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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

11-16-1970

Floor Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Fulfilling Obligations Despite Political Antagonism

Edmund S. Muskie

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE
November 16, 1970

THE RETURN TO ACTION BY THE 91st
CONGRESS IS A SIGNIFICANT EVENT.

WE ARE THE FIRST CONGRESS TO RECONVENE
AFTER AN ELECTION, SINCE THE 81st CONGRESS --
20 YEARS AGO.

OBVIOUSLY, WE ARE BACK BECAUSE WE HAVE
NATIONAL BUSINESS TO TRANSACT.

WE MUST DO SO IN THE AFTERMATH OF A
BITTER CAMPAIGN.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE GAVE THEIR MANDATE
ON NOVEMBER 3rd TO THE HOPE FOR A BETTER
FUTURE, FOR A MORE HEALTHY SOCIETY.

WE MUST RESPECT THAT MANDATE NOW.

WE MUST RESPECT THAT MANDATE HERE --
ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO PREDICT THAT THE
BITTERNESS AROUSED BY THIS DIVISIVE CAMPAIGN
WILL NOT DISAPPEAR VERY QUICKLY.

AND YET IT MUST.

WE CANNOT AND WE MUST NOT PERMIT
ANTAGONISM -- WHETHER POLITICAL OR PERSONAL --

TO INTERFERE WITH OUR FUNDAMENTAL OBLIGATIONS --

-- TO OUR COUNTRY;

-- TO OUR CONSTITUENTS;

-- TO OUR CONSCIENCES.

WE HAVE IMPORTANT LEGISLATION TO CONSIDER.

IT IS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE WHETHER A

PARTICULAR BILL WAS INITIATED BY THE ADMINISTRATION

OR BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, WHETHER IT WAS

INTRODUCED BY DEMOCRATS OR BY REPUBLICANS.

ALL THAT MATTERS IS WHETHER OR NOT A BILL
HAS MERIT OF ITS OWN.

SEVERAL MEASURES NOW BEFORE US HAVE THAT
MERIT.

ONE OF THEM IS THE CAMPAIGN BROADCAST REFORM ACT -- AN ACT APPROVED OVERWHELMINGLY BY BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS.

IT DOES NOT PRETEND TO CURE EVERY CONCEIVABLE CAMPAIGN ABUSE -- BUT IT DOES ESTABLISH A RESPONSIBLE CEILING ON RADIO AND TELEVISION ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES IN PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS.

IT REQUIRES BROADCAST MEDIA TO CHARGE CANDIDATES NO MORE THAN COMMERCIAL CUSTOMERS.

IT AUTHORIZES NATIONWIDE TELEVISED DEBATES BETWEEN MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES.

THIS ACT PROMISES TO BE A MAJOR STEP IN
THE DIRECTION OF FAIR ELECTION PROCEDURES --
AND THE PRESIDENT'S VETO CANNOT REASONABLY
BE JUSTIFIED.

IT IS A VETO BOTH DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS
SHOULD VOTE TO OVERRIDE.

LEGISLATION TO CONTROL AIR POLLUTION ALSO
DESERVES THE FULL ATTENTION OF THE 91st CONGRESS.

THAT LEGISLATION SHOULD REFLECT THE BASIC
CONCEPTS WHICH WERE APPROVED BY A UNANIMOUS
SENATE --

-- NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS
AND NATIONAL DEADLINES TO MEET THOSE STANDARDS;

-- EFFECTIVE AND TOUGH PERFORMANCE
REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW SOURCES OF POTENTIAL
POLLUTION;

-- AUTHORITY TO BAN THE EMISSION OF
SUBSTANCES THAT ARE HAZARDOUS TO THE PUBLIC
HEALTH.

THE NATIONAL AIR QUALITY STANDARDS ACT
IS NOW IN CONFERENCE.

THE WORK OF THE CONFEREES WILL ULTIMATELY
AFFECT EVERY AMERICAN.

THAT WORK MUST BE COMPLETED PROMPTLY.

A STRONG OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH
BILL MUST ALSO BE ENACTED INTO LAW BEFORE WE
ADJOURN.

EVERY YEAR, SOME 14,500 AMERICAN WORKERS
ARE KILLED BY INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS.

ANOTHER 2.2 MILLION PERSONS ARE DISABLED
AS A RESULT OF THEIR JOBS.

ALMOST 400,000 MEN AND WOMEN ARE AFFLICTED
BY OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE.

CLEARLY, VOLUNTARY HEALTH AND SAFETY
STANDARDS HAVE NOT BEEN ADEQUATE.

WE MUST RECOGNIZE A RESPONSIBILITY TO
DEVELOP NEW, MINIMUM NATIONAL STANDARDS --
AND TO ENFORCE THOSE STANDARDS WHENEVER AND
WHEREVER NECESSARY.

IT IS HIGH TIME WE AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY
OF LABOR TO ASSUME THAT RESPONSIBILITY.

NONE OF THESE MEASURES PROVIDES ANY FINAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS AT HAND.

YET EACH OF THEM OFFERS AN APPROACH WHICH IS FRESH...WHICH IS SENSIBLE...WHICH IS LONG OVERDUE.

THERE ARE OTHER MEASURES WHICH THE SENATE MUST ALSO ACT UPON -- MEASURES --

- TO START REFORMING OUR WELFARE SYSTEM;
- TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN;
- TO PROVIDE ADDED SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY;
- TO STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF THE CONSUMERS;
- TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE TRADE.

WE CANNOT EXCUSE OUR FAILURE TO ADOPT
THESE MEASURES SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT
COMPREHENSIVE ENOUGH.

INDEED, IF WE WERE TO REQUIRE PERFECTION
OF EVERY LEGISLATIVE ACT, THEN SENATORS AND
CONGRESSMEN WOULD THEMSELVES HAVE TO BE
MORE THAN HUMAN.

WE ARE NOT.

WE ARE MEN AND WOMEN -- LIKE THE MEN
AND WOMEN WHO CHOSE US TO REPRESENT THEM.

WE CARRY WITHIN US THEIR IMPERFECTIONS AS
WELL AS OUR OWN.

WE ALSO SHARE WITH THEM A COMMON
CONVICTION -- THAT AMERICANS ARE STILL WILLING
AND ABLE TO IMPROVE THEIR COUNTRY, THEIR
COMMUNITIES AND THEMSELVES.

THE ELECTIONS OF 1970 HAVE ONLY SERVED
TO REAFFIRM THE VITALITY OF THAT CONVICTION.

WE MUST SUPPORT THAT CONVICTION -- BY
MAKING THE MOST OF THE LEGISLATIVE OPPORTUNITIES
WE HAVE.

WE ARE HERE, AFTER ALL, TO FIND A COMMON
GROUND ON WHICH WE CAN ADVANCE THE PUBLIC
INTEREST.

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