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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at Norwood Country Club

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS OF SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

NORWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

TRANSCRIPT

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI FEBRUARY 5, 1972

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you very much Warren and Betty Hearnese, Stu Symington, Tom Eagleton, and my good friends of the great state of Missouri.

You know after listening to someone like David Frye do so well as he does in charactering those of us in public life, I'm always hesitant to give up... to get up and give him another opportunity to analyze me because I can almost hear myself speaking the way that he would repeat it later on. (LAUGHTER)

But I'm delighted to be here in Missouri. And I'm grateful to Warren, to Stu and to Tom and all those who are responsible for this gathering and to all of you for being a part of it, making me feel welcome, giving me assurances to the future.

I should of course say more than just a word about the confidence with which these three good friends have imposed on me. It is rather awesome as I consider its implications. And I know that from a political standpoint it was courageous and from my personal standpoint it was unexpected. Because I've been in politics a long time. And I know how easy it is to wait until the signs are clearer, until the choices are easier, when one is contemplating supporting a man for the presidency of the United States. I've been through that many times myself in the last quarter of a century. They didn't need to do it to be assured of my friendship. They've had that for a long time and will for a long time. But I think all four of us understand that what we are about in this election year is the challenge of selecting the leadership of this country for the four years beginning a year from now. And all of us feel that our country needs a change in that leadership. And all of us feel a responsibility to contribute to that choice. It is that sense of responsibility about it that prompts me to seek the presidency and it is that same sense of responsibility which prompted them to make a choice. That they should have been the three to have done so together when they did is a source of great personal satisfaction to me. I have known them all three for so long, I am so fond of them all as friends and respect them so greatly as public leaders and representatives of their people.

Warren Hearnese has been an outstanding Governor of his State. You know that. (APPLAUSE) I was privileged to know him only after he had begun, but not long after he had begun, and I was impressed and am still impressed. And I regret that a year from now he is on the verge of becoming an elder statesman and one way of avoiding that result is to elect a Democratic administration in Washington in December. (Applause).

I first knew Stu Symington when he was a candidate for the presidency in 1952. I was an unknown young Democrat from Maine who held no public office at that time, who did not intend to seek any public office at that time, but who was interested in being involved in the affairs of the Democratic Party nationally and went into the '52 election. Stu Symington was an awesome kind of a figure. He already had public authority on the national scene. When I went to the Senate as a Freshmen, he was someone whose example I followed. Together we've voted on the same issues, made some of the same

mistakes, changed our minds about some of the crucial issues which concern all Americans together, have been subjected to similar criticism for doing so. And as I receive this criticism I look at Stu Symington and understand how steadfast he is in his position because he's sure that he's right. I don't know of any other standard to guide a public servant. (APPLAUSE)

Tom, of course, is the young squirt (LAUGHTER), but I can't tell you how much pride I take in him, not only since he announced for me but before, because he's a member of my subcommittee on air and water pollution and we've put together some far reaching, very far reaching legislation since he's been on that committee in the field of both air and water pollution. Tom has been my strong right arm. And I've come to respect his abilities, his effectiveness and his ability to bring senators and other people together behind a constructive solution to the problem. He has a great future ahead of him and I'm sure you know that as well as I. (APPLAUSE).

And I'm also delighted to be herein the state of Missouri because this is the state of Mr. Democrat himself, Harry Truman. (CHEERS - APPLAUSE). And as I think of him I think of a quality he brought to the White House which we so desperately need today. The ability (APPLAUSE), the ability to speak the truth plainly. (APPLAUSE).

I come here to Missouri at the end of two days when I have been attacked by the opposition for speaking out, for saying what I believe to be the truth about our present policy in Vietnam. So I come to Missouri, the place where the Truman tradition is so visible, reassured that history looks kindly upon those who speak the truth as they see it. (APPLAUSE)

Maine and Missouri were borne out of the same womb, the Missouri compromise of 1820. And I like to think that we have a lot of things in common. One is that somebody put it this way... "There's no substitute for brains, but silence is often a useful substitute." (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE) Both of our states are known as states which have given birth to people of few words. When they speak they try to speak directly, plainly, candidly and as truthfully as it's possible for human fallibility to produce.

Well, what does one say to a room full of people who have been as generous, warm-hearted and reassuring as you. I might point out that you are paying as much for this dinner as Stan Musial made when he broke into baseball with the Rochester Redwings. (LAUGHTER) You know a thousand dollars is a great deal of money for dinner, even with this kind of food and entertainment. It reminds me of what Joe Holland, who some of you may remember, said years ago when he ran for circuit attorney against the late Tom Hennings and lost by 175,000 votes. Joe's analysis of the election went like this: He said, "I came within 175,000 votes of giving Tom Hennings the worst schellacking of his life. (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE) Well, I'd say that Jack Arianni and Tom Musial have come within \$990 of giving you the finest \$1000 meal you've ever eaten. (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE). Well, I think you

and I can make a very simple and clear-cut deal. I'm willing to give this effort all I have and all I'd like is your permission to give it all you have as well. (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE)

I was asked earlier today at another meeting in St. Louis why I seek the presidency. This question came from a young gray-haired lady who said she'd just accepted a political assignment for the first time in her life and she wondered why. So she couldn't resist asking me why I was seeking the presidency. Well, obviously it's a question that I've had to consider. And I assume that you wonder why as well.

Is it for political glory? Well, as a Democrat from Maine, I've had more glory than a Democrat from Maine could ever expect to get. (LAUGHTER) So that isn't it. Is it for financial security? Well, there are other ways to achieve that.

But more seriously, is it because I think I'm divinely ordained to be the next president of the United States? Well, the answer of course, I hope you think of course, is no. But what this political process is all about in this free country rests upon the fundamental assumption upon which the country itself is built. That is that if people are truly free to develop themselves and to grow as individuals, that the country itself grows and enlarges its capacity to deal with the problems of this country. But even more importantly the problems of its people. And so among, you know, the objectives which any society seeks is the selection of wise, courageous, effective leadership responsive to the needs of the country as we move along.

This generation lives between what I like to call what is no longer and what is not yet. We live in a period of suspension between what has been and what will be. And no one knows clearly how long the journey will be or where we will come out in the end. Is our destination to be something related to what we've believed in in the past. Will it be built upon the foundations of two centuries of national experience or will it be different? But in any case, will it be better?

How does a society like ours answer that kind of question? It must come out of the people themselves. It must come out of the people themselves. The first thing they must do is to select those who will identify the values, the ideals, the hopes and the needs which will govern the people's choice. And that is the leadership of the country.

Our people are divided. No one can be more sensitive to that fact than those who travel the country seeking high national office. In the last week I have

spoken to conservative southerners in the northern panhandle of Florida, in Wallace country. I've spoken to Blacks in the ghettos of Miami, I've spoken to restless students in Madison on the campus of the University of Wisconsin. I've spoken to Americans in the rural areas of Wisconsin and Illinois. And for weeks and months in the past and in the future, I will be listening to and speaking to Americans of all descriptions who have forgotten how to talk to each other; who have forgotten how to understand each other; who increasingly from day to day are convinced, deeply convinced that other Americans do not share with them the same vision of what must be in the future, what values should govern and what kind of country we ought to be.

Who, then, is to explain Americans to each other if not our leaders? I'm convinced from what I've seen that most Americans want the same thing. I'm convinced that Americans who appear to be at the opposite ends of the spectrum are not as far apart as they want to believe.

Let me put it to you this way. Americans who have good jobs want to keep them; those who do not, need them. Americans who are privileged to go to good schools want to protect that right; those who are not, need to. Americans who are now involved in the processes of government in a way that gives them a sense of involvement, want to protect their position; those who are not want to be included.

And so you could go down through the litany of those who have and those who have not. And what appears to divide them is not what they want, not what they need, not what they hope for, but what they have.

Well, if there's any lesson that American history teaches us it is that in a country like ours people of widely different backgrounds, widely different experiences, widely different circumstances can find the ways --- not always easy, often difficult and even agonizing -- to work together to serve these common needs.

Why then, if I am right, do we find ourselves confronting each other over barriers today? It's because in the last ten years National policy has left our people. So people have lost confidence that our commitments to each other, that government's commitment to us still relates to our basic needs and hopes. And so when you reach this point in any society, what happens is that people draw inward to protect the familiar, to protect what they have against threats real or imaginary from others. And once a people get into that cycle of doubt and suspicion and uncertainty, the problems begin to seem insoluble, so we must protect what we have.

That sounds like pessimism. Believe me it isn't. My life, to me, justifies the belief that America always rises above these periods of depression. They're cyclical. We can reach out to each other once again, because we have a greater capacity to do so than ever before. But in order to do so we must straighten out some of the problems and some of the policies and some of the directions in which we have been moving and in which we've created the uncertainty and the doubt.

In my judgment, the clearest signal that we must strike is the signal to end our involvement in the war in southeast Asia. (APPLAUSE).

And I say that not because I think that's just a foreign policy decision but because I think it's economical as well. I think it's a social decision. I think it's a racial decision. I think it's an environmental decision. I think it's an education decision. Because the war has been a vast dam that has held back our resources and our energies that we needed to apply to our problems here at home. A vast dam that has held us back from each other. That's why, in the last two days, I've spoken out against our present policy in Vietnam. (APPLAUSE).

And I do so not with any sense of self-righteousness because I have been wrong about this war, as have so many of us. But what we need to do, at last, is to face the truth.

I've been criticized by the Secretary of State on the grounds that I'm undermining the national interest in criticizing the President's policy. Well, let me tell you what our people perceive as the national interest. Our people perceive the national interest as requiring that we end our involvement, the fighting and the killing in Vietnam as soon as possible. I find this from Blacks, whites, northerners, southerners, rich and poor, and young and old. Finally this is the way they see it and someone has to speak for them in Washington. Others will; others have; I must.

I don't want the war to be an issue in this campaign. I would like to see the war end tomorrow and let Richard Nixon get whatever political benefit he does from that fact that he can. I'd rather end the war than win the election next November. (APPLAUSE).

But if we need to win the election to end the war then I want that. (APPLAUSE). Because I tell you this country, with all of the doubts that have arisen out of our present trials and ferment, is still a great country.

I know we've not measured up to our ideals, and we all know it; but I think

we all understand, as well, that when we can be stimulated to respond to what we all know America is at her best, that America still can be a symbol of hope for our own people, and a symbol of hope for people around the world. And then when we are, we will have a maximum influence upon the affairs of all of mankind. And a maximum capability for achieving a recent life here at home for our people.

Now, if this kind of message is not saleable to every group of Americans, using the idioms and the needs that apply to them, then there is no hope for unity in our country. And so we need to find a president --and it may not be me -- we need to find a president who can establish his credibility with every group of Americans, so that they can believe, once again, that when our government makes a commitment to decency, to progress, to better lives, they can believe it.

You know, those who are deprived and discriminated against know that we can't solve all their problems tomorrow, or next week. All they ask for is commitment. But what is commitment in a society where there is no confidence in the word of our leaders? Commitment in nothing unless there is confidence and trust.

Sure, you can demonstrate commitments by particular programs to create jobs -- and we must make that commitment --, to clear up the environment -- and we must make that commitment -- to create decent housing -- and we must make that commitment --, to clean up our cities and to provide for the tensions that split our races and our age groups -- and we must make that commitment --; but there is no commitment unless the people believe.

So if there is any issue that faces us in this country, not in a partisan sense, but in a sense of dividing the American people from what ..between...from what is no longer and what is yet to be, it is the question of believeability. And if we can establish that, we'll be on our way.

I know that may sound like a sermon. If it does, so be it. But it imposes a heavy responsibility on everyone in this room; because everyone in this room has a reason not to support change. Everyone in this room has a reason to hang onto what is. And yet, I think you're all here because you know that you cannot hang on to what is; that you will really be better off if we make the changes that must be made -- make them wisely, make them responsible, make them in the continuity of American history at its best, but make them. I think that's why you're here.

If that isn't why, than you're here for the wrong reason. If that isn't why, than I haven't got a chance. If I can't pursue the Presidency on those terms,

I don't want to win it. If I am to be President of the United States, I want to be President on the clear understanding that I will reach out to every group of Americans and try to make life better for them. (APPLAUSE)

Let me tell you an old Abe Lincoln story that fits the point. You know, in the days of Abe Lincoln, anybody could walk off the streets into the White House without an appointment and accost the President wherever they could find him --in his bedroom or even more intimate quarters. The White House was filled day after day with favor-seekers and job-seekers. One day old Abe wasn't feeling well and he called on the doctor. The doctor examined him and he said, "Mr. President, I regret to say that you've got a case, a slight case, of the chicken pox." The President said, "wonderful. At last I've got something I can give to everyone." (APPLAUSE).

You know and I know that a President can't give something to everybody unless he gives them a sense of national purpose, a sense of relief in our future, and a vision which summons us all to a greater effort to improve this country. He cannot hand out Christmas presents to everybody. He can't agree with all his constituents, because they don't agree with each other. He can't agree with all of the points of view of every group in America, because they don't agree with each other. But somehow, he has got to identify the fundamental needs of every group and relate them to each other. I think that can be done. And I mean to try. And if you'll help, I think we can make it next November. Thank you very much. (APPLAUSE).

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