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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Senior Citizens in Bangor, Maine

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
BANGOR, MAINE
OCTOBER 21, 1970

I THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO BANGOR THIS MORNING.

AND FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT AN
ISSUE THAT SHOULD MEAN A GREAT DEAL TO ALL OF US -- IN MAINE AND
THROUGHOUT AMERICA.

FIRST, LET ME TELL YOU A STORY.

A DOCTOR -- AFTER EXAMINING HIS NEWEST PATIENT -- TOLD HIM,
"YOUR CONDITION IS EXCELLENT. HOW OLD DID YOU SAY YOU WERE?"

"~~SIXTY~~-NINE," THE PATIENT REPLIED.

"WELL," SAID THE DOCTOR, "YOU HAVE THE HEALTH OF A MAN OF SIXTY.
HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO KEEP SO FIT?"

"I THINK," SAID THE PATIENT, "MY CONDITION IS DUE TO AN AGREEMENT
MY WIFE AND I MADE WHEN WE GOT MARRIED. SHE PROMISED IF SHE GOT
MAD, SHE'D KEEP QUIET AND STAY IN THE KITCHEN UNTIL SHE CALMED DOWN.
AND I PROMISED THAT WHEN I GOT MAD, I'D KEEP QUIET TOO, AND JUST STEP
OUT OF THE HOUSE UNTIL I CALMED DOWN."

"BUT WHY WOULD THAT GIVE YOU SUCH A SOUND CONSTITUTION?" THE DOCTOR ASKED.

"WELL," REPLIED THE MAN, "I'VE LIVED WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL AN OUTDOOR LIFE."

THAT IS THE WAY WE LIKE TO THINK OF OUR SENIOR CITIZENS -- AS PEOPLE --

-- WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR;

-- WITH A LUST FOR LIFE;

-- WITH A HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

THAT IS THE WAY I THOUGHT OF MY FATHER...AND THE WAY MANY OF YOU MUST THINK OF YOURS.

BUT DOES REALITY FULLY REFLECT THAT IMAGE FOR EVERYONE?

THE HARD, SHORT ANSWER -- FOR MANY OF OUR ELDERLY -- IS "NO".

WOULD YOU BE CHEERFUL --

-- IF THE HOUSING YOU LIVED IN WAS SUBSTANDARD?

-- IF THE FOOD YOU CONSUMED WAS INSUFFICIENT?

-- IF THE HEALTH CARE YOU RECEIVED WAS INADEQUATE?

FOR MANY OF OUR ELDERLY, THOSE ARE THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE.

BEAR IN MIND --

-- THAT 118,000 OF OUR CITIZENS IN MAINE ARE 65 YEARS OF AGE AND
OLDER -- AND THEY COMPRISE 12.1 PERCENT OF OUR POPULATION;

-- THAT MORE THAN THREE-FOURTHS OF THEM DEPEND ON SOCIAL
SECURITY AS THEIR PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME;

-- THAT SOME 59,000 OF THEM RECEIVE LESS THAN HALF THE ANNUAL
INCOME THEY NEED TO MAINTAIN EVEN MINIMUM STANDARDS OF LIVING.

FOR THE MOST PART, THE SENIOR CITIZENS OF MAINE WERE BORN HERE...
AND RAISED HERE...AND MADE THEIR LIVING ~~HERE~~

BUT NO MATTER WHAT THEIR ORIGINS, OUR SENIOR CITIZENS HAVE
HELPED BUILD AMERICA.

THEY HAVE WORKED THE LAND...AND ENGAGED IN INDUSTRY...AND DEVELOPED
OUR COMMUNITIES.

THEY HAVE PAID THEIR TAXES...AND FOUGHT OUR WARS...AND PRESERVED
OUR INSTITUTIONS.

THEY HAVE DONE WHAT THE NATION HAS ASKED OF THEM...AND NOW THEY
HAVE GROWN OLD -- MANY OF THEM TO SPEND THE LATTER PART OF THEIR LIVES
IN UNDIGNIFIED AND IMPOVERISHED CIRCUMSTANCES.

WE HAVE BECOME AWARE --

-- HOW DIFFICULT IT IS FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS TO OBTAIN
THE FOOD THEY NEED TO STAY HEALTHY;

-- HOW THE COSTS OF MEDICAL CARE FOR THOSE OVER 65 AVERAGES THREE
TIMES MORE THAN THE COSTS FOR THOSE UNDER 65;

-- HOW OUR EMPLOYMENT SECURITY COMMISSION COULD FIND JOBS FOR
ONLY 9 PERCENT OF LAST YEAR'S ELDERLY JOB APPLICANTS IN MAINE.

READ THE REPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON THE AGING.

IT IS NOT ABOUT STATISTICS.

IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE --

-- PEOPLE UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF THEIR COMMUNITIES;

-- PEOPLE UNABLE TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES;

-- PEOPLE UNABLE TO GET THE ATTENTION THEY DESERVE;

-- PEOPLE LIKE MAINE'S TYPICAL OLDER PERSON -- A WIDOW, AGE 73,

WHO HAS LIVED IN MAINE ALMOST ALL HER LIFE IN THE SAME COUNTY WHERE SHE NOW RESIDES. SHE IS NOT WELL OFF FINANCIALLY. SHE FREQUENTLY GOES WITHOUT NUTRITIOUS FOOD. SHE IS LIKELY TO HAVE BAD EYESIGHT, POOR HEARING AND WALKING PROBLEMS.

AND SHE IS -- ONE OF US.

I THINK GOVERNOR CURTIS HAS PERFORMED A LASTING SERVICE TO MAINE -- BY FOCUSING OUR ATTENTION ON PROBLEMS WE HAVE NEVER APPROACHED ADEQUATELY ANYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY.

OF COURSE, WE HAVE ENACTED NATIONAL LEGISLATION OF VALUE -- SOCIAL SECURITY...MEDICARE...OLD AGE ASSISTANCE.

BUT WE HAVE NEVER REALLY CONSIDERED THE PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A FULLY-DEVELOPED NATIONAL POLICY.

ISN'T IT TIME WE ESTABLISH SUCH A POLICY --

-- OUT OF A SENSE OF DUTY?

-- OUT OF A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY?

-- OUT OF A SENSE OF COMPASSION?

-- A POLICY OF GIVING OUR SENIOR CITIZENS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE FULL PARTICIPANTS IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE.

INITIALLY, THAT MEANS A COORDINATED RESPONSE TO THE LEGITIMATE NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY.

IT MEANS --

-- RELIEVING THEIR PROPERTY TAX BURDENS;

-- EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES THEY

MIGHT UNDERTAKE TO GIVE THEIR LIVES MEANING;

-- EVEN DEVELOPING BETTER WAYS OF INFORMING THEM ABOUT PROGRAMS OF ASSISTANCE ALREADY AVAILABLE TO THEM.

IT ALSO MEANS ENACTING SPECIFIC MEASURES -- ON A NATIONAL LEVEL -- WHICH HAVE A POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING THEIR LIVES --

-- THE 10 PERCENT INCREASE IN SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS, NOW BEFORE THE CONGRESS;

-- THE ASSURANCE OF A BASIC MINIMUM INCOME FOR THE ELDERLY, UNDER THE PRESIDENT'S FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN -- WHICH I HAVE SUPPORTED AND WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT;

-- THE EXPANSION OF LOW-COST HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY -- AND
INSURANCE AGAINST ALL OF THEIR MEDICAL COSTS -- PRINCIPLES WHICH ARE
CONTAINED IN PENDING LEGISLATION THAT I HAVE CO-SPONSORED IN THE
SENATE.

ALL OF THESE MEASURES ARE IMPORTANT.

AND NONE OF THEM EXHAUSTS THE POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER ACTION.

BUT THE POINT I WANT TO EMPHASIZE TODAY IS THAT A PIECEMEAL
APPROACH -- NO MATTER HOW MANY PIECES IT CONSISTS OF -- WILL NEVER
BE ENOUGH -- IF OUR ATTITUDE REMAINS ONE OF DISTANCE...OF FEELING APART
FROM THE ELDERLY...OF ACTING AS IF WE ARE DOING THEM A FAVOR.

THERE IS NO NEED TO CREATE A "GENERATION GAP" BETWEEN US AND
OUR OLDER CITIZENS.

THERE IS NO GOOD REASON FOR THEM TO FEEL ISOLATED...OR FOR US TO
FEEL ASHAMED...PROVIDED WE SHOW THE UNDERSTANDING, THE RESPECT, AND THE
WILLINGNESS TO MEET THE STANDARD WHICH THE GOVERNOR'S REPORT SETS FORTH:

"THE TEST OF A PEOPLE IS HOW THEY BEHAVE TOWARD THE OLD."

THANK YOU.