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United States
of America

ELECTION EVE REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
CAPE ELIZABETH, MAINE, NOVEMBER 2, 1970

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 92nd CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

EXCERPTS
JULY 19, 1971

Senate

My Fellow Americans—I am speaking from Cape Elizabeth, Maine—to discuss with you the election campaign which is coming to a close.

In the heat of our campaigns, we have all become accustomed to a little anger and exaggeration.

Yet—on the whole—our political process has served us well—presenting for your judgment a range of answers to the country's problems . . . and a choice between men who seek the honor of public service.

That is our system.

It has worked for almost two hundred years—longer than any other political system in the world.

And it still works.

But in these elections of 1970, something has gone wrong.

There has been name-calling and deception of almost unprecedented volume.

Honorable men have been slandered.

Faithful servants of the country have had their motives questioned and their patriotism doubted.

This attack is not simply the overzealousness of a few local leaders.

It has been led . . . inspired . . . and guided . . . from the highest offices in the land.

The danger from this assault is not that a few more Democrats might be defeated—the country can survive that.

The true danger is that the American people will have been deprived of that public debate—that opportunity for fair judgment—which is the heartbeat of the democratic process.

And that is something the country cannot afford.

Let me try to bring some clarity to this deliberate confusion.

Let us begin with those issues of law and order . . . of violence and unrest . . . which have pervaded the rhetoric of this campaign.

I believe that any person who violates the law should be apprehended . . . prosecuted . . . and punished, if found guilty.

So does every candidate for office of both parties.

And nearly all Americans agree.

I believe everyone has a right to feel secure . . . on the streets of his city . . . and in the buildings where he works or studies.

So does every candidate for office of both parties.

And nearly all Americans agree.

Therefore, there is no issue of law and order . . . or of violence.

There is only a problem.

There is no disagreement about what we want.

There are only different approaches to getting it.

And the harsh and uncomfortable fact is that no one—in either party—has the final answer.

For four years, a conservative Republican has been Governor of California.

Yet there is no more law and order in California today than when he took office.

President Nixon—like President Johnson before him—has taken a firm stand.

A Democratic Congress has passed sweeping legislation.

Yet America is no more orderly or lawful—nor its streets more safe—than was the case two years ago . . . or four . . . or six.

We must deal with symptoms—

Strive to prevent crime;

Halt violence;

And punish the wrongdoer.

But we must also look for the deeper causes . . . in the structure of our society.

If one of your loved ones is sick, you do not think it is soft or undisciplined of a doctor . . . to try and discover the agents of illness.

But you would soon discard a doctor . . . who thought it enough to stand by the bed . . . and righteously curse the disease.

Yet there are those who seek to turn our common distress to partisan advantage—not by offering better solutions—but with empty threat . . . and malicious slander.

They imply that Democratic candidates for high office in Texas and California . . . in Illinois and Tennessee . . . in Utah and Maryland . . . and among my New England neighbors from Vermont and Connecticut—men who have courageously pursued their convictions . . . in the service of the republic in war and in peace—that these men actually favor violence . . . and champion the wrongdoer.

That is a lie.

And the American people know it is a lie. And what are we to think when men in positions of public trust openly declare—

That the party of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman which led us out of Depression . . . and to victory over international barbarism;

The party of John Kennedy who was slain in the service of the country he inspired;

The party of Lyndon Johnson who withstood the fury of countless demonstrations in order to pursue a course he believed in;

The party of Robert Kennedy, murdered on the eve of his greatest triumphs—

How dare they tell us that this party is less devoted or less courageous . . . in maintaining American principles and values . . . than are they themselves.

This is nonsense.

And we all know it is nonsense.

And what contempt they must have for the decency and sense of the American people to talk to them that way—and to think they can make them believe.

There is not time tonight to analyze and expose the torrent of falsehood and insinuation which has flooded this unfortunate campaign.

There is a parallel—in the campaigns of the early fifties—when the turbulent difficulties of the post-war world were attributed to the softness and lack of patriotism of a few . . . including some of our most respected leaders . . . such as General George Marshall. It was the same technique.

These attacks are dangerous in a more important sense—for they keep us from dealing with our problems.

Names and threats will not end the shame of ghettos and racial injustice . . . restore a degraded environment . . . or end a long and bloody war.

Slogans and television commercials will not bring the working man that assurance—of a constantly rising standard of life—which was his only a few years ago . . . and which has been cruelly snatched away.

No administration can be expected to solve the difficulties of America in two years.

But we can fairly ask two things: that a start be made—and that the nation be instilled with a sense of forward movement . . . of high purpose.

This has not been done.

Let us look, for example, at the effort to halt inflation.

We all agree that inflation must be arrested. This administration has decided it could keep prices down by withdrawing money from the economy.

Now I do not think they will ever control inflation this way.

But even if their policy was sound, the money had to come from someone.

And who did they pick to pay?

It was the working man . . . the consumer . . . the middle class American.

For example, high interest rates are a part of this policy.

Yet they do not damage the banks which collect them.

They hardly touch the very wealthy who can deduct interest payments from their taxes.

Rather they strike at every consumer who must pay exorbitant charges on his new car or house. And they can cripple the small businessman.

Their policy against inflation also requires that unemployment go up.

Again, it is the working man who pays the price.

In other fields the story is the same. They have cut back on health and education for the many . . . while expanding subsidies and special favors for a few.

They call upon you—the working majority of Americans—to support them while they oppose your interests.

They really believe that if they can make you afraid enough . . . or angry enough . . . you can be tricked into voting against yourself.

It is all part of the same contempt . . . and tomorrow you can show them the mistake they have made.

Our difficulties as a nation are immense, confused and changing.

But our history shows—and I think most of you suspect—that if we are ever to restore progress it will be under the leadership of the Democratic party.

Not that we are smarter or more expert—but we respect the people.

We believe in the people. And indeed we must—for we are of the people.

Today the air of my native Maine was touched with winter . . . and hunters filled the woods.

I have spent my life in this State . . . which is both part of our oldest traditions and a place of wild and almost untouched forests.

It is rugged country, cold in the winters, but it is a good place to live.

There are friends . . . and there are also places to be alone—places where a man can walk all day . . . and fish . . . and see nothing but woods and water.

We in Maine share many of the problems of America and, I am sure, others are coming to us.

But we have had no riots or bombings and speakers are not kept from talking.

This is not because I am Senator or because the Governor is a Democrat.

Partly, of course, it is because we are a small State with no huge cities . . . but partly it is because the people here have a sense of place.

They are part of a community with common concerns and problems and hopes for the future.

We cannot make America small.

But we can work to restore a sense of shared purpose, and of great enterprise.

We can bring back the belief—not only in a better and more noble future—but in our own power to make it so.

Our country is wounded and confused—but it is charged with greatness and with the possibility of greatness.

We cannot realize that possibility if we are afraid . . . or if we consume our energies in hostility and accusation.

We must maintain justice—but we must also believe in ourselves and each other—and we must get about the work of the future.

There are only two kinds of politics.

They are not radical and reactionary . . . or conservative and liberal. Or even Democratic and Republican. There are only the politics of fear and the politics of trust.

One says: You are encircled by monstrous dangers. Give us power over your freedom so we may protect you.

The other says: The world is a baffling and hazardous place, but it can be shaped to the will of men.

Ordinarily that division is not between parties, but between men and ideas.

But this year the leaders of the Republican party have intentionally made that line a party line.

They have confronted you with exactly that choice.

Thus—in voting for the Democratic party tomorrow—you cast your vote for trust—not just in leaders or policies—but for trusting your fellow citizens . . . in the ancient traditions of this home for freedom . . . and most of all, for trust in yourself.

"A PILGRIMAGE HOME" CLOSING REMARKS, MAINE SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN, 1970

I feel, and I know that Jane does as well, that these weeks of traveling among all of you—and there are so many from all sections of the State here tonight—that this traveling has been in the nature of a pilgrimage.

And I know that we have had an opportunity to renew our energies, our faith in our people and our hope for the 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 1964 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 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 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 gifts?

I think what they look for is men of character, men of judgment, men of intelligence, men capable from time to time of summoning 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.

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.

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 to understand each other.

The other day I read an advertisement in several Maine papers I 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 a century to study me, to read or hear the thousands upon thousands of words that I've spoken, to evaluate all of the things 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 monster 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 opposition?

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 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 assassination of the characters of honorable Americans?

We live in a divided time in our country. If there was 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 to bind us together, not withstanding our great differences and 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 perfectibility 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 for believing in each other? Or a country made up of people who are learning to hate each other?

What 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 won'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 why I do what I do, because you won't always have all the facts. But I want you to believe that whatever I say or do, I'll always measure it against what 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 hesitate to make this next point because 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. . . .

But whatever else you do on November 3rd, and in all the days and weeks and months and years ahead . . . if you forget everything else I've said tonight, do this for me: learn to trust each other because unless you do, unless you can, freedom in this country has no future.

There's no other way to put it. There's no other way to keep it. There's no other way to make it grow. There's no other way to build a country. Learn to trust each other. Not only when it's easy to do, but when it's hard to do as well; not only when things are peaceful, but when they're turbulent and even violent.

That doesn't mean that you become foolish about those who would do you harm. That doesn't mean that you don't enforce the laws or write better ones in order to keep the weaknesses in people under control.

But underlying it all must be this fabric of trust and confidence that only you can give to your country. It's the most important gift you have to bestow upon freedom in the United States of America. I know you will because you've done it in the past. I urge you to continue.

With that may we all say or may I say, on behalf of Jane and myself and our family, you've been good to us. You've given us a meaningful life for a quarter of a century. We'll always be grateful for it and we hope to conduct ourselves in such a way that you'll never be sorry that you did.