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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Brown County Democratic Luncheon

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE News



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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

BROWN COUNTY DEMOCRATIC LUNCHEON

GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN

SEPTEMBER 27, 1971

I have come here today to ask you to put Wisconsin where it belongs . . . back in the national Democratic column in 1972.

And I have also come to speak with you about the prevailing climate in our country today . . .

About promises made and promises broken . . .

About an administration which has brought farmers and workers together in the common misery of recession . . .

And about the meaning of America -- that somewhere on this planet, there can be justice for every member of a society.

Only a decade ago, John Kennedy told us that we could be better than we thought we were . . . that a new generation of Americans could build a country worthy of all that had gone before. . . that we could make peace among nations and build prosperity in our own land.

With that expression of faith, President Kennedy inaugurated not only a new administration, but a new time . . . a time of trust and confidence in our country and ourselves.

But Americans have changed since 1961. Bit by bit, hope died . . . near an underpass in Dallas and on a kitchen floor in Los Angeles . . . in a war half a world away and outside a closed factory just down the street.

And so today, Americans are living with doubt . . . doubt about our political leaders . . . doubt about our public institutions . . . doubt about each other. And we doubt increasingly that these doubts can ever be resolved.

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That is the mood of this nation in 1971.

You can see it in the shrug of an unemployed machinist whose children ask why he stays at home.

You can hear it in the discouraged voice of a farmer who spends half his time working another man's fields.

And you can sense it in the questions we all ask about the future and the fate of America.

Most of all, we want to know the truth . . . from our government and from each other . . . about our collective wisdom and our collective shortcomings . . . about the strengths we still have and the tasks we must face. We want a politics of truth to guide our destiny in the years ahead. That is the only way to keep this country -- to keep it free -- to make it as good and as great as it can be.

One place to start looking for the truth is in the state of the economy. We have had, now, four different economic policies since 1969. And after each one, the press has said to me, "Well, Senator, now that President Nixon has solved the economic problem, what issue are you going to have in 1972?" And I say to you here today that the issue will be the same as it was after the last three policies failed . . . the issue is the whole sad history of this administration -- an administration that pledged prosperity . . . produced recession . . . and now promises the economic miracle of getting us back where we were when they started.

And how do they intend to achieve that? With the largest single business tax cut in any year in the history of this country . . . with a program to put money in the coffers of corporate treasuries instead of the wallets and pocketbooks of families . . . with a policy which leaves out those who truly are in need . . . workers and farmers and consumers.

For months and months, the President refused to face the stark fact that there was a recession in industry and a depression in farming. Now the administration which was doing nothing has

done the wrong thing. And the American people are still not told the truth.

The president has renamed his giveaway to big business a "job development credit" -- as if a trick of phrasing could conceal the failure to stimulate consumer demand . . . which is the only real way to create jobs.

And the administration has redefined the base period for calculating the parity ratio -- as if a statistical gimmick could rescue farmers from a parity ratio of 69 . . . the lowest level since the depths of the Great Depression.

What this country needs now is not more tricks and more gimmicks . . . but a government which believes in building prosperity by helping people. That's why I have proposed a consumer tax credit to return seven billion dollars to average income Americans. That's why I have opposed the President's decision to postpone welfare reform and revenue sharing . . . a decision that will push Wisconsin's property taxes even higher. And that's why I will never support an administration farm program which threatens the security and the survival of America's family farms.

In recent weeks, the Democratic party has spoken up for economic policies to benefit the deserving many instead of the comfortable few. Our party is standing where it should -- for fairness and justice and a decent break for America's workers and consumers.

That is very much a part of the Democratic Party's tradition . . . the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman and John Kennedy . . . the tradition that tells us to care about the steelworker on an hourly wage and the janitor who works too long and earns too little. But our heritage also tells us something else -- that the Democratic party must fight for prosperity, not only in our cities and our factories, but in our small towns and on our farms.

It was the Democratic party that responded in the grim days of the 1930's, when the only harvest for some farmers was dust. . . when it was often cheaper to spill milk on the ground than to send milk to market. And in 1971, our party must respond again . . . because American agriculture is in trouble again.

-- The average farm family makes only \$5,500 a year . . . \$3,000 less than the average non-farm family.

-- In recent years, the prices farmers pay have climbed twice as fast as the prices farmers receive, while food costs have continued to soar.

-- In 1970, the net income of farmers fell back to where it was in 1965 . . . and by April of 1971, interest rates for farmers were 34% higher than they were just four years ago. .

This summer, the President sponsored a dinner and a county fair on the White House lawn to celebrate "Salute to Agriculture Day." I would have preferred concrete and effective action to relieve the plight of America's farmers. I would have preferred a commitment to a milk parity price of 90%. I would have preferred a program to take the "for sale" signs off of countless family farms.

Farm organizations like the N.F.O. know what has happened during the Nixon years -- and so does every farmer who plants and grows and harvests the agricultural abundance of America. It's what always happens under a Republican administration. Clifford Hardin and Ezra Taft Benson may have different names -- but for farmers, their policies feel exactly the same.

Anyone who looks at the record knows the truth.

Last November, the President pushed through legislation which favored large corporate farms at the expense of family farms . . . legislation which will lower farm income by a staggering one billion dollars. I was proud to vote against the Agricultural Act of 1970 -- and I will proudly vote against any bill like it in any other year.

And the same kind of Republican leadership which stood in the way of collective bargaining for labor is now working against.

collective bargaining for farmers. I am proud to disagree with them -- and proud to co-sponsor the National Agricultural Bargaining Act. In the last third of the twentieth century in the United States of America, farmers should not have to remain beggars for survival . . . and they should have the right to negotiate together about market controls and the sale price of their own products.

Much must be done to preserve and protect American agriculture. We must provide more farm credit, more resources for rural development, and more support for family farms. And what has this administration done? In the midst of the crisis, President Nixon remains the first president since Herbert Hoover who has not sent a major farm message to the Congress. And he is the only president ever who has tried to abolish the Department of Agriculture.

I suppose that what I have said here today could be classified as partly a farm speech. I resist that classification -- just as I resist the division of America into rural and urban, black and white, farmers and factory workers.

There is no agricultural policy that is not also economic policy. There is no damage to consumers which is not ultimately felt on the farm. And there is no excuse for an administration which has neglected the shared needs of our people . . . from the sidewalks of New York to the fields of Wisconsin.

We can change that -- if our leaders tell the truth and face the truth . . . if they forget the gimmicks and the tricks . . . if they stop pretending that everything is fine, while so much of what we care about is actually in trouble.

What Americans really want is leaders who know that challenges are not overcome by wishing them away . . .

-- That the plight of the farmer will not disappear after a county fair on the White House lawn . . .

-- And that even after business has pocketed a multi-billion dollar bonus the machinist in Green Bay will still have no job

- More -

Only when people and their government work together -- facing problems openly -- sharing visions of a better time -- can we begin to move our country forward once again.

Any president who fails to learn that lesson deserves to be called a "one-term president."

We can give him that title -- together -- in 1972.

Together, let us do that much -- and then we can do so much more.

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