

Bates College

SCARAB

Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

10-14-1970

Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie to the Brewer Chamber of Commerce

Edmund S. Muskie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/msp>

SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
BREWER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BREWER, MAINE
OCTOBER 14, 1970

I appreciate your invitation to be here this morning. I would like to discuss with you a subject that has been on people's minds -- not only in Maine, but throughout this country -- for the past several years.

But first, let me tell you a story about a man who was arrested for being disorderly not long ago.

The man was brought into court, and the judge -- seeing the condition he was in -- asked, "How did you get so terribly drunk?"

"Well, your honor," he replied. "I got into bad company. I had a bottle of whiskey with me -- and the two fellows I was with don't touch the stuff."

For a long time, that has been the view others have had of our state -- as a place where people can still laugh together about the shortcomings of human nature -- as a place that is relatively peaceful -- relatively stable -- relatively secure.

That impression -- of domestic tranquility -- has a basis in fact.

Last year -- according to crime statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation -- the crime index for Maine was substantially below the indexes for New England ...and for the nation as a whole.

For every 100,000 people --

-- total crimes in Maine were 44 percent of the New England average...and 40 percent of the national average;

--property crimes were 44 percent of the New England average...and 43 percent of the national average;

-- violent crimes were 46 percent of the New England average...and 20 percent of the national average.

In other words, our rate of crime was less than half the rate for both our region and our country.

But a relatively low crime rate has not been unusual for Maine.

Why?

Why have our lives been more secure in this state?

Why have we been less afraid of each other?

There is no simple answer.

Perhaps we have developed a stronger sense of community...and of trust in our neighbors.

Perhaps we have maintained a deeper respect for the law...and for officers of the law.

Perhaps we have accepted a greater sense of responsibility for what we do...and for what happens to others.

Yet we cannot be satisfied to speak only of the traditions we cherish...or the values we believe in...or the principles we live by.

For although some of our problems have been relatively minor compared to other parts of the country, crime -- even in Maine -- has been on the increase.

In 1969 alone --

-- total crimes were 16.1 percent;

-- property crimes were also up 16.1 percent;

And violent crimes were up 15.4 percent.

That should not come as a complete surprise -- when the national crime index for 1969 was up more than 11 percent.

And bear in mind -- the number of serious crimes across the country in the first six months of this year was again 11 percent greater than for the first six months of last year.

But do the statistics tell the whole story--

-- of the businessman who is insecure whenever a stranger enters his store?

-- of the housewife who is afraid to walk in her own neighborhood after the sun sets?

-- of the youngster who is confused by the easy road to drug abuse?

Crime affects us all in human terms -- whether it occurs in a city like New York or a city like Brewer.

And as the level of crime increases, we feel a change in the very climate of our lives.

I know Governor Curtis has acted in a responsible way to improve that climate in Maine --

- by expanding the Superior Court and the District Court system;
- by seeking more probation and parole officers;
- by establishing a law enforcement planning agency to invest Federal contributions where they are most urgently needed.

And yet, some people still act as if the answer to crime is a harsh speech...a repressive law...or a mean disposition.

Of course we should be firm.

Of course we should condemn violence -- not only the act of violence -- but also the threat of violence.

Of course we should deal decisively with crime -- organized crime as well as street crime.

But none of our resolve will have any lasting impact on the level of crime and violence until we put our resources where our good intentions are --

- with our overworked police forces;
- with our overburdened courts;
- with our overcrowded jails and prisons.

Much can be done, for example --

- to streamline police operations;
- to increase police presence where it is needed;
- to open new channels of cooperation between the police and the community,

But in the long run, these measures can help reduce crime only if we meet the needs of policemen for --

- higher salaries;
 - better training;
 - and more effective equipment -- to protect us...and themselves as well.
- Policemen have, in recent years, been praised as well as criticized, like all human beings, they have deserved some of both.

But praise is no substitute for assistance -- and criticism is no excuse for neglect.

When I was growing up in Rumford, we were taught to look on policemen as friends...as protectors...as guardians of a free and open society,

They -- along with clergymen, doctors and teachers -- were the first persons outside our homes that we came to respect.

They were the first persons we asked for directions when we lost our way,

They were the first persons we were greeted by as we walked down the street,

That is the kind of policeman I remember.

That is the kind of policeman I still know in Maine.

That is the kind of policeman every decent American wants -- in the big city and the small town...in the suburb and the ghetto...in the business district and the campus community.

And that is the kind of policeman we must support.

But it is not only the police that need help.

Our courts are in trouble also.

They need --

- more judges;
- more courthouse personnel;
- more courtroom facilities.

Why?

Because the best way to prevent crime is to demonstrate --

- that criminal justice is administered fairly and efficiently;
- that trials are held promptly;
- that the innocent are acquitted and the guilty are convicted swiftly.

In Federal District Courts alone, it now takes twice as long as it did in 1960 to dispose of a criminal case from indictment to sentencing.

Is it any wonder --

- that more crimes are committed by some of those awaiting trial;
- that jurors are often left with nothing to do;
- that prosecutors may even drop charges...as witnesses are lost and testimony

is forgotten.

Isn't it obvious --

- that we should establish timetables for criminal cases?
- that we should improve the management of our courts?
- that we should redesign the judicial system to separate, for example, the handling of serious criminal offenses from traffic violations?

But we shall accomplish none of these reforms -- until we commit the necessary resources.

And what about our prisons?

They contain men and women who have been found guilty.

These people have been sentenced according to law. And at some time or another, 98 percent of them will be released.

Aren't we concerned that they return to society as decent and law-abiding citizens.

Of course we are.

But let us look at some facts.

Each year, it is estimated that two and a half million persons are locked up in the United States -- either convicted or awaiting trial.

Each year, as many as 200,000 persons are employed to take custody of these inmates.

And each year, some 60 to 70 percent of those behind bars have been there before.

Does our rate of failure really have to be that high?

I didn't think so when I was Governor -- when we established a centralized state probation and parole board.

And I don't think so now.

Bear in mind that it costs ten times as much, on the average, to keep a man in prison as it does to have him working in the community under proper supervision by probation or parole officers.

Then why don't we hire sufficient probation and parole officers -- as the Governor has asked for -- to perform their vital services?

Why don't we pay and train our custodial personnel to be more than just guards in dead-end institutions?

Why don't we expand our educational programs for prisoners -- the education that can mean a job...as well as the education that can mean a degree.

The problems of our prisons have been increasing over the years --

problems of overcrowding...of violence...of wasted years.

It is time we recognize that they are not only the inmates' problems.

They are also our problems.

For the longer people leave our correctional institutions more bitter and hardened and dangerous than when they entered, the longer our crime statistics will continue to climb.

Let us consider one reported incident in another state -- of a 21 year old pre-law student...last September...who was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon.

Unable to post bail of \$500, he was held in jail for the next ten days awaiting trial.

His first night in jail, he took a shower -- and returned to find his clothes stolen.

He went to his bunk -- and was given a severe beating.

And for the next nine nights, he was the object of brutal assaults.

Finally, at his trial, he was fined \$50 and released.

Some people would call him fortunate.

After all, he did not have to serve any time in a prison.

I do not mean to ignore -- by this discussion -- our responsibility for dealing with the basic causes of crime -- whether social...or economic...or psychological.

Certainly, we must do so far more effectively than we have up to now.

But in the meantime, we must learn to deal at least as effectively with the intolerable expression of criminal behavior.

That is why -- in 1968 -- a Democratic Congress passed the most significant anti-crime legislation in years -- the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act -- an act that established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which Attorney General Mitchell has called, "The Federal Government's major effort to help the states and the cities reduce the plague of crime."

That act recognized the need for a strong and well coordinated national response to the widespread increase in crime.

That act is intended to help state and local governments help themselves.

And that act requires substantial Federal assistance in order to work -- more assistance than the Administration has been willing to allocate.

After all, the problems of crime have been the object of inquiry --

-- by Presidential commissions;

-- by Congressional committees;

-- and by independent fact-finding bodies.

They have all agreed -- that the first object of our society is the physical safety of its members;

-- that this object remains to be properly achieved;

-- that this object may in fact be moving further from our ability to achieve.

But I am convinced --

That the future is not helpless:

-- that we can reverse the trend of the statistics;

-- that we can preserve our best traditions of freedom and tolerance and community,

if -- and only if -- we undertake the full commitment that the object of a safe society deserves -- in our state and our country.

Thank you.
