

April 9, 1981

EDMUND MUSKIE: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Senators, it is a pleasure to be here. I am not entirely sure why I am here, but that you should have invited me to come to speak to you presumably on any subject of my own choosing is an honor which I appreciate and warmly welcome. Legislative service was indeed my first public service. I never planned a political life. I had returned from the war in 1945 and resumed the practice of law. Clients weren't very plentiful and the local Democratic Committee persuaded me to run for the Legislature, a political ambition I had never entertained up to that moment, and I had to run, God forbid, against a Republican incumbent which was a considerable challenge in my state in those days and still is but it is somewhat more competitive. But in any case I won the election and entered upon my first term as a legislator and astounded to find out how one-sided the situation in the Legislature was. I think there were only two Democratic Senators out of thirty-three in the Upper House and twenty-four Democratic legislators out of the one hundred and fifty-one in the Lower House and we were treated in accordance with our numbers. We were ignored. I remember my first effort was to undertake to make sure that there was Democratic representation on every committee which wasn't the case when I arrived. As a matter of fact, as I remember the figures, eighty-five percent of the legislation was referred to committees on which there were no Democrats whatsoever. We served on none of the important ones, such as, Judiciary, Legal Affairs, Appropriations, Taxation, Highways. We didn't have any service on those. I think we had someone on the Fisheries Committee which I take it wouldn't be very important in Nebraska. It was in Maine but there weren't many Democrats who came from the costal towns of the state. In any case, I found that experience among the most enjoyable of my life and it tempted me to return for a second term and then a third term and then I left politics forever. This was in 1951. While the rest of the story has been told and I am not here to repeat a biographical sketch of my life but I went on from that and gradually my entire life became devoted to politics. I entered politics at a time when notwithstanding the one party nature of my state, politics was regarded as a respectable profession which engaged the interest and enthusiasm of citizens as well as candidates. So although running for office for a Democrat in those days was a challenge, it was also fun and it was fulfilling and it was rewarding, not in material terms but in terms of the values that one acquires in the day to day exchange with citizens on a constructive basis. One of my regrets after thirty-five years in politics is that the profession has come to be regarded with cynicism, suspicion and distrust by so many of our American people. Politics to me is an