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Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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## Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Iron Shipbuilder's Conference

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE  
(D-MAINE) TO THE IRON SHIPBUILDER'S  
CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, D.C., MARCH  
26, 1964.

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE WITH YOU, TODAY,  
IF ONLY BRIEFLY. IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO BE IN A GROUP THAT  
INCLUDES MY GOOD FRIEND, LONNIE YOUNG. FURTHERMORE, I KNOW THAT  
YOU AND I SHARE A CONCERN OVER OUR NATION'S FUTURE IN SHIPPING  
AND NAVAL CAPABILITY.

MAINE IS STILL A SEAFARING STATE WITH A PROUD TRADITION  
OF BUILDING FINE SHIPS FOR TRADE AND DEFENSE. FROM THE LITTLE  
SHALLOP BUILT AT THE MOUTH OF THE KENNEBEC RIVER TO THE MODERN  
MISSILE FRIGATES BEING BUILT AT THE BATH IRON WORKS AND THE  
POLARIS AND ATTACK NUCLEAR SUBMARINES BEING BUILT AT KITTERY THE  
PRODUCTS OF OUR SHIPBUILDERS HAVE EXCITED THE ADMIRATION AND THE  
ENVY OF THE WORLD. WE WANT THAT TRADITION TO CONTINUE -- AS IT  
SHOULD.

I WANT TO TAKE THESE FEW MINUTES TO TALK WITH YOU  
ABOUT POLITICS -- IN ITS BROADEST SENSE. THIS IS AN ELECTION YEAR

# COPY

AND A GOOD TIME TO CONSIDER THAT LIFEblood OF OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, POLITICAL ACTION.

THE VERY ESSENCE OF OUR POLITICAL LIFE IS CHOOSING.

WE WON THAT RIGHT MORE THAN 175 YEARS AGO WHEN WE WON OUR INDEPENDENCE FROM THE BRITISH EMPIRE. AFTER A HALTING AND UNSUCCESSFUL START UNDER THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION THE FOUNDING FATHERS CHOSE OUR FEDERAL CONSTITUTION -- NOW THE OLDEST WRITTEN CONSTITUTION IN THE WORLD.

FROM 1787 UNTIL TODAY WE HAVE BEEN MAKING CHOICES ON THE KIND OF GOVERNMENT WE WANT, ON THE ACTIONS WE WANT TO TAKE AS A PEOPLE, AND ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES WE MUST ASSUME AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WHAT DOES MAKING CHOICES INVOLVE?

FIRST, IN ORDER TO MAKE A CHOICE YOU MUST BE CONCERNED. YOU MUST CARE ABOUT YOUR COUNTRY, ABOUT YOUR FELLOW MAN, ABOUT THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD. YOU DO CARE, OR YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE.



# COPY

THE SECOND STEP IN MAKING INTELLIGENT CHOICES IS TO BE INFORMED -- TO KNOW THE ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION WHICH ARE OPEN TO YOU. TOO MANY PEOPLE IN OUR SOCIETY MAKE CHOICES WITHOUT REALLY KNOWING WHAT THE CHOICES ARE. THEY ARE TOO READY TO TAKE THE FIRST CHOICE THAT COMES ALONG. OR, SOMETIMES, THEY WILL TAKE THE EASY CHOICE , THE ONE WITH NO RISK.

IN MAKING CHOICES AND VALUE JUDGMENTS IT IS ESSENTIAL TO KNOW THE ALTERNATIVES AND TO KNOW THE GOOD AND THE BAD IN EACH OF THE ALTERNATIVES. THERE ARE NO BLACK AND WHITE CHOICES. THERE IS SOME GOOD AND SOME BAD IN ALL CHOICES.

THE NEXT STEP IN MAKING A CHOICE -- HAVING DEVELOPED A CONCERN AND HAVING WEIGHED THE ALTERNATIVES -- IS TO MAKE A SELECTION AS IF YOU HAD A STAKE IN IT. ON POLITICAL CHOICES YOU SHOULD MAKE YOUR DECISION AS IF YOU WERE THE PRESIDENT, THE GOVERNOR, THE MAYOR, THE SENATOR OR THE REPRESENTATIVE WHO HAS TO PUT HIS JUDGMENT ON THE LINE. MAKING A CHOICE AS AN UNINVOLVED AND DISINTERESTED BYSTANDER IS MAKING NO CHOICE AT ALL.



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IN MAKING A CHOICE ANY RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC OFFICIAL MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE TWO RISKS: (1) HE MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK OF MAKING AN UNPOPULAR CHOICE; AND (2) HE MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK OF MAKING A MISTAKE.

LITTLE MEN SELDOM MAKE BIG MISTAKES, AND SELDOM LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES THEY MAKE. BIG MEN SOMETIMES DO MAKE BIG MISTAKES, BUT THEY LEARN FROM THEM.

AS A PUBLIC OFFICIAL I WOULD NOT WANT YOU TO TAKE MY VIEWS WITHOUT QUESTION. AS CITIZENS WITH A STAKE IN A FREE SOCIETY I WANT YOU TO TEST MY IDEAS, MY PROPOSALS, AND MY PROGRAMS. I WANT YOU TO TEST BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES.

THE TESTING OF IDEAS, THE FIXING OF RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICAL CONTROVERSY ARE ESSENTIAL TO A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. OTHERS MAY SHUDDER AT OUR FREEDOM, BUT WE ARE NOT AFRAID. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT FREEDOM WILL WORK.

# COPY

THE CHOICES WE MAKE IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF FREE DEBATE  
ARE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR  
ALL ME.

BUT MAKING FREEDOM WORK IS MORE THAN A MATTER OF  
MAKING CHOICES. WE MUST ACT ON OUR CHOICES. WE MUST BE WILLING  
TO MOVE SOCIETY, TO MOVE OUR NATION, TO MOVE AS INDIVIDUALS.

FORTUNATELY FOR OURSELVES AND FOR THE FREE WORLD,  
AMERICA WAS PEOPLED BY THOSE WHO WERE MOVERS. WE WORKED TOGETHER  
TO SPAN THE CONTINENT, TO BROADEN THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION,  
TO ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC GROWTH, TO ENLARGE THE SCOPE OF FREEDOM,  
TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE POOR, THE ILL AND THE DISABLED, AND TO  
PROTECT OURSELVES FROM OUR ENEMIES, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC.

IN JANUARY I WENT TO CALIFORNIA. ON MY WAY I STOPPED  
IN INDIANAPOLIS TO SPEAK TO A STEELWORKERS LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE.  
ON THE WALL OF THE HOTEL WHERE I STAYED I FOUND A PLAQUE COMMEMORATING



A SPEECH MADE BY ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN INDIANAPOLIS ON HIS WAY TO  
HIS FIRST INAUGURATION.

IN THAT SPEECH LINCOLN SAID: "I APPEAL TO YOU TO CONSTANTLY  
BEAR IN MIND THAT NOT WITH POLITICIANS, NOT WITH PRESIDENTS,  
NOT WITH OFFICE-SEEKERS BUT WITH YOU IS THE QUESTION: SHALL THE  
UNION AND SHALL THE LIBERTIES OF THIS COUNTRY BE PRESERVED TO THE  
LATEST GENERATIONS?"

LINCOLN BELIEVED IN THE UNION. HE BELIEVED IN THE USE  
OF GOVERNMENT. HE HAD FAITH THAT THE PEOPLE COULD GOVERN THEMSELVES.

LINCOLN PRESERVED THE UNION AND FREED THE SLAVES -- AND HE  
DID MORE. HIS ADMINISTRATION -- IN 1862 -- GAVE US FEDERAL AID TO  
EDUCATION ON A LARGE SCALE, THROUGH THE MORRILL LAND GRANT COLLEGE  
ACT. HIS ADMINISTRATION -- THAT SAME YEAR -- OPENED THE WEST TO  
THE POOR, THROUGH THE HOMESTEAD ACT. HIS ADMINISTRATION -- THAT SAME  
YEAR -- USED THE WEALTH OF THE NATION TO STIMULATE COMMERCE FROM  
COAST TO COAST THROUGH THE RAILROAD LAND GRANT ACT.

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I LIKE TO REMIND MY REPUBLICAN FRIENDS OF THIS BIT  
OF HISTORY. I SUSPECT PRESIDENT LINCOLN WOULD HAVE ENDORSED  
THESE WORDS OF PRESIDENT JOHNSON, WHO SAID:

"I REGARD ACHIEVEMENT OF THE FULL POTENTIAL OF OUR RESOURCES --  
PHYSICAL, HUMAN, AND OTHERWISE -- TO BE THE HIGHEST PURPOSE OF  
GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES NEXT TO THE PROTECTION OF THOSE RIGHTS WE  
REGARD AS INALIENABLE."

WE HAVE NOT REACHED OUR POTENTIAL TODAY, AND OUR CONSCIENCES  
ARE TROUBLED IN THE MIDST OF OUR PROSPERITY BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT  
MANY AMERICANS HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF THEIR BIRTHRIGHT.

WE KNOW THAT THE COLOR OF A MAN'S SKIN OR THE ORIGINS OF  
HIS FOREFATHERS CAN BLOCK HIM FROM HIS RIGHTS AS A CITIZEN AND THE  
ACHIEVEMENT OF HIS FULL POTENTIAL AS A HUMAN BEING.

WE KNOW THAT ONE-FIFTH OF OUR POPULATION IS SUFFERING  
FROM THE DEPRIVATION OF POVERTY.

POVERTY CAN BE TRACED IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN  
CUT OFF FROM OPPORTUNITY BY REASON OF THEIR RACE, BECAUSE OF THE



# COPY

ACCIDENT OF GEOGRAPHY OF THEIR BIRTHPLACE, BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE  
EDUCATION, BECAUSE OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES WHICH MADE THEIR  
JOBS OBSOLETE, BECAUSE OF CHANGES IN THE PRODUCTIVE NEEDS OF THE  
NATION, OR BECAUSE OF ACCIDENTS OR ILL HEALTH.

THE POOR ARE EXILES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY. THEY LIVE  
IN DEFEAT AND PESSIMISM. WITHOUT HELP THEY CANNOT TAKE ADVANTAGE  
OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES.

I BELIEVE WE CAN MEET THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY. I BELIEVE  
WE CAN MAKE FREEDOM AND EQUALITY MEANINGFUL BY OFFERING NEW  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEPRIVED.

UNTIL EVERY CITIZEN, REGARDLESS OF HIS RACE, CREED OR COLOR,  
ENJOYS HIS FULL RIGHTS AS A CITIZEN, NONE OF US IS FREE. THE CRUEL BARRIERS  
OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE WILL NOT BE WIPED AWAY IN A SINGLE DAY,  
BUT THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW AND THE POWER OF THE STATE MUST BE USED TO  
OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS, NOT TO SUSTAIN THEM.

# COPY

BUT BEYOND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EQUALITY IN CITIZENS RIGHTS  
MUST LIE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR JOBS. OUR DREAM IS NOT TO MAKE ALL  
AMERICANS EQUALLY IMPOVERISHED. OUR GOAL IS TO SWING WIDE THE  
DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MEANINGFUL JOBS, PAYING DECENT WAGES FOR  
ALL AMERICANS.

IN THIS CAMPAIGN, I EXPECT TO SEE THE LINES CLEARLY  
DRAWN BETWEEN THOSE WHO HAVE AN INHERENT DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT  
AND THE ABILITY OF THE PEOPLE TO GOVERN THEMSELVES, AND THOSE  
WHO ARE WILLING TO USE ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AS INSTRUMENTS  
OF PUBLIC POLICY IN SOLVING PUBLIC PROBLEMS. THIS IS AN ISSUE  
FROM WHICH WE NEED NOT SHRINK.

AGAIN AND AGAIN WE NEED TO MAKE OUR POINT: WE ARE FREE  
MEN AND WOMEN AND WE CAN WORK TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD. OURS  
IS A BALANCED SOCIETY IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS, PRIVATE BUSINESS, LABOR,  
PRIVATE ORGANIZATION, PUBLIC GROUPS, AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERN-



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CAN WORK TOGETHER, SO LONG AS THERE IS AGREEMENT ON OUR ULTIMATE GOALS  
AND A RATIONAL DISCUSSION OF THOSE ISSUES WHICH TEND TO DIVIDE US.

IN THIS ELECTION YEAR WE WILL DETERMINE THE LEADERSHIP OF  
OUR COUNTRY FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS. THAT CHOICE WILL NOT BE MADE  
IN WASHINGTON. IT WILL BE MADE IN THE WARDS AND PRECINCTS OF THE  
CITIES AND TOWNS, OF THE RURAL AND URBAN AREAS OF NORTH, EAST, SOUTH  
AND WEST. YOU WILL HELP DETERMINE THAT CHOICE. YOU WILL INFLUENCE  
THE COURSE OF GOVERNMENT.

INFLUENCING THE VOTE IS MORE THAN A MATTER OF REGISTRATION,  
ENROLLMENT AND CARRYING VOTERS TO THE POLLS. IT IS A MATTER  
OF GETTING VOTERS CONCERNED; HELPING THEM TO INFORM THEMSELVES; AND  
MOTIVATING THEM TO ACT. IF WE MAKE THESE STEPS, THEN WE WILL  
LIVE UP TO THE FAITH PRESIDENT KENNEDY EXPRESSED IN US:

# COPY

"I BELIEVE IN AN AMERICA THAT IS ON THE MARCH --

AN AMERICA RESPECTED BY ALL NATIONS, FRIENDS AND FOES ALIKE --

AN AMERICA THAT IS MOVING, CHOOSING, DOING, DREAMING -- A STRONG

AMERICA IN A WORLD OF PEACE."

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