

Muskie Replied for Party Because of His 'Stature'

By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

Senator Edmund S. Muskie's nationwide television broadcast on Monday night, which the politicians believe strengthened his position at the top of the list of potential Democratic Presidential candidates, was neither his idea nor his supporters'.

Nevertheless, Senator George S. McGovern of South Dakota, who also hopes to head his party's ticket in 1972, was said to feel he "got conned" and to have called the Muskie television appearance "politics with a vengeance."

The idea for the 15-minute paid broadcast, which was shown on all three commercial networks after a recorded speech by President Nixon, came from Geoffrey Cowan, a 28-year-old new-left writer who is a lawyer in Washington.

Mr. Cowan was active in Senator Eugene J. McCarthy's Presidential campaign in 1968 and he and many of the other Democrats who planned, financed and wrote the Muskie broadcast are identified with the wing of the party that supported the Minnesota Democrat and Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York in 1968.

Muskie's 'Stature' Cited

They agreed, however, that someone had to go on television to counter President Nixon's appeal for votes and that, according to Mr. Cowan, Senator Muskie was "the only guy with enough stature to oppose the President."

They realized that the mere appearance of the Maine Senator as the spokesman for his party the night before the Congressional elections was bound to strengthen his position at the top of the list of potential Presidential candidates, but they saw no alternative to the 1968 Vice-Presidential nominee.

Many politicians recalled that in 1966 Richard M. Nixon asked the Republican party to allow him to make a similar 11th hour television broadcast. Ray C. Bliss, then the Republican national chairman, refused, arguing that such a broadcast would make Mr. Nixon appear the heir apparent to the Presidential nomination.

After Mr. Nixon was elected President two years later, Mr. Bliss was dismissed as party chairman.

A Talk Was Imperative

A broadcast by a Democrat Monday night seemed imperative, however, since President Nixon had already reserved network time to make political capital of the incident in San Jose, Calif., last Thursday night when several hundred demonstrators threw rocks at the President after a campaign speech.

Following is the chronology of the events leading up to the Muskie speech, as put together from interviews with Mr. Cowan and several other Democrats:

Mr. Cowan was walking home from his office Friday night when he saw in a newspaper that Mr. Nixon had scheduled his nationwide television speech.

He said he became angry because "one way or another I'm convinced that Nixon created the episode at San Jose." "It was a little like the Reichstag fire," he said, a reference to the fire in the German parliament in 1933 that led to Hitler's election as chancellor. Most historians agree the fire was planned by Hitler supporters.

Mr. Cowan that night called Joseph A. Califano, the former special assistant to President Johnson, who is now general counsel of the Democratic National Committee. Mr. Califano agreed that someone should reply to Mr. Nixon, but he said that the committee had no money to pay for a broadcast and that it would be impossible for the committee to choose among the different Presidential aspirants.

Mr. Califano and Mr. Cowan

agreed that the solution was to form a new political committee with independent funds.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Cowan spoke with Lawrence F. O'Brien, the Democratic National chairman, and obtained Mr. O'Brien's tacit approval for the new committee.

Mr. Cowan then reached Sam Brown, the former coordinator for the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, and Mr. Brown was able to persuade W. Averell Harriman, the former Governor of New York and diplomat, to head the new organization, which was called the Committee for National Unity.

"Muskie Agreed"

It was not until the middle of the afternoon on Saturday that Mr. Califano finally called Senator Muskie and explained the situation. Mr. Muskie agreed to make the broadcast.

The Maine Senator then called Richard Goodwin, who was a speech writer for President Kennedy and Senator McCarthy, and asked Mr. Goodwin to prepare his speech. Mr. Goodwin wrote Saturday afternoon and into the night and then drove from his farm in Kingfield, Me., to Senator Muskie's home in Waterville.

On Saturday and Sunday, money was raised for the broadcast. Arnold Picker, chairman of the executive committee of United Artists, who is Senator Muskie's chief fund raiser, arranged for contributions totaling \$50,000.

Mr. Harriman signed a note for about \$100,000 more, with the understanding that he would be paid back from contributions received after the broadcast. John D. Rockefeller 4th, Secretary of State of West Virginia, gave \$1,500 toward repaying Mr. Harriman.

On Sunday and Monday, Mr. Muskie personally called Senator McGovern, Senator McCarthy, former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, Senator Harold E. Hughes of Iowa and a number of other Democrats, informing them of his speech and asking for suggestions for material to include in it.

Senator Muskie made the tape for his broadcast Monday morning in Cape Elizabeth, Me.

Senator Hughes said today that "there had to be a response to Nixon" and that he was "pleased there could be a spokesman who would contrast and bring out the problems the way Muskie did."

A spokesman for Mr. Humphrey said the former Vice President was also "delighted" to have Senator Muskie go on television.

Some other potential Presidential candidates were less than happy, however, and felt they should have been included in a joint broadcast.

Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Rockefeller and a number of other Democrats who helped in planning the speech emphasized in interviews that their participation was in no way intended to commit them to Mr. Muskie or any other candidate for the Presidency.