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Excerpts from Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at a Reception in the St. Louis Mayor's Home

Edmund S. Muskie

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Excerpts from Remarks by
Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine
At Reception in Mayor's Home
September 10, 1968

St. Louis, Missouri

I started playing golf about two years ago. It was two years ago this month. And I remember one of the first pieces of advice that I received from one of my golfing companions. He said, "When you get to the first tee, ~~meaning of the game~~ at the beginning of the game, and you look around to see who the pigeon is and you don't see one, you know it's you."

Well, I guess I'm the pigeon here tonight.

It's been a long day, and I'm not sure that what I'm about to say is exactly what you'd like to hear someone in my position say. But I'm very deeply concerned about something that's happening in this country and I think that you and I are in a position to do something about it. And I'm speaking now not as a Democrat or as a Republican, but as an American.

Everyone in this room has achieved some measure of success in this society, and you have achieved it because it is a free society which offers opportunity to people who are in a position to seek it and who have the will to do so.

I'm the son of an immigrant, and I suspect that everyone in this room has some such background; either near or remote. My father died a year after I became governor of my state. I know he died fully convinced that this country represented all that he and those who came with him to our shores dreamed it to be.

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So we've all had some measure of success. Now we have alot of young people, disadvantaged people who no longer believe as he did or as we do that this is possible. And I'm particularly concerned about the young. I'm a father of five children; the youngest is seven and the oldest is 19. I'm sure they have no conception of the kind of life that my father came to this country to escape. So they can't conceivably have ^{the} appreciation for freedom and what it offers that he did. Or even that I do.

And so we have a great unrest among these young people who have real honest doubts about the validity of our system in this free society for advancing the welfare of any individual who has the capacity and undertakes to use it. They're honest doubts. I know we've all had the problems of dealing with teenagers, for I've been frustrated as any other parent, and you wonder whether they'll ever see the right way. They do, if you trust them. And that's the key word in this whole business. Trust and confidence.

There are those who say that in order to capture the allegiance of the disadvantaged, that we must just put together big bundles of money to hand out to them. Well, the problems that are involved do require substantial investments of money. But that's not the key. The key is trust.

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When I came to this earth, I did not come into a society where everyone was equal or where everyone had an equal chance. But we believed that this society was moving in that direction. We had confidence in it, trust in it.

Today we don't have an equal chance for everyone, but we're closer to it than we were when I was born. We're closer to it than we were when I was in high school. And when I entered college we were in the depths of the depression. Those young people in my class in college had confidence in the system even though at that moment it gave us nothing but hardship, inequality and discrimination and injustice. But we had confidence that this was the best means ever devised for achieving what man has never yet achieved--harmony among multitudes of different kinds of people living together.

I don't know what your answer is to this problem or whether you recognize it or acknowledge it. It's there. Somehow we've got to communicate with these young people the very deep faith that we have--that this is the place to be, this is the place where they can improve themselves, that this is the place that can make a great contribution to the lot of the disadvantaged around the globe.

As I'm saying all of this, I'm not advocating any particular political party or any particular philosophy of government or any particular program, or judging the merits of private vs. public efforts. Because all of these together have a part to play in making this system work. This isn't a system which works only because there is a single agency--governmental or otherwise--that does the job. It works because we all work so we've got to get at these young people.

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In Chicago we had a confrontation of force against force and I don't think there is any clear-cut case one way or another who was wrong or who was right. There was plenty of wrong to be distributed among all those present and some right. But the important thing is that two groups of American citizens could confront themselves only over a barrier of hatred and suspicion and could get through only by use of force.

We have every reason to be concerned. That happened because too many Americans no longer have faith and confidence in the system.

When I got into this business of politics fourteen years ago I really didn't envision a life career. I was just back from the war and waiting for clients to climb the stairs to my office in sufficient numbers to give me a living. And somebody suggested that I might use some of my spare time by serving in the legislature--and I thought that was a good idea if it didn't go too far. So I ran and served and I was tremendously exhilarated by the experience. One step led to another until I'm where I am.

But I'll tell you honestly and I can understand if you don't believe me, that the only real satisfaction ^{public} in life is seeing this system work. Improvement--in the life of your community, your state and your country, and above all, in your fellow Americans. So all of us in this room have had a great measure of success and I plead with you to use it--to use the background that it has brought you, the experience, the know-how, the skills in persuading people and working with them, to deal with this

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problem of the young people as though they were all your children,
that you are trying in some way to harness their great urges and desires
and instincts and protests into the constructive channels which make a
work.
free society/ I think that's the great worry this election of 1968
(applause) and if I can contribute to it, I don't care what happens
on November 5. As a matter of fact, I know what would be the most
comfortable result on November 5.

Thank you very much.

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