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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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Remarks by Edmund S. Muskie at the Democratic State Convention

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS TO BE DELIVERED BY EDMUND S. MUSKIE
AT THE
DEMOCRATIC STATE CONVENTION
LEWISTON, MAINE
MARCH 26, 1954

WE FACE A CHALLENGE, AN OPPORTUNITY AND A RESPONSIBILITY. WHAT WE DO ABOUT THEM IS OF IMPORTANCE TO US AS A PARTY, BUT EVEN MORE SO TO ALL OF OUR PEOPLE, TODAY, AND IN ALL THE DAYS THAT LIE AHEAD.

LET ME SPEAK FIRST OF THE CHALLENGE. TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO THIS COUNTRY WAS ON ITS KNEES. WE FACED THE GREATEST INTERNAL THREAT FROM COMMUNISM THAT WE HAVE EVER FACED BEFORE OR SINCE. HUNGER, WANT, INSECURITY AND FEAR CAME CLOSE TO WRITING THE LAST PAGE IN THE STORY OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

A GREAT DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENT BROKE THAT BLACK SPELL. HE DID IT WITH HIS VIGOR AND ENTHUSIASM, HIS INITIATIVE AND IMAGINATION. HE DID IT WITH HIS HEART AND HIS BRAIN. HE DID IT OUT OF HIS DEEP FAITH IN AMERICA, HIS LOVE FOR ITS PEOPLE. AND HE DID IT -- NOT AFTER A YEAR OF POSTPONEMENT AND PROCRASTINATION -- BUT IN THE FIRST 100 MAGICAL DAYS OF AN INCOMPARABLE ADMINISTRATION.

IN THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSES, UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP, ENACTED INTO LAW THE HUMANE AND FARSIGHTED MEASURES WHICH TODAY PEOPLE OF BOTH PARTIES,

INCLUDING THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION, REGARD AS OUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST ECONOMIC DISASTER.

DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP WAS EQUALLY BOLD AND DARING IN MEETING THE THREAT OF TYRANNY ABROAD. IT FOUGHT AND WON THE GREATEST WAR IN HISTORY. IT RALLIED OUR PEOPLE AND OUR RESOURCES TO AN EFFORT UNMATCHED IN ALL THE ANNALS OF OUR COUNTRY'S WARS. IN DEPRESSION AND IN WAR IT DEMONSTRATED OUR ABILITY TO MEET AND OVERCOME APPARENTLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES. IT DID SO BY DRAWING UPON THE HEROIC QUALITIES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE -- THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE AND WORK, THEIR ABILITY TO PULL TOGETHER IN A COMMON CAUSE, THEIR READINESS TO FORGET PETTY, PARTISAN DIFFERENCES, THEIR UNCONQUERABLE BELIEF IN THEMSELVES AND THEIR COUNTRY. THAT LEADERSHIP SUCCEEDED BECAUSE IT COULD BRING OUT THE BEST IN ALL OF US.

TODAY THAT TWENTY YEARS OF MATCHLESS ACCOMPLISHMENT HAS BEEN LABELLED "TWENTY YEARS OF TREASON." THAT LEADERSHIP AND, BY IMPLICATION, WE WHO FOLLOWED IT, ARE DESCRIBED AS TRAITORS FROM ONE END OF THIS COUNTRY TO THE OTHER -- BY SMALL MEN, BY VICIOUS MEN, BY MEN WHO SEEK TO LEAD, NOT BY UNITING US, BUT BY DIVIDING US. THEY SEEK TO BRING OUT -- NOT THE BEST IN US -- BUT THE QUALITIES OF HATRED AND FEAR, PREJUDICE AND INTOLERANCE. THEY SEEK TO REMAIN IN POWER --

NOT BY VIRTUE OF THEIR OWN CONSTRUCTIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS -- BUT BY FOREVER BLACKENING THE NAME OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. THEY PAY LIP-SERVICE TO THE PRINCIPLE OF TWO-PARTY GOVERNMENT, BUT THEIR GOAL IS THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AS AN EFFECTIVE FORCE IN AMERICAN POLITICS.

THIS IS OUR CHALLENGE!

IT IS ALSO OUR OPPORTUNITY.

AMERICANS ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP. WE ARE OPTIMISTIC, TOLERANT. WE LIKE EACH OTHER. WE HAVE FAITH IN EACH OTHER. WE DON'T REALLY BELIEVE THAT THERE IS MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF TRAITORS AMONG US. WE PREFER THE CLEAN, EXALTED FEELING OF WORKING TOGETHER TO THE UNCLEAR, UGLY MOOD OF THE WITCH-HUNTER.

AMERICANS LIKE THESE WILL GLADLY TURN TO YOUNG, AGGRESSIVE, CONSTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP. IF WE PRODUCE CANDIDATES LIKE THAT, THE PEOPLE WILL FOLLOW THEM. IF WE DEVISE A PROGRESSIVE, FORWARD-LOOKING PROGRAM FOR THE BETTERMENT OF OUR STATE AND COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE WILL FLOCK TO OUR CAUSE -- BECAUSE THEY WILL RECOGNIZE IT AS THEIR CAUSE. IN EVERY VILLAGE AND HAMLET, CITY AND TOWN, THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF MAINE, THEY ARE LITERALLY BEGGING US TO GIVE THEM A PROGRAM AND CANDIDATES THEY CAN SUPPORT.

THIS, THEN, IS OUR OPPORTUNITY.

IT IS ALSO OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

FOR TOO LONG NOW WE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN MAINE HAVE PERMITTED OURSELVES THE LUXURY OF APATHY AND DISCOURAGEMENT. WE HAVE FOUND IT EASIER TO SAY, "WHAT'S THE USE! ", AND THEN SIT BACK WHILE A MERE HANDFUL HAS SOUGHT TO RETAIN AT LEAST A SHADOW OF AN ORGANIZATION.

IT IS TIME FOR US TO GET UP AND GO, AND THERE WILL NEVER BE A BETTER TIME THAN RIGHT NOW. THE MEANS AND METHODS OF ORGANIZATION ARE NOT NEARLY AS IMPORTANT AS THE WILL TO ORGANIZE. OPINIONS DIFFER AS TO WHETHER WE SHOULD FIRST HAVE FINANCES, OR LEGISLATIVE AND COUNTY TICKETS, OR CANDIDATES FOR MAJOR OFFICE, OR AN ORGANIZATION. WE NEED THEM ALL -- NOW AND AT THE SAME TIME. WE NEED WORKERS AT EVERY LEVEL -- WORKERS WHO WILL COME FORWARD WITHOUT WAITING TO BE INVITED. WE NEED CANDIDATES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL -- CANDIDATES WHO WILL COME FORWARD FREELY AND EAGERLY TO ORGANIZE AND GIVE ASSURANCE TO PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES FOR HIGHER OFFICE. WE NEED CANDIDATES FOR MAJOR OFFICE WHO ARE WILLING TO GAMBLE, WHO PLACE THE CAUSE OF GOOD GOVERNMENT ABOVE THEIR OWN CHANCES FOR VICTORY, WHO SEE A CLEAN, AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN AS A MEANS OF BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE -- FOR THEMSELVES AND THE PARTY -- WHATEVER THE RESULTS OF THIS STATE ELECTION. WE NEED -- IF WE ARE TO PRODUCE THESE PEOPLE -- A GREAT RESURGENCE OF THE BOLDNESS AND DARING, THE VISION AND ENTHUSIASM, WHICH MADE OUR

PARTY AND OUR COUNTRY GREAT THIS PAST TWENTY YEARS.

TO DO IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY. THE SUCCESS OF
A POLITICAL PARTY IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF. IT IS MERELY A
MEANS OF SERVICE TO OUR STATE AND OUR COUNTRY. IN THESE
DAYS OF SUSPICION AND DISTRUST, DOUBTS OF THE PAST AND FEAR
OF THE FUTURE, IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO MEET THE CHALLENGE
AND THE OPPORTUNITY WHICH ARE OURS TODAY.

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