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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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Senator Edmund S. Muskie Remarks on Accepting the Vice Presidential Nomination

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DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION
ACCEPTANCE OF VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION
BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE (D-MAINE)
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 29, 1968

MAY I, FIRST OF ALL, SAY "THANK YOU" FOR YOUR TRUST AND YOUR CONFIDENCE.

I DID NOT REALLY EXPECT THAT THIS OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY WOULD COME TO ME.

MY REACTION TO IT IS AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF THE WORK WE MUST DO:

TO BUILD A PEACE.

TO HEAL OUR COUNTRY.

TO MAKE A SOCIETY SUCH AS OURS WORK IS NOT EASY.

IT MEANS LIVING WITH, UNDERSTANDING, AND RESPECTING OUR DIFFERENCES AS HUMAN BEINGS—DIFFERENT COLORS, DIFFERENT RACES, DIFFERENT NATIONAL BACKGROUNDS, DIFFERENT CULTURAL LEVELS, DIFFERENT TASTES AND INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES, DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS, AND DIFFERENT SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS, PERSONALITIES AND DISPOSITIONS—AND TO ACCEPT EACH OTHER AS EQUALS.

IT MEANS LEARNING TO TRUST EACH OTHER, TO WORK WITH EACH OTHER, TO THINK OF EACH OTHER AS NEIGHBORS.

IT MEANS DIMINISHING OUR PREROGATIVES BY AS MUCH AS IS NECESSARY TO GIVE OTHERS THE SAME PREROGATIVES.

IT MEANS RESPECT FOR THE RULE OF LAW AND EQUAL JUSTICE AS THE BEST GUARDIAN OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS.

IT MEANS GRANTING ALL CITIZENS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN AMERICAN LIFE, IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES OF OUR SOCIETY.

IN ALL FRANKNESS OUR SOCIETY HAS NOT WORKED IN THIS WAY UP TO NOW.

IN PART THIS IS BECAUSE OF THE RISKS IN OUR SOCIETY. THERE IS EVIL AS WELL AS GOOD. THERE IS MEANNESS AS WELL AS GENEROSITY.

THERE IS DISHONESTY AS WELL AS HONESTY. THERE IS VIOLENCE AS WELL AS PEACE.

IN ALL FRANKNESS OUR SOCIETY HAS NOT OVERCOME THESE RISKS UP TO NOW.

AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT CANNOT.

TO PUT THEIR DOUBTS IN PERSPECTIVE, LET US NOT FORGET THAT WHEN WE BEGAN THIS EXPERIENCE IN GOVERNMENT, WE DID NOT INSTANTLY ACHIEVE AN EQUAL CHANCE FOR EVERY MEMBER OF OUR SOCIETY, BUT WE DID PROMISE TO WORK TOWARD IT.

WE MADE THAT PROMISE BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WHEN MEN, HOWEVER DIFFERENT, ARE FREE TO GROW, THEY WILL ENLARGE THEIR INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL POWERS: THEY WILL BECOME BETTER NEIGHBORS TO OTHERS: AND THEY WILL MAKE POSSIBLE A MORE ENLIGHTENED AND CIVILIZED SOCIETY.

THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM SINCE THAT TIME HAS MADE POSSIBLE TREMENDOUS ADVANCES IN THE LIVES OF OUR PEOPLE.

IRONICALLY, THESE VERY ADVANCES HAVE HIGHLIGHTED OUR SHORTCOMINGS WHICH HAVE DENIED HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT TO TOO MANY AMERICANS: WHICH HAVE CONCEALED THE REALITY OF HUNGER, POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION

FOR MANY UNDER AN ILLUSION OF PROSPERITY AND EQUALITY FOR ALL.

WE HAVE LEARNED--PAINFULLY AT TIMES--THAT FREEDOM DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY CORRECT THE INEQUITIES, THE INJUSTICES, THE HUMAN FAILURES OF A SOCIETY.

IT DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY CREATE CONCERN, UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION IN ALL CITIZENS.

AND SO, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT FREEDOM DOES NOT WORK UNLESS WE WORK AT IT.

THAT, PERHAPS, IS AT LEAST PART OF THE REASON FOR THE SURGING DETERMINATION OF SO MANY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND OF THE DISADVANTAGED AMONG US TO MAKE A PLACE FOR THEMSELVES IN BUILDING THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY, IN IDENTIFYING THE DIRECTION IN WHICH IT SHOULD GO, IN SETTING THE PACE AT WHICH WE SHOULD MOVE.

SUCH A FORCE SHOULD HEARTEN THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN FREEDOM AS THE MOST CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

THERE ARE, HOWEVER, DISQUIETING ASPECTS TO THIS FORCE. IT CAN BE EXPRESSED IN UNRESTRAINED, IRRATIONAL, AND SOMETIMES EXPLOSIVE WAYS. THESE MAY BE THE PRODUCT OF IMPATIENCE WITH RESULTS, LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN OUR INTENTIONS, LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. THEY MAY ALSO BE THE PRODUCT OF EXPLOITATION BY MILITANTS WHOSE MOTIVES ARE SUSPECT.

WE MUST HAVE THE PATIENCE TO MAKE THE DISTINCTION AND TO DEAL WITH EACH DIFFERENTLY.

WE MUST LEARN TO WORK WITH THIS FORCE, TO INSURE CONTINUED AND MORE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. THIS

SHOULD INSPIRE THOSE INVOLVED WITH CONFIDENCE THAT THEIR EFFORTS WILL ACHIEVE DIGNITY, OPPORTUNITY, EQUALITY AND FULL PARTICIPATION, WHICH IS THE MEASURE OF WHAT THEY SEEK.

THIS IS THE WAY TO DEVELOP THE SELF-DISCIPLINE OF AN ENLIGHTENED AND CIVILIZED SOCIETY, RATHER THAN THE IMPOSED DISCIPLINE OF A BARRACKS STATE.

THIS IS THE KIND OF WORK WHICH THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY KNOWS, RESPONDS TO INSTINCTIVELY, AND DOES SO WELL. WE MUST SURPASS ALL OUR PREVIOUS EFFORTS IN THIS ELECTION YEAR.

WE MIGHT WELL HEED THESE WORDS FROM ANCIENT GREECE:

"WE ARE CAPABLE AT THE SAME TIME OF TAKING RISKS AND OF ESTIMATING THEM BEFOREHAND. OTHERS ARE BRAVE OUT OF IGNORANCE; AND WHEN THEY STOP TO THINK, THEY BEGIN TO FEAR. BUT THE MAN WHO CAN MOST TRULY BE ACCOUNTED BRAVE IS HE WHO BEST KNOWS THE MEANING OF WHAT IS SWEET IN LIFE AND OF WHAT IS TERRIBLE, AND THEN GOES OUT UNDETERRED TO MEET WHAT IS TO COME."

IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT I ACCEPT YOUR NOMINATION AND WILL TRY TO JUSTIFY IT.

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