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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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5-16-1971

## Remarks of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the David Obey Testimonial Dinner

Edmund S. Muskie

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Joe Sunda  
Speaker Pro Tem  
OBEY TESTIMONIAL

Tony EARL  
State Rep

WISCONSIN STATE COLLEGE -- STEVENS POINT, WISCONSIN

MAY 16, 1971

Jim Squire + Obey co-authored picture at off  
hours

~~I'M GLAD TO BE HERE IN MUSKIE COUNTRY -- EVEN~~

~~IF I'M NOT A FISH~~

AND I'M PROUD TO SPEAK IN A CONGRESSIONAL

DISTRICT THAT HAS GONE IN A FEW SHORT YEARS FROM MELVIN

LAIRD TO DAVID OBEY.

I'VE HEARD OF GOOD TRADES BEFORE -- BUT EVEN

THE GREEN BAY PACKERS HAVE NEVER DONE THAT WELL.

A WEEK OR SO AGO, THE PRESIDENT CELEBRATED

SALUTE TO AGRICULTURE DAY BY THROWING A BIG DINNER FOR

FARMERS AT THE WHITE HOUSE. OVER A HUNDRED PEOPLE WERE

ON THE GUEST LIST. BUT ONLY SIXTEEN OF THEM WERE FARMERS.

. . . I GUESS THE PRESIDENT REALIZES THAT, AFTER FOUR YEARS

OF HIS ADMINISTRATION, THERE MAY BE JUST A FEW FARMERS

LEFT IN THE UNITED STATES.

GWINDOR  
POLAROID  
Seymour  
P. F. J. J.  
Mrs. H. H.  
Dr. D. D.  
Mrs. S. S.

AT THE DINNER, THE PRESIDENT WAS ASKED IF HE  
WAS GOING TO SERVE BUTTER. HE REPLIED: "OH, BUTTER --  
IS THAT THE MARGARINE WITH THE EXTRA FOOD COLORING?"

BUT I SUPPOSE THE WHITE HOUSE KNOWS WHAT SOME  
FARMS ARE LIKE. ITS POLICY TOWARD AGRICULTURE SMELLS  
LIKE A BADLY KEPT COW BARN DURING THE WINTER.

~~THE FARMERS WHO VOTED FOR PRESIDENT NIXON~~

~~MUST NOW FEEL LIKE THE GIRL WHO MARRIED A REPUBLICAN~~

~~FOR YEARS AND YEARS, ALL HE DID WAS SIT ON THE EDGE OF THE~~

~~BED AND TELL HER HOW GOOD IT WAS GOING TO BE.~~

EVEN THOUGH FARM INCOME MAY BE GOING DOWN,

I THINK WE SHOULD GIVE THE ADMINISTRATION CREDIT FOR THE  
THINGS THAT ARE GOING UP . . . UNEMPLOYMENT, PRICES, AND  
THE COST OF POSTAGE STAMPS.

Don't Okey  
C. G. Simpson  
G. Simpson  
F. J. + G. Simpson  
G. Simpson  
G. Simpson  
G. Simpson

AT THIS RATE, THE RECESSION WILL LAST AS LONG  
AS A SPEECH BY MY FRIEND HUBERT HUMPHREY.

I PROMISE TO FINISH THIS SPEECH IN A LOT LESS  
TIME THAN THAT.

AND I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY SHARING WITH YOU  
SOME FASCINATING FACTS I READ THE OTHER DAY.

YOU WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO HEAR ABOUT THEM  
IN A CLASSROOM THAN IN A STUMP SPEECH. BUT I THINK  
THEY TELL US SOMETHING IMPORTANT ABOUT OUR BUSINESS HERE  
TONIGHT -- AND ABOUT THE EVERYDAY BUSINESS OF FARM  
AND FACTORIES ACROSS AMERICA.

SCIENTISTS HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THE PHYSICAL  
STRUCTURES THEY CALL GENES ARE THE ESSENTIAL BUILDING  
BLOCKS OF LIFE. FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, GENES  
TRANSMIT THE TRAITS THAT MAKE EVERY MAN HUMAN AND EACH  
MAN INDIVIDUAL.

THEY ARE OUR MOST DIRECT LINK TO THE PAST -- AND OUR ONLY CERTAIN BEQUEST TO THE FUTURE.

THERE ARE THREE BILLION PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET AND EACH OF THEM HAS 100,000 GENES. BUT IF WE PUT ALL THOSE GENES TOGETHER, THE RESULT WOULD BE A BALL ONLY ONE MILLIMETER IN DIAMETER. THAT IS THE SMALL MARGIN BETWEEN OUR HUMANITY AND A MERE PHYSICAL PROTOPLASM.

AND THERE IS ANOTHER, EQUALLY SMALL MARGIN THAT WE MUST ALSO LIVE WITH -- BECAUSE WE COULD NOT LIVE WITHOUT IT. THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING OUR EARTH -- THE ATMOSPHERE THAT GIVES US THE AIR WE BREATHE AND THE WATER WE TAKE FOR GRANTED -- IS JUST A THIN LAYER OF LIFE SUPPORT IN AN ALMOST EMPTY UNIVERSE. ABOVE IT, THERE IS ONLY THE BLACK DARKNESS OF OUTER SPACE. BELOW IT, THERE IS ONLY THE BLACK DARKNESS OF THE INNER EARTH. WE SURVIVE BY THE GRACE OF A RESOURCE WE HAVE CONSTANTLY CONTAMINATED.

WE CAN ENDANGER IT -- AND WE CAN DESTROY IT AND OURSELVES.

SOME OF US WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THAT THREAT  
YEARS AGO. BUT ONLY IN THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE OUR WARNINGS  
BEEN HEEDED. ONLY RECENTLY HAVE AMERICANS REALIZED HOW  
FRAGILE OUR ENVIRONMENT REALLY IS. AND ONLY RECENTLY  
HAVE WE STARTED TO SEE THE SIMILAR FRAGILITY OF OUR OWN  
GENETIC STRUCTURES.

NOW WE KNOW THAT EVERYTHING THAT IS IMPORTANT  
IS ALSO FRAGILE. AND THAT SIMPLE TRUTH APPLIES NOT ONLY  
TO THE EARTH GOD MADE -- BUT TO EARTH MAN HAS REMADE.  
OUR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS SUSTAIN US ONLY IF  
WE SUSTAIN THEM. THERE IS NO INVISIBLE HAND PROTECTING  
OUR PRINCIPLES OR OUR ECONOMY. NOT FATE, BUT THE WORK OF  
OUR OWN HANDS, IS WHAT KEEPS US PROSPEROUS AND FREE.

AND WHEN OUR HANDS FALTER OR FAIL, THE STRAIN  
ON OUR FRAGILE BUT VITAL INSTITUTIONS IS FELT IMMEDIATELY.  
IN RECENT YEARS, WE HAVE OFTEN FALTERED AND OCCASIONALLY  
EVEN FAILED. AND YOU CAN NOW FEEL THE STRAINS EVERYWHERE  
IN AMERICA.

YOU CAN SEE THEM ON THE NIGHTTIME STREETS OF  
OUR CITIES -- WHERE THERE IS OFTEN NO ONE TO SEE AND THE  
ONLY THING THAT WALKS THE SIDEWALKS AFTER DARK IS FEAR.

YOU CAN HEAR THEM IN THE WORDS OF THE VIETNAM  
VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR -- WHO FOUND OUT WHAT IT WAS  
LIKE OVER THERE AND WONDER NOW WHETHER ANYTHING IS RIGHT  
BACK HERE.

AND YOU CAN SENSE THE STRAINS IN THE NEW  
DIVISIONS THAT SEPARATE OUR COUNTRY -- BLACK AND WHITE,  
YOUNG AND OLD, LONGHAIR AND HARDHAT.

WE HAVE NOT TENDED TO AMERICA'S NEEDS. WE  
HAVE NEGLECTED AMERICA'S IDEALS. WE HAVE DAMAGED THE  
FRAGILE INSTITUTIONS THAT HOLD AMERICA TOGETHER AND MOVE  
AMERICA FORWARD.

THE MOST RECENT DAMAGE IS THE RECESSION  
INFLICTED ON THE NATIONAL ECONOMY BY FAILING FEDERAL POLICIES.  
OUR ECONOMY IS SUPPOSED TO PROVIDE PROSPERITY FOR OUR  
PEOPLE. IN 1971, IT IS INSTEAD PUTTING WORKING MEN AND  
WOMEN OUT OF WORK -- AND PUSHING PRODUCTIVE FARMERS INTO  
BANKRUPTCY. WE ARE PAINFULLY REDISCOVERING HOW FRAGILE  
OUR ECONOMY REALLY IS.

IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, UNEMPLOYMENT IN AMERICA  
HAS SOARED TO OVER 6%. THAT'S NOT JUST A NUMBER -- THAT  
NUMBER IS PEOPLE -- PEOPLE STANDING IN WELFARE LINES  
INSTEAD OF PAYROLL LINES -- PEOPLE NAILING A "FOR SALE"  
SIGN TO THEIR HOMES BECAUSE THEY CAN NO LONGER MEET THE  
MONTHLY MORTGAGE PAYMENTS.



AND THAT NUMBER IS ALSO YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS. BETWEEN  
FEBRUARY, 1969, AND FEBRUARY, 1971, UNEMPLOYMENT DOWN  
THE ROAD IN WAUSAU CLIMBED FROM 1400 TO 2700.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S GAME PLAN TRADED AWAY  
WAUSAU'S JOBS FOR LOWER PRICES -- BUT THE ONLY PRICES THAT  
ARE GOING DOWN IN 1971 ARE FARM PRICES. AND THAT IS ONE  
PLACE WHERE INCOME WAS ALREADY FAR TOO LOW.

THE AVERAGE NON-FARM FAMILY MAKES \$8,800 A YEAR --  
\$3,000 MORE THAN THE AVERAGE FARM FAMILY. THE ADMINISTRATION  
RESPONDED TO THIS INJUSTICE WITH THE AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 1970 --  
AN ACT THAT THREATENED AN EVEN FURTHER DECLINE IN FARM  
INCOME. I AM PROUD THAT I VOTED AGAINST IT. AND I AM  
PROUD TO SPEAK UP AGAINST A POLICY THAT REDUCED THE PARITY  
RATIO TO 69% IN APRIL, 1971 -- AND THEN ATTEMPTED TO COVER  
UP THE REDUCTION BY CHANGING THE BASE PERIOD FOR CALCULATING  
THE RATIO.

NO WONDER THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF FARMERS  
HAS ACCELERATED. NO WONDER FARMERS HAVE TO WORK AWAY FROM  
THEIR FIELDS FOR NEARLY 50% OF THEIR INCOME. NO WONDER  
FAMILY FARMS ARE DISAPPEARING SO FAST THAT WE MAY SOON  
SEE THEM ONLY IN A GRANDMA MOSES PAINTING.

THE ONLY WONDER IS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION  
STILL REFUSES TO ACT. IN THE MIDST OF THIS CRISIS, PRESIDENT  
NIXON REMAINS THE FIRST PRESIDENT SINCE HERBERT HOOVER WHO  
HAS NOT SENT A FARM MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS. AND HE IS THE  
ONLY PRESIDENT EVER WHO TRIED TO ABOLISH THE DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE. WHAT HE MAY SUCCEED IN ABOLISHING IS THE  
SECURITY AND GROWTH OF AMERICAN AGRICULTURE.

A COUNTY FAIR ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN IS NO  
SUBSTITUTE FOR A BETTER LIFE ON WISCONSIN'S FARMS.

AND THE MERE PROMISE TO RESTORE PROSPERITY  
IN OUR FACTORIES AND FARMS IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR NEW JOBS  
AND A MILK PARITY PRICE OF 90%.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF 1969 UNTIL NOVEMBER, 1970,  
A COALITION OF FARM ORGANIZATIONS CONSTANTLY ASKED FOR AN  
APPOINTMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT. THEIR REQUEST WAS CONSTANTLY  
REJECTED. THE ADMINISTRATION APPARENTLY DID NOT WANT TO  
LISTEN TO THEM -- JUST AS IT DOES NOT WANT TO LISTEN TO  
THE VOICES OF PEACEFUL PROTEST AGAINST THE WAR. AND THE  
REFUSAL TO LISTEN IS TURNING A FRAGILE SOCIETY INTO A  
BRITTLE SOCIETY. IT IS ERODING OUR BONDS OF TRUST AND OUR  
TRADITION OF PROSPERITY. REFUSING TO LISTEN -- TO FARMERS  
OR STUDENTS OR UNITED STATES SENATORS -- IS NO SERVICE TO  
AMERICA. IT IS THE WAY TO MAKE A BRITTLE SOCIETY BREAK.

NONE OF US WANT THAT -- NOW OR EVER.

WE KNOW THAT THERE IS ONLY A THIN MARGIN  
BETWEEN THE FUTURE OF AMERICA AND THE FAILURE OF AMERICA.

THAT'S WHY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND DEMOCRATS  
LIKE DAVID OBEY ARE DETERMINED TO FIGHT FOR SOMETHING BETTER.

FOR A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY, WHERE NO FARMER HAS  
TO LEAVE HIS TRACTOR AND LOOK FOR WORK IN A TOWN THAT LACKS  
JOBS FOR EVEN THE WORKERS WHO ALREADY LIVE THERE.

FOR A SAFE SOCIETY, WHERE ANY WOMAN IN ANY  
NEIGHBORHOOD CAN WALK TO THE NEAREST LATENIGHT STORE TO  
BUY AN EARLY EDITION OF THE NEXT MORNING'S PAPER.

FOR A PEACEFUL SOCIETY, STRONG ENOUGH TO DEFEND  
THE RIGHT CAUSE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME --  
AND WISE ENOUGH TO STOP SPENDING LIVES AND TREASURE, WHEN  
WE FIND OUT THAT OUR CAUSE HAS BEEN A MISTAKE.

FOR A FREE SOCIETY, WHERE NO ONE IS LISTENING  
IN AND EVERYONE IS LISTENED TO.

IF WE CAN CREATE SUCH A SOCIETY IN OUR LAND,  
WE WILL STRENGTHEN THE FRAGILE ENTERPRISE WE CALL AMERICA.  
WE WILL SHAPE A FUTURE WORTHY OF THE HOPES OUR FATHERS  
BROUGHT WITH THEM FROM THE OLD WORLD TO THE NEW.

I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN DO THAT MUCH.

I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN DO NO LESS.

AND I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN DO EVEN MORE.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS POINTED THE WAY --  
IN WISCONSIN AND IN THE NATION. AND THE PEOPLE WILL FOLLOW  
US -- ALL THE WAY TO WASHINGTON IN 1972.

# # # # #

*any copy of this  
document - FBI*  
**IT APPEARS TO**

~~THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION~~ BELIEVES THAT UNITY CAN BE BORN OF

*+ share*  
**SUPPRESSION.**

THESE ACTIONS REINFORCE THE UNCERTAINTY OF CITIZENS NOT ONLY  
ABOUT THEIR GOVERNMENT BUT ABOUT EACH OTHER.

THEY BREED FEAR, THEY BREED DISRESPECT. THEY BREED SUSPICION  
AND DISTRUST IN PLACE OF OPENNESS AND HONESTY. THEY UNDERMINE OUR  
CONFIDENCE IN EACH OTHER.

IF AMERICANS ARE TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN EACH OTHER, THEY MUST  
HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THEIR LEADERS.

THEY MUST KNOW WHERE THEIR LEADERS PROPOSED TO LEAD THEM,  
AND THEY MUST KNOW THAT THEY ARE LEADING.

NO ISSUE HAS UNDERMINED PUBLIC CONFIDENCE MORE THAN THE WAR  
IN INDOCHINA. AMERICANS EVERYWHERE YEARN FOR A CLEARCUT AND DEFINITE  
COMMITMENT TO END THAT WAR.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR PROTEST AGAINST THAT WAR IS NOT TO WIN  
THE ELECTION OF ~~1972~~ 1972--BUT TO BRING OUR BOYS HOME IN 1971.

OUR PURPOSE MUST NOT BE TO CREATE AN ISSUE NEXT YEAR--BUT  
TO END THE KILLING--NOW.

WE CANNOT PUT VIETNAM ON SOME BACK SHELF, PLANNING TO PICK  
IT UP IN 1972--IF THERE IS ENOUGH DEATH TO MAKE THE WAR A LIVE ISSUE.



THAT MUST BE OUR HOPE.

THAT MUST BE OUR PURPOSE.

IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN POLITICS. IT IS ABOUT HUMAN LIFE AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE. IT IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR IN 1971--AND IT IS EVEN WORTH LOSING FOR IN 1972.

THE WAR IN INDOCHINA MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO BECOME A PARTISAN ISSUE. PRESIDENT NIXON INSISTS THAT IT WILL NOT BE BECAUSE HE SAYS HE WILL END IT BEFORE IT CAN BE.

IT IS MY EARNEST HOPE THAT HE WILL ACHIEVE THAT GOAL AND I INTEND TO DO ALL I CAN TO ENCOURAGE HIM TO ACHIEVE IT FASTER THAN HE MAY NOW THINK IS POSSIBLE.

THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT. ~~AND THE SOONER IT OCCURS THE~~  
~~HAPPEN WHEN WE ARE IN THE WHITE PARTY~~

THEN WE CAN GO ON--ALL AMERICANS, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION--TO THE JOB OF BUILDING A COUNTRY.

BUT WE MUST APPROACH THAT TASK POSITIVELY. THAT MUCH WE OWE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO HELP THEM BREAK OUT OF THIS NATIONAL MALAISE THAT CLOUDS THEIR LIVES.