



Richard M. Nixon

*Opening Statement, First Presidential Candidate Debate*



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Mr. Smith, Senator Kennedy.

The things that Senator Kennedy has said many of us can agree with. There is no question but that we cannot discuss our internal affairs in the United States without recognizing that they have a tremendous bearing on our international position. There is no question but that this nation cannot stand still, because we are in a deadly competition, a competition not only with the men in the Kremlin, but the men in Peking. We're ahead in this competition, as Senator Kennedy, I think, has implied. But when you're in a race, the only way to stay ahead is to move ahead, and I subscribe completely to the spirit that Senator Kennedy has expressed tonight, the spirit that the United States should move ahead.

Where then do we disagree?

I think we disagree on the implication of his remarks tonight and on the statements that he has made on many occasions during his campaign to the effect that the United States has been standing still. We heard tonight, for example, the statement made that our growth and national product last year was the lowest of any industrial nation in the world. Now last year, of course, was 1958. That happened to be a recession year, but when we look at the growth of GNP this year -- a year of recovery -- we find it is six and nine-tenths per cent and one of the highest in the world today. More about that later.



Looking, then, to this problem of how the United States should move ahead and where the United States is moving, I think it is well that we take the advice of a very famous campaigner, "Let's look at the record." Is the United States standing still? Is it true that this Administration, as Senator Kennedy has charged, has been an Administration of retreat, of defeat, of stagnation? Is it true that, as far as this country is concerned, in the field of electric power, and all of the fields that he has mentioned, we have not been moving ahead? Well, we have a comparison that we can make. We have the record of the Truman Administration of seven and a half years, and the seven and a half years of the Eisenhower Administration. When we compare these two records in the areas that Senator Kennedy has discussed tonight, I think we find that America has been moving ahead.

Let's take schools. We have built more schools in these seven and a half years than we built in the previous seven and a half, for that matter in the previous 20 years. Let's take hydroelectric power. We have developed more hydroelectric power in these seven and a half years than was developed in any previous Administration in history. Let us take hospitals. We find that more have been built in this Administration than in the previous Administration. The same is true of highways.

Let's put it in terms that all of us can understand.

We often hear Gross National Product discussed, and in that respect may I say that when we compare the growth in this Administration with that of the previous Administration, that then there was a total growth of 11 percent over seven years; in this Administration there has been a total growth of 19 percent over seven years. That shows that there's been more growth in this Administration than in its predecessor.

But let's not put it there; let's put it in terms of the average family. What has happened to you? We find that your wages have gone up five times as much in the Eisenhower Administration as they did in the Truman Administration. What about the prices you pay? We find that the prices you pay went up five times as much in the Truman Administration as they did in the Eisenhower Administration. What's the net result of this? This means that the average family income went up 15 percent in the Eisenhower years as against two percent in the Truman years.

Now, this is not standing still. But, good as this record is, may I emphasize it isn't enough. A record is never something to stand on; it's something to build on and in building on this record, I believe that we have the secret for progress. We know the way to progress and I think first of all our own record proves that we know the way.

Senator Kennedy has suggested that he believes he knows the way. I respect the sincerity with which he makes that suggestion, but on the other hand, when we look at the various programs, that he offers, they do not seem to be new. They seem to be simply retreads of the programs of the Truman Administration which preceded him and I would suggest that during the course of the evening he might indicate those areas in which his programs are new, where they will mean more progress than we had then.



What kind of programs are we for?

We are for programs that will expand educational opportunities, that will give to all Americans their equal chance for education, for all of the things which are necessary and dear to the hearts of our people. We are for programs, in addition, which will see that our medical care for the aged are much better handled than it is at the present time. Here again, may I indicate that Senator Kennedy and I are not in disagreement as to the aim. We both want to help the old people. We want to see that they do have adequate medical care. The question is the means. I think that the means that I advocate will reach that goal better than the means that he advocates. I could give better examples but for whatever it is, whether it's in the field of housing or health or medical care or schools or the development of electric power, we have programs which we believe will move America, move her forward and build on the wonderful record that we have made over these past seven and a half years.

Now, when we look at these programs might I suggest that in evaluating them we often have a tendency to say that the test of a program is how much you're spending. I will concede that in all the areas to which I have referred, Senator Kennedy would have this Federal Government spend more than I would have it spend. I costed out the cost of the Democratic platform. It runs a minimum of 13 and two-tenths billion dollars a year more than we are presently spending to a maximum of 18 billion dollars a year more than we're presently spending. Now the Republican platform will cost more too. It will cost a minimum of four billion dollars a year more, a maximum of four and nine-tenths billion dollars a year more than we're presently spending.

Now, does this mean that his program is better than ours?

Not at all, because it isn't a question of how much the federal government spends. It isn't a question of which government does the most. It's a question of which Administration does the right things, and in our case I do believe that our programs will stimulate the creative energies of 180 million free Americans. I believe the programs that Senator Kennedy advocates will have a tendency to stifle those creative energies. I believe, in other words, that his programs would lead to the stagnation of the motive power that we need in this country to get progress.

The final point that I would like to make is this: Senator Kennedy has suggested in his speeches that we lack compassion for the poor, for the old, and for others that are unfortunate. Let us understand throughout this campaign that his motives and mine are sincere. I know what it means to be poor. I know what it means to see people who are unemployed. I know Senator Kennedy feels as deeply about these problems as I do, but our disagreement is not about the goals for America but only about the means to reach those goals.