



*"in this place . . . ."*

**SITKA, ALASKA**

**DEMOCRATIC STATE CONVENTION**

**April 5, 6, 7, 1968**

**MINUTES**

Address of  
SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY

(Introduction by Senator Ernest Gruening)

Fellow Democrats. I mentioned this morning that ten years ago John Fitzgerald Kennedy, then a United States Senator, was sufficiently interested and concerned with Alaska that he came up here, taking himself from his busy schedule to speak in four different Alaskan cities on behalf of the prospective statehood Democratic ticket with results that you all know.

Then when he was running for the presidency, he was represented up here in his arrangements by his younger brother, Ted, and it was at that time certain that the Kennedys were all deeply concerned with this infant state which was about to come into being and which they had helped so much to bring into the full equality of self-government.

And when Jack became President, he did everything he could to help this state get the proper start.

And now the mantle of Jack has fallen on his two brothers, worthy successors of one of the greatest and most beloved men in all our history. (Applause)

Now Ted in the Senate, despite a modest self-effacement which is one of his most charming characteristics, has been one of the most effective senators.

He has cast aside without violating it the position that freshman senators should be largely seen but not heard. He has been active in every field of human endeavor, interested in the matters of poverty, racial discrimination, care of the young, care of the aged. He has signally opened up his guns on the unfairness of the draft and has proposed reforms that are acceptable to every intelligent and compassionate human being.

I could speak at great length on the great impression that he has made, the great record that he has already established in the United States Senate, but I think at this time it would be proper for me to yield to him to give you this message from the heart that represents the fine tradition of the Kennedy family, their idealism, their practical grasp of all our important problems, and so without further delay I want to give you my friend, that great United States Senator, Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts. (Applause. Mr. Kennedy received a standing ovation.)

Senator Kennedy's Address

Thank you very much, Senator Gruening, your Chairman, Chairman Guess, who is a long-time friend and classmate of mine from a few years ago when we were in law school together, Senator Bartlett who is unable to be here with us today but there can be no meeting of Democrats in this State without recognizing his presence in spirit if

not in fact, your distinguished National Committeeman, Alex Miller who with your National Committee woman were so kind and generous to me today in adjusting the schedules of this convention as all of you have been to meet the problems of scheduling of myself and others as well, to your State Chairman who has been extremely hospitable in his welcome, your Vice-Chairman, to all of those who greeted me out at the airport and who have been with us today, to the representatives of our distinguished other Presidential candidates, Congressman Edwards who I have known for a long time and who I see here and who I know has spoken effectively for Senator McCarthy and whose record in the Congress is outstanding. To my old friend, Gene Foley, who's representing the Vice President . . . none of us are quite sure what he is representing him for. (Laughter) I have a pretty good idea, and I was saying earlier when we shared a caucus, I used to see Gene Foley in the mountains, hills and dales of West Virginia representing the then Senator Humphrey at that time and it is always a pleasure to see him again. To all of you, let me say what a pleasure it is to serve in the United States Senate with a combination of Senator Gruening and Senator Bartlett.

Those of us from Massachusetts feel a special sense of affection for Senator Gruening who spent many years of his earlier life as one of the outstanding editors of one of our great newspapers in that state, was concerned about the issues involving mankind at that time many years ago and has continued his concern and his deep sense of feeling about the well-being and the welfare of his fellow citizens.

This state is extremely well represented and I can say what a pleasure it is for me as a Senator from a maritime state to be able to be counseled by these two great senators, Senator Gruening and Bob Bartlett who have been interested in the problems of the sea, the sea-coast and the problems of ports, who have concerned themselves about conservation, the great salmon breeding grounds of our nation, and have, I think, made extraordinary contributions, not only to their state but to our nation.

When Senator Gruening stands on the Senate floor and speaks about the interests of this state, he speaks not only for Alaska and not just for the Democratic party, he speaks for all Americans and all Americans listen. (Applause) And it's a pleasure to be with him today.

Senator Robert was scheduled to be here in Sitka today to address this great convention of Democrats in a great state. He was prepared to speak to you of the challenges we face together as one nation, one country in the uncertain world in which we live. He would have been proud to be in the company of the men and women who are truly America's new frontiersmen, people who have pitted themselves against the elements as did our forebears in New England, people whose courage and independence is looked upon by all Americans as symbolic of all of our ideals.

But there are times for all things. There is a time to talk to Democrats and a time to talk to all men regardless of party. There is a time to recount our past and recall those in our party who have built

a nation, and there are times to focus on the present, to assure a future more secure. There is a time for meeting with friends to discuss the political challenges of the coming months, challenges created by man and to be won or lost by man. And there are times to accept for the moment what God has given to us or taken from us.

This Sunday in Sitka is a time to meet in the full dignity of our sorrow for this is a day of mourning for Martin Luther King, for Washington, for Detroit, Memphis and Chicago and it should also be a day of mourning in Sitka, for as the earthquakes of Alaska were felt in Boston, so the impact of the shot in Tennessee must be felt in this city.

Events occur that alter the course of our nation, events that must be recognized for what they tell us of ourselves, where we stand in reality rather than in our fondest dreams. Certain events, a tragic affair occurred in Memphis, Tennessee Thursday evening when Martin Luther King was shot and killed and the tragedy of that occurrence is still upon us and may remain with us for many days to come.

And so today I will not make a political speech. Today I wish to share with you my personal thoughts in a time of sorrow and in a time of fear.

As we meet today, we should know that ten thousand federal troops have been stationed in your nation's capital. They surround the White House. They surround Capitol Hill. The people of Washington, D.C. have been ordered off the streets from 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon until 6:30 in the morning. Firemen who are attempting to fight the blazes in the District of Columbia have taken gunfire. Last night there were fires in 70 Washington stores and there is a red glow over the city this afternoon.

The City of Chicago is also under a curfew and National Guard troops have been called in by the Governor.

I am not stressing these things to be an alarmist or to strike fear into your hearts. I tell you these things because they are occurring and until we recognize things for what they are, until we recognize how serious a situation confronts our nation, we will never be able to meet the crises or afford realistic or meaningful solutions.

A man of vision has made the observation that the most exciting, the most dramatic, the most promising development for all mankind in the second thousand years since the birth of Christ is the United States of America.

Never before in the history of the world have a people developed a form of government and a set of ideals so close to the most intimate dreams and wishes of all men as we have in America.

If any man ever doubted the good intentions of his fellow man, if any man ever wondered whether the institutions of government could be responsive to human needs, if any man ever yearned for a way of life

that satisfied his desires for human freedom and dignity, he could look to America.

This was our image, in truth this was America as we knew it, as we grew in it and as we have taught our children. Yet one feels today that we have been so content to live with what we were convinced our country was, we have refused to take sight of what, in the decade of the sixties, our country has become.

If we are willing to face it, all of the ugly signs are there to see. It seems that we have lost hold of our communities. It seems as though our country is pulling apart into separate societies who do not know one from another. Separate societies of the rich and the poor, of the black and the white, of the old and the young where whites have jobs and Negroes have unemployment, where the middle class live in suburbs and the poor are left in the ghettos, where one group of Americans looks upon another group of Americans with growing distrust and even dread and where, unfortunately, not because we lack the good will, but because we lack the faith in ourselves, our response often is to bolt the door, to hire more police and to stay away as far as we can from the centers of violence.

In this decade we have lived through periods of more hate and violence than perhaps any other time in the history of our country. It is a decade the likes of which we must never and we can never live through again.

But as we approach the seventies, we must keep in mind the events of the sixties or we will be compelled, as has been said, to relive the past we have forgotten.

The death of Martin Luther King was not the work of the white society, it was the work of a sad mind filled with hate. The death of Medgar Evers, of Emmett Till, the four little girls in the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, of the Rev. James Reeb of my own state of Massachusetts, of Viola Liuzzo of Detroit, of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman, none of these tragic occurrences was the result of any one group or another. They all suffered at the hands of individuals who somehow had the notion, in their sickness, that their violent actions would be tolerated. To the extent that all of us are to blame, black and white together we are to blame for the apathy that gave the hater the license to hunt people in America.

And those who now loot and steal, those who claim they have the right to honor the memory of a man of peace, a man who stood for everything that was non-violent, by burning our cities, by breaking into the places of business and terrorizing our neighborhoods, they, too, are suffering from an illness that if allowed to go unchecked will further drag down this great nation. Their actions cannot be tolerated, they will not be tolerated, for they do not mourn a great leader, they mock him.

What has become of our land? What disease has affected us as a people? How many good men must we give, common men in the streets,

a holder of the Nobel Peace Prize and even a President of the United States, before we finally face the fact that the weakness of our society is the weakness in ourselves, within each and every one of us who are complacent, who are doing well, who realize the comforts of material gains and who are, above all else, apathetic.

Where is the moral strength within us, the qualities of character that we attribute in stories to our children of the American heroes that have gone before us?

I for one do not feel that we are any less than our forebears. I for one do not feel that there is anyone within this room who has less courage, less conviction or is any less dedicated to the American dream than generations past, but I do feel that in a few short years we have let events master us rather than we them. I do feel that in our great history we have fallen into a lapse. We have refused, each and every one of us, to exercise the talents and character bred into us, and as a result in a land that was created on the Judeo-Christian ideals of love and brotherhood, we have let the haters take the lead and we are paying that price today as we have paid for it many days and nights in this difficult decade. It is not until we recognize that hundreds of years of oppression must be accommodated not by the least we can give but by the utmost we can give, will these nights of sadness and fear end.

It is not the bigot among us that has brought us to where we are, for men of good will ignore him. It is not the racist among us who has brought our society so low for it is easy to see and discount him. We are where we are because all of us are passing through life with our own personal blinders on.

We favor civil rights bills and feel a warm glow in our hearts when we hear the eloquence of a Martin Luther King. We cluck our tongues over the agitators in the streets and call them outside troublemakers or ne'r-do-wells. And then since we are all very decent men and women of good faith, we are all doing very well with our careers and our families, being all too busy with our own concerns to fight injustice, to fight poverty and to fight ill will in the immediate world around us.

As a United States Senator my message to you today is very simple. We only delude and mislead ourselves if we feel that we lift a personal burden from our shoulders by passing pieces of legislation, important as that is, if we feel legislation can be our only response to our fellow man, who are deprived.

Beyond that I would say that no matter how the most difficult question of Viet Nam is solved, no matter how strong the controls we develop over the power of atomic weapons and no matter how we face the domestic problems of health for the poor, education for our young and decent housing and better roads for the more distant parts of America; no matter how well we do these things, they will only be the epitaph of a great nation that could not bind its own wounds within

itself and as a result lost itself.

If laws do not meet the need and they don't. If speeches will not meet the need and they won't, if marches and demonstrations won't meet the need and they won't, where are we to turn?

We can only turn to ourselves, for in a moment of national crisis such as we are experiencing now, that is all that is left.

Men in public life, in order to be true to themselves, must be more candid with whomever they speak regardless of the political consequences. Our ministers, our priests, our rabbis must be more relevant in social sermons with their flocks regardless of how many unhappy people they will make. Our educational institutions and our teachers must see to it that America's young are not shielded from the realities of their society, but are educated to meet the challenges that will soon be theirs. And in our homes as parents we have our own responsibilities to wipe away cynicism and to introduce the understanding that we wish to see future generations exercise so they will not suffer as their mothers and fathers have suffered.

Last Thursday evening I left my office in Washington to attend a midnight church service, not in the church of my faith, but in the church of the faith of Dr. Martin Luther King. During that service the pulpit was given up by the men of the cloth and those in attendance were asked to speak their views and to console each other. Black and white alike rose to the occasion. Some were eloquent, others were harsh. I found myself recalling that day before the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 when Martin Luther King stood before a crowd of 250,000 Americans and proclaimed that he had a dream, he had a dream in which freedom would ring, ring out for all Americans from the coast of Maine to Alaska; from the mountains in the east to the mountains in the west. He will never see that dream, but the moment that we realize that his dream is truly our dream and the moment we work as individuals to make it come true, we will be one again, we will be strong again, we will proceed as a nation to the fulfillment of our destiny, to the fulfillment of the statement that this nation is the most important occurrence of the second thousand years.

These are the thoughts I wanted to share with you today and I thank you for letting me come back to Alaska.

(Mr. Kennedy received a standing ovation as he left the hall.)