning January 20. It is like writing a piece  
11 of legislation and then in advance of final enactment assure the  
12 country as to all of the conceivable situations to which it  
13 would apply, and all of the decisions that administrators would  
14 make with respect to those decisions, in advance. Policy is  
15 one thing and implementation is another.

16           Now, with respect to Vietnam, we have said that we  
17 would consider the ending of the war the first order of business.  
18 Now, this is to indicate our feeling of the urgency of this  
19 problem, ending the war.

20           Secondly, we are clearly on the record against military  
21 escalation.

22           Thirdly, we are clearly on the record as committed to  
23 a negotiated settlement.

24           Next, we are clearly on the record as indorsing the  
25 concept of taking risks, and by taking risks we mean an evaluation,  
26 evaluation of particular circumstances with respect to  
27 their potential for movement toward substantive negotiations.

28           Now, this involves, of course, trying to read the mind  
29 of the enemy on negotiations. Does he really want a settlement  
30 of this kind.

31           Well, in reading the evidence and evaluating it, you  
32 have got to take some risks. What risks? You can't really say  
33 in advance until you know what the particular circumstances are  
34 that you are evaluating.

35           This is where you get into the area in which you say  
36 you have difficulty understanding what we mean. If we set up  
37 hypothetical circumstances, this just leads you astray. Because  
38 you give people an answer to something that isn't so, that may  
39 never be so, that simply confuses the issue with respect to what  
40 you really stand for.

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So all you can say is what your objectives are, the feeling of urgency you have about it, the feeling you have about the risks business and your evaluation of such things as the bombing halt idea, as a step toward peace. This is about all you can do.

And in the process, of course, it is our hope not only that we convince you of our determination but also that we somehow generate confidence that we mean what we say, and that this is the direction we really want to go and that we will do the best we can to go in that direction.

I don't know what else you can do.

QUESTION: Senator, a day or two ago, being interviewed, you mentioned just in passing that to get greater voter participation in National elections, you would favor some sort of a national registration of voters.

Could you spell that out a little bit, please.

ANSWER: Well, at the present time the state of course, very greatly, not so much in the question of eligibility to vote, although there are great variations there, as of the mechanics, for registration,

For instance, in Michigan there is one provision in the Michigan law that in the cities if you miss one election you are dropped off the registration roles and have to re-register

In other words, they make registration sort of a game and sort of a competition between parties and between groups who try to get out to register those people they think would be sympathetic to their cause.

Well, I think the competition ought not to be in the mechanics of registration, but in the competition for ideas. And that every American who is eligible, by reason of age or any qualifications that are established ought to be registered and it ought to be sort of a universal thing. It ought to be done as a matter of public policy, not as a matter of party competition to see who can get what voters registered.

I think registration ought not to be made an obstacle to voting, that it ought to be made as automatic as possible with due regard, of course, to the qualifications that are essential. And the qualifications ought to be minimal.

If an American is a citizen, and can read and write, and even hear perhaps we ought to be flixible and include reading

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1 and writing languages, other than English. We can expand the  
 2 franchise and have those people eligible to vote on election  
 3 date. Then whether or not they would go to vote on election  
 4 day will depend upon us, the candidates, to so engage their  
 5 interest and so challenge their concern that they go.

6 But if we challenge them and motivate them to go and  
 7 they go and find they are not registered, I mean I think the  
 8 country has lost an important ingredient in public policy making.

9 QUESTION: In respect to greater participation, it was  
 10 proposed during the primary campaign by one of the Democratic  
 11 candidates, that bi-annual Democratic conventions be held to  
 12 give the delegates an opportunity to voice their opinions on  
 13 current policies. What do you think is the merit of that parti-  
 14 cular idea?

15 ANSWER: I think it would be a good thing if it would  
 16 work. Whether it would work depends upon whether or not you  
 17 could, of course, get people interested in that kind of thing.

18 We had tried that sort of thing in the Maine Democratic  
 19 Party and it has had, I think, encouraging success. We have  
 20 what we call "Issues, conferences," rather than conventions,  
 21 prior to state conventions.

22 But we have had them within six months of the state  
 23 convention, the regular state convention, when interest is  
 24 beginning to develop. Now, if we had them at the mid point  
 25 between state conventions, I don't know how they would work.  
 26 But obviously, they would have a greater possibility of working  
 27 in a small state like Maine than in a larger state or than on  
 28 a national basis.

29 I think it is a good idea if it can be made to work,  
 30 and it can be made to work, I think, only if you can find some-  
 31 way to have that kind of a convention produce a meaningful impact  
 32 of some kind and it would have to be formalized, I think, upon  
 33 the policy-making process. Just to meet and people talk and  
 34 nobody pays any attention to what they do, interest is likely  
 35 to soon decline.

36 QUESTION: Senator, several times during this past  
 37 week you have found yourself in what is perhaps the unique  
 38 position of having to defend the front runner on your ticket  
 39 against such suggestions that he should repudiate his President  
 40 and so forth.

41 I am wondering whether or not you feel that this may  
 42 be a problem in the future in this campaign, in finding dissi-  
 43 dent Democrats of both right and left turning to you as the

1 unifier of the Party, and whether that will compromise your  
2 position as the second parson on the ticket.

3 Can you sepak to that general problem, if you see it  
4 as a problem?

5 ANSWER: Well, obviously, the problem of unifying the  
6 Party is still with us. Obviously, also, because of the Vice  
7 President was a figure in the great preconvention struggle for  
8 the nomination and the divisive arguments over our policies  
9 in Southeast Asia; because he was a figure in that, he has a  
10 particular problem in acting as the unifier.

11 Now, I am a fresh face, so I don't have the scars of  
12 these kind of controversies.

13 And I think that is the difference between us. I  
14 think that Hubert Humphrey instinctively by nature, by reasons  
15 of all of his experience in public life, has demonstrated the  
16 qualities need to unify or bring people together. He did it  
17 in Minneapolis as Mayor, he did it in the senate of the United  
18 States as Assistant Majority Whip and then as Majority Whip.  
19 He has demonstrated a great capacity for bringing people together.

20 But unfortunately, his experience before the convention  
21 with the war issue and with the contest for the presidential  
22 nomination has, I suppose, undermined his credibility in this  
23 respect, with people who were on the other side during that.

24 Now, if I can be helpful undertaking to present his  
25 positions and his attitudes toward these issues which trouble  
26 them, because I am a fresh face -- not because I am a more  
27 effective unifier basically, because I am a fresh face -- then  
28 I think that is the role I ought to try to play. I am happy  
29 to do it, and I think that this is a role he had in mind, not  
30 with respect to him personally so much as with respect to the  
31 need for the party to be unified in this election campaign.

32 A fresh voice and a fresh face sometimes can put a  
33 new perspective on an old problem and an old controversy. And  
34 I try to do that to the best of my ability.

35 QUESTION: Senator, it seems this week that you have  
36 spent a heavy proportion of your time among white working class  
37 people as opposed to black people. Is that a quirk of schedul-  
38 ing or conscious decision?

39 ANSWER: Oh, I have met a lot of black people in the  
40 course of all of these groups through the week.



1 Just this morning, I spent an hour, an hour and a half  
2 in the Model Cities neighborhood in Cleveland, which is an all  
3 black neighborhood. And we have gone out of our way to assure  
4 that we meet with Negroes, as well as with whites, wherever we  
5 go. We intend to do it right along and intend to get into the  
6 neighborhoods. We want to see what is going on and we want to  
7 understand first-hand what their problems are and talk with them.

8 You can't do everything at one event and you can't do  
9 everything in one day. We have been working up to eighteen  
10 hours a day, as the press knows, and there is no intention to  
11 exclude anybody or to concentrate on any particular group. We  
12 want to get to as many people, as many different kinds of people  
13 in as many different areas of the country and the cities as we  
14 can. That is our overall objective. We might meet in any one  
15 instance with a group that is all black or a group that is all  
16 white but that is not by design. Our design is to be as univer-  
17 sal in our approach as possible.

18 QUESTION: You have said a lot about the Richard Nixon  
19 campaign and very little about Spiro T. Agnew. What is your  
20 personal opinion at this time about this fresh face?

21 ANSWER: I haven't really examined the subject care-  
22 fully enough.

23 QUESTION: You said just a minute ago, in answer to a  
24 question, that your position and Mr. Humphrey's was clearly  
25 against escalation. Would you refresh my memory as to just when  
26 this statement was made?

27 ANSWER: Well, I don't have any quotations -- I am just  
28 talking about our position now. I can tell you more about my  
29 position over the years, but I don't have detailed documentation  
30 about the actual words that Mr. Humphrey has used over a four-  
31 year period.

32 QUESTION: I thought you were drawing a distinction  
33 between the Democratic Ticket candidacy now and the Republican  
34 Ticket and George Wallace?

35 ANSWER: I said we are committed to negotiated settle-  
36 ment. We are committed to ending the war by negotiated settle-  
37 ment, not by military victory. Wallace has said he would do  
38 anything militarily to end the war that his advisors tell him.  
39 That is not our position. It seems to me that has been very  
40 clear. If it isn't, I am happy to make it clear now.

41 QUESTION: Your position is -- you mentioned in his  
42 suggestion that he might increase the troop level there if

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1 necessary. Are you saying that it is the Democratic position  
2 that troop levels will not be increased now, that you are com-  
mitted to any solution other than that?

3 ANSWER: Well, troop numbers can change without being  
4 inconsistent with the policy against military escalation.

5 I don't know -- I don't watch the number changes from  
6 day to day. I guess the authorized level is a few thousand  
7 above what we actually have there. Whether or not it is neces-  
8 sary to bring in some more troops involved in the fighting or  
9 to bring in more housekeeping troops, I don't follow it that  
10 closely. I am saying that we are committed to negotiated  
11 settlement. The platform is very clear on this point. Mr.  
12 Humphrey has been very clear on this point, I try to be very  
13 clear on this point. As far as I am concerned, I have been  
14 against the idea of moving toward a military victory or trying  
15 for a military victory for three years.

16 I have understood that times in the past we have had  
17 to increase our military presence there in order to counter  
18 increased pressure from the other side. I think General Taylor  
19 called it a measured response to the aggression of the enemy.  
20 That got us into a great debate over who was increasing the  
21 pressure first. You never could win that one, that I could see.  
22 But in principle, I felt that we ought to just keep the pressure  
23 off, pressure to keep us there, pressure enough to deny the  
24 enemy a military victory, to try to stabilize the militarization  
25 and drain the enemies resources by that fashion, without riskin  
escalation but in order to increase the possibility that a  
negotiated settlement would appeal to him as a way to end the  
war.

That is my view of the situation, and the emphasis is  
is even more on negotiated settlement than I think it was

19 QUESTION: If there was a requirement to increase the  
20 resources involved in keeping the pressure on, you would  
consider that as escalation?

21 ANSWER: I asked you to be specific. What do you mean?

22 QUESTION: Well, it seemed to me you were talking of  
23 George Wallace's statement that he might send another quarter of  
24 a million men over there. May we assume from your discussion  
25 that you would not send another quarter of a million men?

ANSWER: Under the present circumstances? No.

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1 Now, if you want to envision some hypothetical situ-  
2 ation like the Red Chinese sending a half million men down to  
3 South Vietnam, I don't know what we would do. I don't expect  
4 that to happen. But we are not talking about that kind of  
5 hypothetical situation. We are talking about what Wallace  
6 would do from what he said in U.S. News and World Report today,  
7 with the military situation as we find it today. He says that  
8 he would look over the possibilities of ending today's military  
9 problem by a military victory if it took as many as a quarter  
10 of a million additional troops. And that would not be my answer.  
11 I would not support that. I would oppose it. It is my impres-  
12 sion that Vice President Humphrey would as well.

13 QUESTION: Senator, could I throw this one soft ball --

14 ANSWER: You mean we have had some hard ones?

15 QUESTION: Perhaps not. All of last week we were  
16 asking you on a daily basis about the crowds that were not there.  
17 Now, within the last couple of days we have had crowds at the  
18 airports. To what do you attribute this?

19 ANSWER: Better advance organization. Somewhat more  
20 enthusiasm. I think in some instances, quite a bit more enthu-  
21 siasm, a little better national press coverage because of the  
22 events of recent days, I hope. At least that is what people  
23 tell me when I meet them at the airport. A combination of  
24 circumstances, but it is all part of it. You have got to  
25 organize it, too.

26 But I think there is a detectable increase in recogni-  
27 tion, thanks to television, and the events that have developed  
28 this week, and the enthusiasm that has been generated. A number  
29 of people along the fence mentioned the Washington, Pennsylvania  
30 incident, for example, which apparently I didn't see, gave us  
31 quite a bit of national television exposure and apparently the  
32 reaction is favorable and that has stimulated enthusiasm.

33 Frankly, it is a good feeling to have it.

34 QUESTION: Are you going to debate Agnew?

35 ANSWER: I would be delighted to debate Mr. Agnew or  
36 anybody else, including any youngster in the crowd who wants  
37 to come on.

38 (At this point a resolution on behalf of the Ohio  
39 State Federal Democrats Club was presented to the Senator.)

40 SENATOR MUSKIE: I accept it. Do you want me to read  
41 it to you?

1 It says:

2 "Whereas: The issues facing the electorate this  
3 November are crucial to the United States, and

4 "Whereas: The Office of the Vice Presidency is the  
5 second highest office in the land, and

6 "Whereas "The Country has a right to know and to com-  
7 pare the views of the candidates, for Vice President, as well  
8 as those candidates for the President, since one of these men  
9 may be called upon to execute the office of the presidency,

10 "Realizing with the grief of memory that unexpected  
11 events of tragedy can thrust upon the vice president the burdens  
12 and responsibilities of the highest office of this nation, we  
13 the O.S.V. Young Democrats, do hereby respectfully request the  
14 following:

15 "1. That United States Senator Edmund S. Muskie and  
16 Governor Spiro T. Agnew meet in national debate of crucial  
17 issues facing this nation.

18 "2. That the national media offer to the vice presi-  
19 dential candidates their time and facilities for the benefit  
20 of the more knowledgeable electorate.

21 "Attest: Elizabeth Levy, Secretary.

22 Signed: William W. Miller,  
23 President"

24 SENATOR MUSKIE: One of the networks, as I think I  
25 told you before, did extend the invitation a month or so ago.  
26 We indicated our acceptance. I don't yet know whether the  
27 Governor has accepted. I also asked the staff to explore the  
28 possibility of getting the other networks involved to extend  
29 a similar invitation. I don't know whether we have an affirma-  
30 tive response to that; apparently not.

31 I would be delighted with this kind of confrontation.  
32 I think it would be more useful. I don't know whether it would  
33 be more useful to Mr. Agnew or myself. I will try to make it  
34 more useful to myself.

35 QUESTION: It would be unfair to Wallace though,  
36 wouldn't it?

37 ANSWER: Well, he has got a vice presidential candi-  
38 date in Michigan, on the Michigan ballot -- Mark Griffen -- and

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if it were to be held in Michigan, I would be glad to have Mr. Griffen there. Or in other states, if Mr. Wallace has a vice presidential candidate, I would welcome his participation.

Thank you.

- - -

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