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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Hemisfair on Polish-American Day

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE OF MAINE
POLISH-AMERICAN DAY, HEMISFAIR
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1968
12:45 P.M. (CDT)

I have come to a happy place to be a part of an occasion touched with sadness. It is an experience not unusual for our time.

Hemisfair is a joyous creation in a colorful city. It combines the achievements of industrial America with the enchanting heritage of Mexico.

In Hemisfair and in San Antonio we see the rich contributions of many cultures and many peoples.

- We sense the creative force of free people.
- We feel the warmth of community which comes to those who value the dignity and worth of every man.

But, also, we remember those who have been cut off from other peoples, those whose creativity has been stifled, those whose hearts have been made cold by hatred and oppression.

When I was a boy, my father talked to me, for hours on end, about Poland, and about the tyranny and oppression she has known.

But he also made it clear that conquest, occupation, and oppression have strengthened the determination to be free and to serve the cause of freedom in other lands.

We remember the impact of Paderwesi on Woodrow Wilson.

We remember the valiant resistance against Hitler and his Nazi invaders.

We remember those who fought outside their country when it had been over-run.

We remember the resistance to Russian Communism.

And we have watched with sadness as Poland, under its present rulers, helped the Soviets muzzle Czechoslovakia.

Many of us have watched with special interest, because our parents or grandparents came to this country to seek freedom. Some came to flee the Czar -- as my father did. Some came to flee the tyranny erected in the name of the class struggle.

All came to seek "A new birth of freedom."

As we pray for Poland and the love of liberty which enriches her history, we should pray for our own country. Threats to freedom come in many guises other than conquest.

They include fear, hate, and intolerance. They exist in those who want to change and in those who want nothing but change.

A little more than a week ago, in Chicago, I looked out on a crowd facing a line of Police and troops, separated from each other by an almost tangible wall of suspicion and distrust, fear and hatred -- and the only communication between them was force.

The principal casualty of that confrontation was the spirit of democratic discussion and debate.

The election of 1968 has a significance which goes far beyond the candidates involved. The election of 1968 will test our ability to conserve and improve a democracy in the midst of domestic and foreign troubles.

In our land today there are those who would divide and destroy us. There are those who strike out blindly and destructively, heedless of the damage undisciplined dissent can inflict on even a strong society.

There are also those whose patience has been worn too thin by the clashes provoked by others. They are exhausted by the clamor of argument and the occasional resort to violence of those who dissent. They would prefer to prevent controversy altogether and rely on force indiscriminately applied, to control and suppress the troublesome.

Neither of these ways will work.

Our society has always nurtured the right of dissent. Free debate of ideas has been a hallmark of our form of Government. We cannot allow them to be suppressed.

Americans in recent months too often have been the victims of violent exchanges, hostility leading to violence and intolerable disruption of our lives. This deepening shadow of undisciplined emotions, directed by one group against another is a sad and ominous warning of even more dangerous actions that could threaten the existence of our Nation.

It is my hope that this campaign will see our country emerging with a more passionate concern than ever before for the protection and improvement of free elections and for their restoration in dark corners of the world where no right to vote now exists.

I accepted the challenge of the 1968 Vice Presidential Campaign because I believe deeply in the democratic process. I believe in it because it gives us the best hope for freedom and equality of opportunity.

I believe in it because it gives us the best hope for spiritual growth and creative achievement.

I may or may not succeed in my campaign for election, but I am determined -- as is Vice President Humphrey -- that we shall do all we can to spread the enlightened practice of freedom in this land and across the earth.

This, I submit, is a solemn obligation for all of us, whatever our political persuasion.

You who gathered here today have special reasons to know the value and the price of freedom.

And the lesson above all is this -- that none of us can be free unless we are all free in the same way -- to live, to work, to grow, and to become whatever our God-given capacities make possible.

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