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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at a Public Reception in Kansas City, Kansas

Edmund S. Muskie

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1 REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE EDMUND S. MUSKIE
2 DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY OF THE UNITED STATES
3
4 AT A
5
6 PUBLIC RECEPTION, TOWN HOUSE HOTEL
7
8 KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

Town House Hotel
Kansas City, Kansas
Friday, September 20, 1968
8:15 p.m. (CDT)

9 Today has been a busy day, probably the busiest of
my campaign tour.

10 It has been a great day in Kansas today. It didn't
11 seem so when we arrived at 2:00 o'clock this morning in Topeka
12 from Salt Lake City, and the night was a very quick one. We
began this morning in Topeka and have been busy all day long,
meeting Kansans.

13 There is a heartwarming thing about the whole exper-
14 ience, that you have been so good as to remember my first visit
15 to Kansas in 1954. That was a time when both our States were
16 noted for their Republicanism, and I guess they haven't exactly
shed that reputation since. So to have you remember me so
warmly, as your next Congressman George has, and as you have,
everyone of you, makes me feel very much at home.

17 The historians tell us that there was a considerable
18 migration from New England and from Maine to Kansas, and I can
19 well believe it. Because you have the same qualities of warmth
and hospitality and directness that my own Mainiacs in Maine
have.

20 (Laughter)

21 You know, we refer to ourselves in two different ways.
22 We are either "Mainiacs" or "State of Mainers," and you might
23 like to know the difference. Someone who was born in Maine
and still lives there is a "State of Mainer." Someone who was
born there and left Maine is obviously --

24 (Applause)

25 I think you have the same approach to problems and to
life that we do -- conservative in a sense but not in the

1 stolifying sense -- progressive, interested in other people,
2 interested in change, constructive progressive change. Well,
3 that is the way we like it in Maine and apparently that is
4 the way you like it in Kansas.

5 When I came here in 1954 -- I came to speak, I think,
6 in this very hotel, it was new then -- at a fund raising dinner
7 for George Docking, who was then running for Governor.

8 (Applause)

9 George didn't make it that year but he tried again
10 two years later and did make it. And for the next four years,
11 he was one of our great Governors here in Kansas, respected
12 not only among you, his people, but also across the land and
13 certainly in that northeast corner of Maine where I remembered
14 him with such respect and warmth.

15 Now to have had breakfast with his son in the Governor's
16 Mansion in the State Capitol was for me a marvelous experience,
17 even though it made me feel old --

18 (Laughter)

19 to have the son of a colleague who was Governor with
20 me as Governor in his own right. I am sure that you are going
21 to give him the same thing his father received, a second term.

22 (Applause)

23 In those days, I traveled around the country as sort
24 of a prize exhibit. You remember that we had an early election
25 in Maine in 1954, and we had it again in '56 and '58, and dis-
continued it in 1960. So whatever we did in Maine, in those
early elections, was somehow regarded as an indication of what
the country would do in November.

Well, that formula never really worked until 1954,
1956, and 1958. Then we changed it.

(Applause)

I am not so sure it was a constructive change, I would
like to be still pointing the way for the rest of the country.

But as a result of those elections, and those early
elections, I had occasion to travel around the country a great
deal. And my stop in Kansas was one of many, many from coast
to coast. I always enjoyed it.

1 I think I covered in the course of 14 years some 46
2 states, before I was ever a national candidate. But I must say
3 it was much different than traveling and soliciting votes in
4 my own behalf, as I am doing this year. I had some misgivings
5 about it. I felt that so far as grass roots America was con-
6 cerned, I was an unknown, and I still feel that way about it.

7 I make many friends across the country in the leader-
8 ship of the Democratic Party, among the workers, in the Demo-
9 cratic Party, and among people who have been interested in the
10 legislative fields which I have been privileged to work and
11 write legislation. But so far as grass roots America is concerned
12 it takes a considerable impact to become known, and to try to
13 do it in a quiet, rational way in a relatively short time is
14 quite a chore.

15 There is a way to get headlines that we all know, the
16 George Wallace way, where you don't care what you say, as long
17 as it stirs people up.

18 Now, I could find those things to say if I thought it
19 was the responsible, rational, useful, meaningful way to say
20 them, but we face serious problems, in our country. We are going
21 to deal with them effectively, only in a serious way. Serious
22 problems that can't be solved in a cheap way or in a tough way,
23 Problems that can be solved only by an enlightened, intelligent
24 people, confident in each other, and willing to apply themselves
25 and their wisdom, their experience, the experiences of 180 years
of Freedom, to do this work.

Unfortunately, some of these issues have a high emo-
tional content -- Vietnam, so-called law and order issue.

And it is suggested somehow that Democrats are prone
to crying, prone to war, by people who apparently in election
years, at least, fail to recognize that manifestations of this
kind of human weaknesses and shortcomings come out of much
deeper causes, resting in the dissatisfaction of people with
life as they find it, with restlessness of people in the face
of hopelessness, and lives which appear -to offer no hope for
improvement.

It is deprivation, hopelessness, lack of improvement,
that cause people to rebel against things as they are.

There are those, unfortunately, who will exploit their
dissatisfaction and unhappiness. It is out of this sort of thing
that wars are created, that ideologies designed to exploit
people who are backward, un nourished, and oppressed. It is out
of these things that a society like ours, with a great national

1 wealth, finds themselves confronted with the restlessness of
2 the deprived and the disadvantaged. And that is what it is
3 all about in this election year.

4 I have talked about these points, all day long and
5 every day since the campaign started.

6 There is something else I would like to talk to you
7 about tonight, because I think we have got to focus on the choices
8 that are available to the American people in this election cam-
9 paign. In discussing this, I am speaking not only to you, but
10 to those people in our own Party who would have liked another
11 candidate, or to those people in any other Party, who might have
12 liked another candidate, than those who are available.

13 One thing we ought to focus on, above all else, is
14 that one of two men is going to be President as the result of
15 the election on November 5 -- Mr. Humphrey or Mr. Nixon.

16 A vote cast for anyone else, for George Wallace, or
17 anyone else, can have only a negative protest effect. It cannot
18 have a positive impact upon the selection of the next President
19 of the United States.

20 (Applause)

21 Now, everywhere I go in this country, I am told that
22 George Wallace is having an appeal in the ranks of labor, those
23 who by and large supported the Democratic Party over the years.

24 I can understand why he has that appeal. He has that
25 appeal because he gives them an opportunity to protest, protest
against demonstrations and riots and the apparent rise in law-
lessness in this country.

Well, putting aside for a moment the question of what
are the causes of these evidences of unrest, it is incredible
to me that anyone who works for a wage, even though that on an
annual basis is now a pretty good income, would support George
Wallace.

George Wallace's entire record in public life as Governor
has run counter to everything that labor has been for in the
last 25 years that I have been interested in public life.

(Applause)

I speak not only of those objectives which have to do
with the rights of labor themselves, the right to collective

1 bargaining, organizing unions, and to protect our own interests
2 by all of the devices that you have developed over the years
3 that you fought, but the right to advance your own interests.
4 But I am speaking also of the broader interests of labor, the
5 broader interests of labor and all of the social legislation --
6 aid to education, medicare, health programs, economic improve-
7 ment programs, minimum wage -- all of these programs that labor
8 has fought for and that I have discussed with labor in the
9 legislative sessions in our State Capitol and on Capitol Hill,
10 over and over again over the years. All of these things, George
11 Wallace is against.

12 (Applause)

13 The interesting thing is that he says he is against
14 them, but if you will look at what the State of Alabama receives
15 from the Federal Government, by way of federal grants, you will
16 find George Wallace's state third from the top in the States
17 that rely on this Government in Washington which he spends
18 every moment of every day abusing, which he spends every moment
19 of every day assuring Americans that if he becomes President,
20 he will return all these responsibilities to the State. He is
21 against the big hand of the Federal Government, but he is all
22 for putting out his hand for these grants --

23 (Applause)

24 -- In order to make his administration as Governor
25 good.

That is a typical trait of governors I suppose.

(Laughter)

-- To use the federal handouts to make themselves
look good. And George Wallace isn't immune from that disease.

Well, Richard Nixon says that the way to deal with
George Wallace is to ignore him. And so he won't debate him.
It may be that they couldn't find enough points of difference
to discuss; I don't know.

(Laughter and applause)

I am sure that isn't the reason, but a fellow is
entitled to speculate if Mr. Nixon doesn't make himself clear.

At least I find that such speculation is carried on
about what I say, until I make myself clear, and even then

1 the speculation goes on.

2 Well, now, what about Mr. Nixon? Here is the most
3 reluctant candidate for the presidency, in terms of his willing-
4 ness to talk to the people about our problems and his willing-
5 ness to test his ideas against sharp questioning and disagree-
6 ment.

7 Here is a man who has a built-in reputation, for
8 supposed reputation as a skillful debator, as a skillful small-
9 town lawyer who has moved to the big town and made good, as a
10 man who is quick on his feet to make extemporaneous speeches,
11 and yet apparently he has decided that he is going to expose
12 himself as little as possible in this campaign. Apparently he
13 has decided that he is so far ahead that he doesn't have to
14 condescend to test his ideas, that he doesn't need to take
15 the risks of rocking the boat, or of once again getting an
16 attack of that old Nixon disease -- foot in mouth.

17 (Applause)

18 You know, he condescended the other day to tell the
19 press that he would have a news conference about once in every
20 eight or nine days. Well, I get more questions in one morning
21 news conference than he does in eight days.

22 (Applause)

23 He has refused to go on any of these national "Meet
24 the Press" type programs, and hasn't been on one since 1966.
25 Has that occurred to you?

26 And there is some question as to whether or not he
27 is willing to debate the Vice President once, let alone enough
28 time to subject himself to the same risks he incurred in 1960.

29 I can understand he is playing safe and he knows that
30 when he gets under pressure he has a tendency to panic and
31 make mistakes. I am told this is how he happened to get so
32 close to Strom Thurmond.

33 (Applause)

34 I can understand that when he was confused at the
35 time of the Republican Convention. After all, one poll said
36 on one day he was ahead, another poll said the next day he was
37 behind, and the third day the polls said they were saying the
38 same thing. The must have been following his style.

39

1 Mr. Nixon is saying just enough to perhaps give us
2 an opening. One of the things he has been saying in criticizing
3 the Vice President is that if the Vice President is elected,
4 we will have four more years of what we have had in the last
5 eight.

6 Now, that isn't so bad when you look at what has
7 happened to the economy, what we have done about all of the
8 domestic problems which plague us, and still plague us despite
9 the great efforts we have made to deal with them. But the
10 important point is that he has laid down the principle that a
11 man who has been Vice President in one administration will
12 inevitably produce in his own administration as President the
13 same results.

14 Now, Mr. Nixon was Vice President in an administration
15 from 1952 to 1960. I can remember his saying over and over again,
16 "I run four square on the record of the last eight years."

17 Nobody ever asked him, "In what ways do you disagree
18 with President Eisenhower." Nobody ever asked him to prove
19 that he was his own man. Nobody ever challenged him to spell
20 out the differences between policies he would support and those
21 which he supported as Vice President. Nobody yet has challenged
22 him.

23 A Voice: What record? He had none.

24 (Applause)

25 Senator Muskie: Well, let us look at just a little
piece of that record.

(Laughter)

Otherwise, you will take away my speech.

(Applause and laughter)

From 1952 to 1960, we had three recessions. I think
you remember we have almost forgotten in the last eight years
what a recession is. But they had three. And in the process,
we lost national production to the tune of 175 billion dollars.

Now, that is a lot of money. But what did it mean,
that loss?

It meant that American citizens were less able to
improve their own lives, their own standard of living, than

1 they would have been but for those three Republican recessions.

2 It means that they were less able to provide for the
3 education of their children, and for their old age, and for
4 the risks of old age, and of adversity, because of those three
5 Republican recessions.

6 It meant that America was less able to deal with the
7 social causes of unrest and disorder and crime, by effective
8 governmental programs.

9 And what was the record in that respect?

10 Richard Nixon, in this campaign, has said that he is
11 for economic development.

12 Well, now, I was a Member of Congress during part of
13 that period, and we tried to enact legislation to stimulate
14 the economy in the Area Redevelopment Bill. And what happened
15 to those? In the Nixon years, from 1952 to 1960, Congress
16 passed them twice in 1958 and in 1960, and in each case they
17 were vetoed.

18 Mr. Nixon has never repudiated those vetoes, has never
19 indicated that he disagreed with the President's decision to
20 veto those two bills.

21 He says he is for a cleaner environment. Well, since
22 we have made it popular to be for that sort of thing in the
23 last five years, I guess everybody is for pollution control
24 legislation.

25 But Mr. Nixon's President vetoed a bill in 1960, to
raise federal commitments for sewage construction grants from
50 million dollars to 90 million dollars a year. That legis-
lation was vetoed.

Mr. Nixon did not protest it. He has never repudiated
that veto.

Mr. Nixon says he is for decent housing for every
American. But in 1959, my first year in the Senate -- and I
was a Member of the Banking and Currency Committee and the
Subcommittee on Housing -- in 1959 the Republican Administration
vetoed two omnibus housing bills designed to expand the federal
commitment to provide better homes for all Americans.

(Applause)

1 He did not repudiate that veto then and he has not
2 disassociated himself with it since that time.

3 He says he is for quality education for every American
4 child. Well, that great crusade in 1952 promised Federal Aid
5 to Education, and for eight years we tried in the Congress to
6 pass a bill. We did it by one vote in the Senate once, missed
7 by a greater margin in the House, and that Administration didn't
8 turn a hand to help us get the votes to get that legislation
9 through the Congress and on the desk of the President.

10 And, if you will, recall the stories of that time,
11 how the President moved from one side and then to the other,
12 in that wishy-washy fashion, on this business of Federal Aid to
13 Education. Mr. Nixon never disassociated himself with that
14 failure to act.

15 Well, he never makes the same mistake twice if he can
16 help it. He is prone to the first one, we will have to agree,
17 but he never makes it the second time if he can avoid it.

18 But why his Party gives him a second time always,
19 frankly, I don't understand. But let us take him at his word
20 that a former Vice President, who seeks the office of the
21 presidency must be held accountable for the policies which he
22 supported as Vice President.

23 (Applause)

24 I happen to think that is a ridiculous argument. But
25 using it as a Nixon argument, if 1952 to 1960 is projected over
the next four years, three million people now working will be
unemployed at the end of four years.

(Applause)

Using the Nixon argument and projecting that same
period to the next four years, there will be an economic slow-
down which will result in the loss of 30 to 40 billion dollars
in Federal Funds for the support of essential governmental
services, including education, health, medicare, and all of the
rest that have so much to do with social conditions, leading
to crime, unrest, and disorder and instability of this country.

That is what the Nixon supported policies of '52 to
'60 could mean for the next four years, if you accept Mr. Nixon's
own argument about his accountability as President for the
policies which he supported as Vice President.

(Applause)

1 I think that kind of political argument is ridiculous
even though it makes Mr. Nixon look bad. Because I think there
2 are other things that make him look bad. But, nevertheless,
it is the going thing.

3 Take this business of law and order. Now, somehow
4 we Democrats are being put on the defensive and asked to believe
that we invented crime.

5 Well, what could be more ridiculous? I mean what does
6 it prove to know, for example, that there are more murders per
population in George Wallace's Alabama than in any other state?

7 (Applause)

8 (3) What does it prove to know that 13 of the 15 States
9 with higher than average crime rates have Republican Governors?

10 (Applause)

11 What does it prove to know that 22 of the 24 States
12 with the lowest crime rates have Democratic Governors?

13 (Cheers and applause)

14 What does it prove to know that Maine has the fifth
lowest crime rate and that Maryland leads the Nation in violent
crime?

15 (Cheers and applause)

16 So if you want to believe the opposition, believe
17 only this part of their argument that when you can make this
kind of connection, somehow you prove that the other Party is
18 prone to crime.

19 But you and I know better. You and I know that crime
20 has nothing to do with Party. Crime has to do with the relation-
ships of people in a society in which not all of its members
21 as yet have an equal chance to improve their lives, and who
as a result in too many cases have no hope for improvement, who
22 as a result in too many cases live in intolerable conditions,
who in too many cases see no hope for improvement for their
children, who in too many cases have decided that because there
23 is no chance they are going to do something about it themselves.

24 You know, 50 percent of the crimes against property
25 in this country are committed by youngsters under the age of
18. Now, what does that prove?

1 That proves that kids from broken homes -- and these
2 can be in ghettos or in suburbs -- that kids in deprived cir-
3 cumstances, in impossible environmental conditions, without
4 proper parental guidance, without the proper influences, without
5 the proper educational institutions, are slowly slipping into
6 the wrong paths to the future, tempted by crime, tempted by
7 anyway they can to get the material things which they see others
8 enjoy without difficulty.

9 (Applause)

10 This is the sort of thing that leads to unrest. This
11 is the sort of thing that leads to crime. And remember, that
12 the responsibility for law and order, and the enforcement of
13 criminal statutes rests in the local and state governments and
14 not in Washington.

15 (Cheers and applause)

16 An enormously high percentage of crime is committed
17 by repeaters and many of the repeaters are youngsters who at
18 the time of their second crime are still under the age of 18.
19 Well, what does this say?

20 This says that in our correctional institutions, we
21 are not doing a proper job of rehabilitating these people into
22 useful places in society, when 50 percent of them upon release
23 commit crime again. And these correctional institutions are
24 not run by Washington. They are run by the States. All 50 of
25 them, across the country. And we haven't done what we need to
do to build penitentiaries and correctional institutions which
will correct these young people, direct them into constructive
useful lives.

This is one of the sources of crime and it is a source
that is as old as this century, at least, and it goes back to
the beginning of the Republic period. It wasn't invented in
the last eight years, nor was it invented from 1952 to 1960.
I think the sooner we get down to talking common sense about
crime, the more quickly are we going to come to grips with it.

(Applause)

For those who think by the simple act of electing
George Wallace as President you are on the next day going to
have peace and stability and order in this society --

(No, No.)

-- George Wallace, if he were to pursue the policies

1 which reflect his philosophy as announced in every State of this
2 country, day by day, over the telephone networks of this country,
3 would produce an aggravation of the basic causes of crime.

4 (Applause)

5 Because he would neglect these social causes -- he
6 doesn't think they are important, he doesn't think they are
7 relevant. He thinks the way to buy security is to build a wall
8 between various segments of our society. Those of us who have
9 roots in the old world know what happens when you build walls
10 between one segment of the community and another. You produce
11 insecurity for the people on both sides.

12 (Applause)

13 There is only one way to build safety and security in
14 a free society, and that is to knock down walls, to knock down
15 the barriers of discrimination, and disadvantage, and hatred
16 and hopelessness.

17 (Applause)

18 And that is a lesson that George Wallace has never
19 learned and he will never learn as long as he lives, if he
20 really means what he is saying to the American people this year.

21 (Applause)

22 His is an approach, with the social unrest of our times,
23 that must be hit and hit hard so that it is forever dismissed
24 from American public life.

25 (Applause)

26 Thomas Jefferson once said that when we begin to pile
27 people upon one another as in Europe, we will begin to eat one
28 another.

29 The Wallace syndrome is a manifestation of the inclin-
30 ation to eat one another.

31 Well, it has been a long day, and I don't want to
32 conduct a Senate filibuster here tonight.

33 (Laughter)

34 I really don't usually talk this long at one time,
35 it only seems that way.

1 But these are serious things and I do get deeply con-
2 cerned about them from time to time. I hope that you will
3 watch this campaign carefully. Listen carefully to what these
4 candidates say. Don't take my word for them. Candidates do
5 tend to exaggerate -- I don't intend to, but they do tend to.
6 But I am deeply and quietly and sincerely concerned about the
7 trend of things that are being stimulated and that are gaining
8 strength in this country, the country which was so different
9 in the days of my boyhood and the younger days of so many of
10 you in this room.

11 I think we do have to revitalize old values and old
12 morality, which to me means a society in which all of us learn
13 to work and live together in harmony and in peace and understand-
14 ing, notwithstanding those weaknesses and shortcomings which
15 cause us from time to time to hurt one another.

16 That is a part of it, too. Even within a family, its
17 members from time to time hurt one another. But that is not
18 to say that the lesson of love, of parents for children and
19 children for parents, is still not a valid human sentiment.

20 The same is true in our communities, in our society,
21 and in our country. So let's practice that lesson in this
22 election campaign.

23 (Applause)

24 - - -

25