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## Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at a Senior Citizens Conference on Aging

Edmund S. Muskie

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One of the tragedies of America is the present neglect and isolation of millions of older Americans. For many Americans, retirement is not a reward for a life of work but a sentence to debilitating poverty, spiritual isolation, and fastering health problems.

#### Poverty

For many, the reward of retirement is poverty. Today, older Americans are twice as likely to be poor as younger persons. One out of every four individuals 65 and older lives in poverty. With the increasing number of elderly, unless immediate, bold action is taken, more and more of our senior citizens will be condemned to a life of poverty. To free the elderly from poverty, I propose:

- a 15% across-the-board increase in Social Security benefits, retroactive to January 1, 1971. Another 15% raise should be authorized for 1972.
- raising the minimum monthly Social Security benefits payment to \$100 this year and then to \$120 in 1972,
- automatic adjustment of Social Security benefits for cost-of-living increases.
- liberalization of the retirement test
- 100% benefits for widows and orphans
- lower the computation age for retirement benefits, for men to 62.

These changes will allow our senior citizens to retire to a decent life after having done their share of work for our nation.

#### Health

The elderly require greater health care than any other age group. They are in hospitals more frequently for longer stays caused by more serious illnesses. In 1970, the average stay in a hospital for an older American was 13 days. Despite this great need, Medicare and Medicaid, valuable as it is, still covers less than half of the health needs of the elderly. At hearings I held this spring in California, I found that thousands of older Americans could not afford decent health care or were forced to spend all their lives' savings to obtain it. For these reasons, as Chairman of the Health Care Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Aging, I will work for and support a program of

comprehensive national health insurance that would provide all Americans, including the elderly, health services.

In the meantime, I propose:

- inclusion of disabled persons under Medicare
- inclusion of prescription drugs under Medicare
- inclusion of the cost of eye and ear treatment under Medicare.

Last week I introduced legislation that will help end today's doctor shortage. I also plan to draft legislation that will provide new ways of delivering health services, such as local clinics and home health care teams to bring health care to our older citizens.

I shall also work for adequate housing within the means of the low-income elderly and new manpower legislation guaranteeing gainful employment in community services for the elderly. I will insist on nursing home reforms to assure the safety, health, and personal well-being of patients, many of whom are now cruelly neglected in some establishments that can only be described as warehouses where people wait for death.

The knowledge and experience of our older citizens is a tremendous national resource, and I intend to do all in my power to see that their great contribution to our nation is used and recognized.

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