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"Meet the Press" - Senator Edmund S. Muskie Interviewed on NBC Television

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M E E T T H E P R E S S

Produced by Lawrence E. Spivak

SUNDAY, JANUARY 16, 1972

GUEST:

SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE (D. Me.)

MODERATOR:

Lawrence E. Spivak

PANEL:

David S. Broder - Washington Post

Robert Novak - Chicago Sun-Times

R. W. Apple - The New York Times

Douglas Kiker - NBC News

: This is a rush transcript pro- :
: vided for the information and :
: convenience of the press. Accu- :
: racy is not guaranteed. In case :
: of doubt, please check with :
: MEET THE PRESS :
: -----

1 MR. SPIVAK: Our guest today on MEET THE PRESS is
2 Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine who, on January 4th,
3 officially entered the race for the Democratic presidential
4 nomination.

5 Senator Muskie came to the Senate in 1959 after having
6 served as Governor of Maine. He was the 1968 Democratic
7 vice presidential candidate.

8 MR. KIKER: Senator Muskie, at this point you are one of a
9 legion of Democrats who are seeking the presidential nomina-
10 tion. How would you describe the fundamental difference be-
11 tween you and all the others?

12 SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, there are differences, for differ-
13 ent human beings, and I assume in the course of the primaries
14 that differences of view on particular issues will arise, but
15 I think what we ought to understand what a primary campaign
16 is about is the process of selecting the best candidate, the
17 strongest candidate, to represent the party in the contest
18 against Mr. Nixon next fall.

19 Many of the candidates in the Democratic primary share
20 similar political philosophies. Their voting records, I
21 suspect, in the Senate will disclose similarities. The
22 differences are important, but the principal objective is to
23 select a candidate to represent the party.
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MR. KIKER: Then, Senator, are you saying the fundamental difference between you and all the others is that you are the strongest?

SENATOR MUSKIE: No, that is a judgment for the voters to make. I don't think a self/declaration of that kind by a candidate proves anything. Obviously none of us are in the race and wouldn't be unless we thought we had the strength, the political strength and the strength of view and the potential leadership/to do the job.

MR. KIKER: Senator, various political experts, writers, politicians, describe your candidacy more or less this way, that you are at this point in time the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. In fact people are saying that you may even have it tied up. That at this point in time everyone is waiting for you to trip, stumble or fall and that most other candidates are perfectly willing to help you. They are saying that your greatest asset is not that you especially appeal to anybody, but that you don't antagonize anybody, that people may not like you but they don't especially dislike you.

What is your reaction to this assessment of you as a candidate?

SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, I can think of other criticisms that might be more devastating, and I know there is going to be some and the fact that people don't dislike me I

1 would think is a plus, but I would hope there are positive
 2 reasons now. If there are not, that the more positive
 3 ones will emerge. I can't really, you know, react to
 4 criticisms if I am to do what I think I need to do
 5 in the primary and that is to give the people of the primary
 6 states positive reasons for supporting me and I hope
 7 that they have such reasons when they vote for me.

8 MR. KIKER: Do you think you are the frontrunner at
 9 this point?

10 SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, it is hard not to believe what
 11 you read, but I don't know what that means. It means
 12 that the press has made this label current,
 13 the polls give it some support, but what I am really
 14 aiming for is a majority of the votes in each of the
 15 primaries I enter and the nomination and the majority
 16 next November. So I don't know what it does, you know,
 17 to prove or disprove the point, whether or not I am
 18 a frontrunner.

19 (Announcements)

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1 MR. BRODER: Senator, I'd like to get into the subject
2 of Vietnam with as much time as Mr. Spivak will allow me on this
3 round.

4 Senator McCarthy was interviewed earlier today and he said
5 that the significant difference among the Democrats is not on
6 their present position on the war, but on their historical
7 record, and in what was apparently a reference to you he said
8 that "to say that you ought to be for me because I admit I was
9 wrong on the war in '68 is to ask people to credit you with
10 really bad judgment."

11 How do you respond to that?

12 SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, I haven't made the argument which
13 was the basis for his response. I said that I was wrong on
14 the war. I haven't said that was the reason why people should
15 support me. I hope that the considerations which voters will
16 take into account are much broader than that and that they
17 address themselves also to the future, the problems we face
18 today across the board and what we need to do about THEM. That
19 is not my argument for my candidacy. It is an explanation of
20 a past position.

21 MR. BRODER: An important future question then about
22 Vietnam is the American policy on aid to the Saigon regime
23 after the troop withdrawals are completed. When you were
24 asked about this subject last week, specifically whether you
25 would continue military aid to Saigon, you replied: "Some

1 transitional aid might be necessary, but I don't think that
2 continuing American military assistance should be the means for
3 a continuation of the war."

4 Frankly, that leaves me confused. Do you favor continuing
5 American military aid or not?

6 SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, I think the answer is quite clear.
7 The question of transitional aid would depend, I think, upon
8 the nature of our withdrawal, whether or not it is the result
9 of negotiated withdrawal and a negotiated date, a unilateral
10 date for withdrawal. It would depend also upon, I think,
11 what the military situation is with respect to the continuation
12 of the war. I think Americans want to end our involvement in
13 the war. I think Americans understand that military assist-
14 ance initially led to our greater involvement and to where we
15 now are and we ought not to repeat that mistake, so I think
16 all I can suggest as a guideline is that our military assist-
17 ance ought not to be the basis for a continuation of the war.
18 I think Americans want to be out of the war. It ought to be
19 clear-cut and definite.

20 MR. BRODER: But did you not vote last November for
21 the Cooper-Church Amendment which would cut off all
22 military spending by the United States in Vietnam except for
23 the purpose of withdrawal?

24 SENATOR MUSKIE: I have supported several amendments
25 designed -- and the only way that legislation can be designed --

1 to indicate my commitment to the objective of complete with-
2 drawal. It is difficult to shape this legislation always in
3 a way that accommodates itself to the realities of the
4 logistical problems and so on, but with respect -- as is the
5 case with so many Senators, we use these amendments to
6 indicate our fundamental position. Whatever questions we might
7 have as to the details. And so this is why I support Cooper-
8 Church; this is why I have supported McGovern-Hatfield;
9 this is why I have supported the various Mansfield amendments.

10 MR. APPLE: Senator, continuing on the subject of Vietnam
11 for a moment, Senator McGovern, one of your rivals for the
12 presidency or for the nomination, has been going around the
13 country saying flatly that he favored amnesty for those who have
14 gone to Canada to evade the draft and have gone elsewhere.
15 Your position has been somewhat less clear. I wonder if you
16 could state your position as it now stands on the question of
17 amnesty.

18 SENATOR MUSKIE: I think, one, that when the war is over,
19 and the fighting is ended and the dying of Americans is ended
20 in Vietnam that one of our objectives ought to be the repatria-
21 tion of those who left the country under the pressures of the
22 draft in response to their protest of the war. I do not set
23 this group apart as separate from other groups of young people
24 who have been affected by the war; those who have gone and
25 died; those who have gone and fought and returned, some with

1 a drug habit, most with their lives interrupted, with their
2 occupations interrupted, with their education interrupted, the
3 prisoners of war. All of these are young people many of whom
4 protested the war morally but took a different view of their
5 obligation under the draft and I don't think that you take
6 one group^{out} of these for special treatment now. I think when
7 the war is over we consider the problems of all of them,
8 including the objectives, and I think there must be a
9 national objective of repatriating these young people under
10 some conditions which we will have to work out.

11 MR. APPLE: But you are not willing to say now
12 that when the war is over, which is your stated goal, the
13 prompt ending of the war was your stated goal in your speech
14 in Manchester on the sixth, you are not willing to say when that
15 is reached you will grant amnesty to these people who are out
16 of the country now?

17 SENATOR MUSKIE: No, because I cannot bring myself to say
18 that and in effect say to those who are still fighting and
19 dying, "Your obligation under the draft continues, with all
20 of the risks."

21 But these others who have left the country, also protest-
22 ing, are going to be given special treatment now and their
23 burdens completely lifted now.

24 MR. APPLE: Senator, are you saying then that those
25 who do advocate amnesty are undercutting the morale of the

1 people who are fighting in Vietnam by making these people --

2 SENATOR MUSKIE: I do not attempt to characterize the
3 view of anyone else. Obviously they are moved, as I am moved, by
4 the problem of these young people who left the country and I
5 have tried to indicate my concern about that problem.

6 They simply have a different approach to it now than I do.
7 I have explained my view and the reasons for it and I don't
8 think that requires characterizing theirs.

9 MR. NOVAK: Senator Muskie, in the questioning so far you
10 have declined to give a yes or no answer to the question as to
11 whether you would cut off aid to the Saigon regime. You have
12 declined to give a yes or no answer on the question of
13 amnesty to those who have fled the draft or
14 deserted the army. Do you think that is consistent with the
15 politics of trust that you are talking about?

16 SENATOR MUSKIE: I think you have misstated what I have
17 done here today. I have not declined an answer. I have given
18 an answer, and I think it is clear, and I think it is the
19 responsibility of anyone seeking the presidency to be clear in
20 his views of what must be done about these problems. You are
21 suggesting that the only clear answer is a one-word answer,
22 yes or no. These problems are not that simple or that clear.
23 Very few of the problems that rise to the level of a presi-
24 dential campaign are simple problems. It suggests to me that
25 for every problem that comes to my attention, I must be able

1 to say yes or no is to ignore the complexity of these prob-
2 lems.

3 MR. NOVAK: Here is a question, sir, that perhaps you can
4 give a clear answer to. In your opening statement you said,
5 "It is not good enough to pile arms upon arms." Now,
6 specifically how much would you reduce arms spending and in what
7 areas would you reduce arms spending?

8 SENATOR MUSKIE: I started a series of hearings this summer
9 on this very question. I don't think that you can, in advance,
10 specify a number that fixes the line between national security
11 and national insecurity. The budget-making process which pre-
12 occupies the President 12 months of every year cannot be reduced
13 to a single number, or a single line. I have taken the posi-
14 tion clearly that in the past we have been too motivated by an
15 urge to pile arms upon arms without a rational examination
16 of what our real security needs are. This is a hostile world.
17 We live in it and, as the world's greatest power, we must be
18 responsive to our responsibilities in it, including our
19 national security. I refuse to reduce that to a single
20 budget number.

21 I have indicated in my votes in the Senate my view that
22 we have to practice restraint in our military budget as we do in
23 our non-military budget
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1 MR. NOVAK: Well, without getting into numbers, Senator,
2 could you say simply whether, in view of the tremendous
3 Soviet arms buildup, you would advocate, as President, a net
4 reduction in defense spending in real dollars?

5 SENATOR MUSKIE: I have advocated that.

6 MR. NOVAK: Where would you cut it?

7 SENATOR MUSKIE: Again, you want me to frame a defense
8 budget here in response to your question --

9 MR. NOVAK: Don't you think the voters are entitled to know
10 that if they are going to vote for you for President?

11 SENATOR MUSKIE: I think the voters should have a
12 thoughtful, rational budget built upon principles that a
13 candidate clearly enunciates. I don't think the voters
14 would trust a budget that I produced this noon in response to
15 your question.

16 MR. NOVAK: When do you think that --

17 SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, elect me President and I will try
18 to present one.

19 MR. NOVAK: We have to take it on faith until you are
20 inaugurated as President?

21 SENATOR MUSKIE: What you are saying to me, Mr. Novak, is
22 that today
23 because you can take this question into every domestic area
24 and say "Senator, since you are running for President, why
25 don't you produce a housing budget for me today? Why

2 1 don't you produce an education budget for me today?
2 All I can do with respect to budgets is to lay out my
3 priority, my sense of values, my objectives. That I have
4 been doing for a year. That I will continue to do, but what
5 you are saying to me is "Senator, unless you can produce a
6 number -- meaning budgets -- related to each of these
7 objectives, you are not measuring up to your responsibilities.

8 MR. NOVAK: I am not asking for any number, Senator,
9 I was asking that in view, since this is a little
10 different than housing because it involves national
11 survival, that at any time during your campaign you will say
12 exactly what kind of defense spending you think can be
13 reduced.

14 SENATOR MUSKIE: I think if you have examined my record,
15 and I suspect you have somewhat in order to pose the
16 question, that you have found already some of my views that
17 will give a clue as to what my approach will be. I will
18 attempt to repeat those, expand upon them and refine them.

19 MR. KIKER: A two-part question about Vietnam: If
20 you had been in the White House, first of all how would you
21 have gotten us out of Vietnam quicker than Mr. Nixon has --

22 MR. SPIVAK: Let's hold the second part until we have had
23 the first.

24 SENATOR MUSKIE: The initiative I would have taken -- and
25 of course it would be self-serving to suggest what the result

3 1 would have been, but I can suggest what I think the result
2 would have been. The initiative would have been to say
3 to the other side in Paris that I am willing to negotiate
4 a definite date for complete withdrawal of American forces,
5 tied to just two conditions. One, the return of our prisoners,
6 and secondly the safe withdrawal of our remaining forces.

7 Now I think that if that initiative had been taken
8 that we would be closer to complete withdrawal today than
9 we are. I have said that for almost two years now
10 and I see no reason to change it.

11 MR. KIKER: The second part then, Senator. Let's
12 assume you are elected President and you inherit a residual
13 American force in Vietnam of 30-odd thousand troops, that
14 those troops are still there, that the other side says that we
15 will release the American prisoners if you set a withdrawal
16 date, if you will stop all economic and military aid to South
17 Vietnam, if you will withdraw all American troops and all
18 air power.

19 How would you get us out of Vietnam, if you were elected
20 President?

21 SENATOR MUSKIE: My objective would be the same, and
22 in so far as one can try to anticipate what conditions
23 might be a year from now, I think the initiative would still be
24 credible if conditions are similar to what they are now.

25 Now I can hypothesize all kinds of other conditions,

4 1 as you might. All I can do is relate it to what it is now.
2 My objective would be complete withdrawal. My objective
3 would be to take a negotiation initiative in the hope that
4 that would be the best way to get our prisoners back and
5 to achieve this other objective of safe withdrawal. I
6 think if we had taken such an initiative, we would not have
7 had to take the Cambodian initiative or the Laos
8 initiative in the name of safe withdrawal of forces, for
9 example.

10 MR. BRODER: A couple of questions, Senator, going to this
11 matter of trust in government and in yourself, that I
12 hope can be answered briefly: Are you willing to make a
13 commitment to hold weekly on-the-record press conferences
14 throughout this campaign and if you should be elected, after
15 you are President?

16 SENATOR MUSKIE: Regular press conferences, yes. Whether
17 the weekly is necessarily the harness into which I put myself
18 now, I am not prepared to say. Regular, yes.

19 MR. BRODER: A second question. I suppose one of the
20 greatest sources of distrust in government and in politicians
21 is the way in which they raise the money to finance their
22 campaigns. You have said you raised about a million or
23 a million two for your campaign last year. Are you willing
24 to disclose now the sources of that money?

25 SENATOR MUSKIE: I am willing to do what the law requires.

5 MR. BRODER: The law does not require that, as you know
6 perfectly well. I am asking, are you willing as a matter
7 of example and to illustrate your commitment to this politics
8 of trust, voluntarily to make those sources public?

9 SENATOR MUSKIE: Is your question completed?

10 MR. BRODER: Yes, sir.

11 SENATOR MUSKIE: Then let me say that I have done what the
12 law requires. The law is inadequate. I have supported
13 reform of the law. I have testified for that reform as to
14 campaign spending limits and as to disclosure requirements
15 and we will have legislation of that kind. Now
16 you are asking me whether it is possible for a candidate
17 unilaterally to write a new standard of conduct. I
18 haven't found that possible.

19 MR. APPLE: Senator, you say you haven't found it
20 possible unilaterally to write a new standard of conduct
21 and yet as David's question implied, you are saying to
22 the people: Trust Muskie. That is even one of the slogans
23 on some of your bumper stickers. Why isn't it possible
24 to set a new standard of conduct? Isn't that what you are
25 trying to do for the country?

SENATOR MUSKIE: Well the problem is -- for example,
let me give you a for-example: In 1970 when I was a candidate
for reelection to the Senate, we had the problem of separating
fund raising related to our national political operation

1 and my Senate political operation, and in order to avoid
2 any difficulties with respect to confusion in the public
3 mind, we disclosed both, and that is the standard I'd like
4 to meet. But I found that in the process, the fact that I
5 disclosed made me not an example but a target. People
6 who reported -- whose names I reported, were then
7 used as a target, and those candidates who did not disclose
8 were not a target. It is understandable. I lived with
9 that, I had no problem with it, but when you set one standard
10 for one candidate and a different standard for others,
11 number one, you limit his possibilities for raising money --
12 that is a very practical fact -- secondly you make him a target
13 when you don't the others.

14 MR. APPLE: In other words, you are saying to us the
15 American political system is in such bad shape and is
16 so corrupt that if you reveal the list of your contributors
17 you can't make an effective campaign for the Presidency?

18 SENATOR MUSKIE: That isn't what I said. What I said
19 is that the willingness of people to contribute -- and it
20 may be nothing more than the problem of reconciling their action
21 with the views of their employers, or with neighbors or what
22 have you, the fact they are subject to an unequal requirement
23 inhibits them, whether for good reasons or bad, whether for
24 corrupt reasons or non-corrupt reasons. You just can't set
25 this kind of a standard unilaterally. And if you have any
question about that, you might try it sometime.

1 MR. SPIVAK: We have less than three minutes.

2 MR. NOVAK: Senator Muskie, there was a recent Federal
3 Court decision regarding the school system in Richmond that
4 everyone agrees will, if upheld by the Supreme court, lead to
5 massive compulsory busing for required school integration.
6 Do you welcome that result?

7 SENATOR MUSKIE: I don't welcome this problem at all.

8 MR. NOVAK: I didn't say the problem; the result, sir. Of
9 massive busing?

10 SENATOR MUSKIE: You don't mind if I answer the question
11 in my own way? I don't welcome the problem at all and I empha-
12 size "problem" because it is the problem that leads to uncomfort-
13 able results. Obviously busing is a difficult problem and may
14 I say the least desirable answer to the problem of bringing
15 quality education to those who have been denied it because of
16 racial segregation in the past. I don't think that busing
17 is the total answer at all. Massive busing of children. You
18 know, without any reference at all to the time and distance
19 factors that are involved is not a desirable answer, but it is
20 an answer.

21 In many instances it is the only short-term answer and so
22 it is an instrument or a tool that must be taken into account.

23 Now, I haven't read the 300-odd pages of the Richmond
24 school decision and I would not attempt to judge it in those
25 terms, but I am not prepared to say either that busing is no

1 answer or that it ought to be excluded. We are going to have
2 to find many ways to get at this problem of bringing quality
3 education within the reach of young blacks and other
4 minorities who have been discriminated against. Busing is one
5 tool. Change in residential patterns is another. Change in
6 employment patterns is another. The building of transit systems
7 adequate to carry people about from homes to jobs and so on.
8 It is a complex problem and I simply do not narrow the answer,
9 as people are tempted to do, to the one question of busing. It
10 is too narrow.

11 MR. NOVAK: Sir, one of your opponents for the nomination,
12 Senator Jackson, has taken a much less equivocal stand against
13 busing and for strong national defense --

14 SENATOR MUSKIE: I don't think he has, but you can
15 describe it as less equivocal if you like.

16 MR. NOVAK: Would you think his views on those subjects
17 would disqualify him as your potential runningmate?

18 SENATOR MUSKIE: I am not in the business of disqualifying
19 people at this point.

20 MR. SPIVAK: I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is almost
21 up and I am afraid we won't be able to get in another question
22 or another answer.

23 (Next week: Hugh Scott, (R. Penna.) Minority Leader, U.S.
24 Senate.)
25