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Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Trust and Confidence in Lewiston, Maine

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS OF SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
LEWISTON, MAINE
NOVEMBER 1, 1970

I feel, and I know that Jane does as well, that these weeks of traveling among all of you -- and there's so many from all sections of the State here tonight -- that this traveling has been in the nature of a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage home. We've had an opportunity to renew our energies, our faith in our people and in our hope for the ~~future~~ **future** of our state and of our country.

And to be able to end a campaign in a sense with this audience is very appropriate. This place where we stand and where we sit is close to the place of my origins. I went to school here in this city. In a sense, I began my political apprenticeship with many in this room. The political campaign of 1954 which resulted in our first great victory of the modern era began on this stage.

Some memories come flooding in upon all of us who have been privileged to move down that 16-year-old road. But this is not a time for memories. It's a time for looking ahead -- and looking ahead beyond November 3.

This is my ninth successive statewide campaign beginning with that first one for governor. And I've been a candidate in six of those campaigns. ~~As~~ As I think about them, I'm conscious of the fact that the Democratic Party has always regarded a political campaign as an opportunity to talk about and deal with the people's business. I can't recall ever regarding a campaign as an opportunity to destroy somebody else's reputation.

Or to destroy his character. Or to misrepresent his life's work. Reinhold Niebuhr once said this, "There is just enough bad in human beings to make democracy necessary, and there is just enough good in them to make ~~it~~ it possible." The challenge of leadership and of citizenship in our country is to try to make the good rather than the bad prevail.

What do people look for in candidates in a country like ours? Do they look for complete wisdom? Do they look for all of the answers instantly to all of the problems which press upon them? Do they look for ~~some~~ gifts?

I think what they look for is men of character, men of judgment, men of intelligence, men capable from time to time of summing up the understanding and the wisdom to deal with the complex problems that can afflict a complex country such as ours.

They don't expect and certainly never get perfection. They don't expect and never get men and women who never make mistakes. But in every campaign in which men and women seek public office, they've got a right to the opportunity to measure those who seek their support in accordance with the reasonable standards we would expect others to judge ourselves by. *

I was born in this state. I grew up in a town not far from here. I was the son of parents who were deeply concerned that I learn the difference between right and wrong. And I was privileged to have a father who knew how to define in words understandable to his children what that difference was.

I grew up in an environment where it was relatively easy to face life at a pace that made it possible to grow up in good health, with a good opportunity to get an education, with chances to enjoy the woods and the lakes and the streams of Oxford County.

I was fortunate enough to have teachers who took an interest in their students as children and who were interested in doing more than simply teaching them reading and writing and arithmetic, who were interested in addition to helping their young charges to become good citizens, healthy adults, with a respect for each other and for the quality of sympathy and understanding and compassion, with an ability to live with each other and to work with each other and to understand each other.

* They have a right to a reasonable opportunity to know the truth about candidates. And they've got a right, I think, to expect candidates to stick pretty close to the truth about each other.

The other day, I read an advertisement in several Maine papers I ~~have~~ never expected to see in a Maine political campaign. It began with a question, "What kind of a man is Edmund S. Muskie?" And then it offered an answer.

I expect to get bruises in political life. I'm not a child. I've been in politics a long time. But I know also that Maine people, including my opponent, have had an opportunity for a quarter of century to study me, to read or hear the thousands upon thousands of words that I've spoken, to evaluate all of the things that I've done in and out of political life.

And I know that they've done so with greater care than with most political figures in this state because of the peculiar circumstances of my political career. They had a chance for a quarter of a century to know what kind of a man I am.

Why did they wait until less than a week before election day to tell the people of Maine that I was the kind of a monster that they described in that advertisement the other day?

If I am as evil as they painted me to be, they had a responsibility to say so before. I was under the impression that we in America had a capacity to grow up. That ought to apply to politicians as well.

Don't they know how to deal in a direct, honest man-to-man fashion with their ~~oppositions?~~
~~oppositions?~~

Don't they know how to go to a man and say to his face if they believe what they said about me in that advertisement last week?

Don't they have the backbone to rely on the facts of a man's life-- what he actually says?

Do they have to distort what he says to try to ~~defeat~~ defeat him?

Do they have to distort what he's done in order to defeat him?

What kind of people are these who would use the American political process to abuse the truth to which the American people are entitled in a political campaign? They challenge us to a debate. To debate what? Their falsehoods. To debate what? Their assassinations of the characters of honorable Americans.

We live in a divided time in our country. If there is ever a time when we needed from leaders or potential leaders or would-be leaders a capacity to draw out the best of our people, now is such a time.

The Presidency and the Vice Presidency of the United States are more than political jobs. They are the most eminent places of leadership within the gift of this country to bestow.

If any political office has the capacity to call out greatness in a man, history tells us, those do. And we've got the right to expect of a man who occupies the Presidency on the Saturday and Sunday before an American election day an appeal to the best that we can do ^{for} our country in the years ahead, *the best of what we are for our country in the years ahead.*

This is a time to ask the American people to make our country great, not small. This is a time when we ought to be reaching out to each other, not simply to destroy each other. This is a time when political parties and political opponents ought to be testing their ideas against each other, testing their wisdom against each other, testing their capacity to think and to innovate against each other.

This is no time to be competing to see which party is best suited to Halloween and the witches, the goblins, and the trick or treating and the pranks and the games that children play on that holiday.

Don't they understand that the fabric of a people's understanding, capacity for sympathy and compassion is a fragile thing. And it is that kind of a delicate, intangible thing that has great strength when it is relied upon and developed, great strength to bind us together, not withstanding our great differences in our hostilities and our suspicions and our distrust.

Oh, I wish I could see a President in such a time appealing to his people to trust each other, to have faith in the perfect ability of other Americans, to believe that whoever we are wherever we live we can, if given a chance, overcome our weaknesses and our shortcomings...that we can be as we have been a great people.

Presidents have done that in the past -- great Presidents. And they have led their people through difficult and perilous times--to higher plateaus and achievements in peace and justice for our people.

Why can't this President try that role? Why?

Is victory so important? Is a few more seats in the Congress so important? What kind of a country does he want to lead? A country made up of people who have a capacity of believing in each other? Or a country made up of ~~people~~ ~~from~~ people who are learning to hate each other?

Which kind of a country does he want to lead? If he wants a whole country, ^{if he wants a healthy country, if he wants a great country,} if he wants a growing country, then why doesn't he treat us like that. He might be amazed how the American people would respond to that kind of leadership. These past two years have taken me more away from you and the people of Maine than has ever been the case -- more than I like. And I suspect this will be true in the months ahead. Before the election separates us again, I hope you always believe what is true -- that I am one of you, I couldn't be anything else if I tried.

I can't expect that you will always know fully why I say what I do or what I do what I do, because you ~~may~~ won't always have all the facts. But I want you to believe that whatever I say or do, I'll always measure against the people of Maine in my home town, in my State, have taught me of the fundamental values that ought to govern a man's life.

We have an election coming. I'd like to urge you to give all of your support to this young man who has served you well as Governor and who has acquired the ability to give you great service in the next four years.

I hate to make this next point but Peter and Bill don't really need it that badly, but they've earned it as well and I know you're going to give them your support...