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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Golden Age Senior Citizens Center

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
GOLDEN AGE SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER - APPLETON, WISC.
10:30 A.M., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 1972

I am here today because I intend to defeat Richard Nixon next November.

I intend to change this country -- and I want you to help me.

For more than half a century -- from the time of Robert LaFollette to Wisconsin's demand for party reform at the 1968 Democratic Convention -- the men and women of this state have fought to give our government back to the people. That's the fight I'm waging in this campaign. And it's your fight, too.

Here in Wisconsin, you face the same frustrations year after year. How can you pay the bills this month when the bills keep getting bigger and bigger each month? How can you afford quality medical care or a decent place to live ^{when} inflation steals the value of your income?

These are questions people are asking themselves every day. I think it's time for a President who has some answers. I think it's time for candidates who take the time to understand your problems.

And I think it's time for a government that works for you, instead of helping the rich get richer at your expense. I'm not satisfied when giant corporations grow more powerful while social security benefits buy less today than they did last year. I'm not satisfied when local taxes drive people out of their homes, while the quality of public education continues to decline. I'm not satisfied when Washington spends billions on wars and weapons we don't need, but the government can't pay the cost of prescription drugs under Medicare. I'm not satisfied when over a hundred individuals with incomes over \$200,000 pay no income taxes, while millions of Americans can't even save enough for their retirement. And I'm not satisfied with a President who lines up behind the special interests on every issue that reaches his desk.

Someone should remind Richard Nixon that he is the President of a country, not the President of a corporation. And someone should remind him that the country he governs wasn't built just for Madison Avenue executives and Wall Street lawyers. It was built for the retired barber in Onida Heights, who owes his doctor a thousand dollars, and can't afford to visit his son in California this summer. It was built for the machinist down the block, who breaks his back all day just so he can buy his wife a dishwasher and his daughter a new bike. America was built for you. And you can change it.

With the power of your votes -- the one thing nobody can take away -- you can turn this country around. You can control giant corporations and close tax loopholes and lower property taxes. You can demand economic justice for every American, old and young, rich and poor and in-between. You can do all these things by electing a President who will stand up to the special interests and fight for the public interest.

And that's the kind of President I intend to be.

I am committed to property tax relief and reform. The average property tax in Appleton is \$940 -- and it is increasing at an alarming rate of 7% a year. Across the country, property taxes are forcing people into debt and even out of their own homes. I want to see property taxes reduced for average income Americans. I intend to reduce them as President of the United States.

As President, I will fight for fair property tax assessments. In 1972, thousands of buildings that are owned by wealthy private interests are assessed at incredibly low values. In Augusta, Georgia, thirty-two corporations would be paying a thousand times more in taxes than they are today, if they were assessed by the standards applied to the rest of Augusta's property. In Gary, Indiana, U.S. Steel was underassessed by over a hundred million dollars last year, while the Gary schools faced a nine million dollar deficit. Why should you bear the burden, while billion dollar corporations escape their duty? Why should they pay so little, while older Americans struggle to keep up with inflation?

I am committed to federal legislation, which will require every locality to publish every property assessment -- so we can find out who's getting special treatment from the tax assessor. I am committed to legislation which will require states to set up quick and easy procedures for homeowner appeals from unjust assessments. It is time for everyone to pay a fair share of our property taxes -- so no one will have to pay too much.

And I am committed to direct property tax relief for elderly Americans. What property taxes do to senior citizens is a scandal. A national news magazine recently reported the sadly typical plight of a California woman ^{living on Social Security} ~~living on Social Security~~. She now pays more in property taxes every year than she paid to buy her house thirty years ago. She may soon be forced to sell out, as thousands of others have. I believe she has a right to something better than eviction and homelessness at the age of seventy-two.

So last January, I proposed a billion dollar Housing Security System to pay the housing costs that older Americans cannot pay for themselves. Like Social Security, Housing Security will mean regular monthly payments to retired workers. It will help them with their rents or their mortgages or their property taxes. It will add \$25 million a year to the income of senior citizens in Wisconsin. Older Americans have given over half a century of service to their country. The least their country can do for them is to guarantee a comfortable home, where they can live out their lives in peace and dignity.

Finally, I am committed to reducing property taxes by changing the way we finance public education. Yesterday, I set forth my plan for a Quality Education Guarantee. . . to send \$7.2 billion in federal aid each year to local schools. Almost half of every property tax dollar now goes to the costs of education. A Quality Education Guarantee will give our children and our grandchildren better schools. And it will give each of us long overdue relief from ~~steep property taxes~~ on our homes.

And I am committed to massive revenue sharing. Over a year ago, I proposed a \$6 billion revenue sharing system which would ~~send \$6 billion~~ ^{give \$17} million annually to ~~state and local governments in~~ Wisconsin. That's \$170 million ~~you would have to raise on your own~~. That's \$170 million you would never have to pay in property taxes. And it is \$50 million more than Wisconsin would receive under the Nixon plan, which shares too much revenue with states which raise too little revenue to help themselves.

I don't ever want to see another family forced to sell or mortgage their home in the face of skyrocketing property taxes. I don't ever want to see another retired couple settle for a substandard apartment because it has a substandard rent. And as President, I will fight to reduce property taxes.

In fact, I won't stop until we have made our entire tax system fair. I have demanded a \$24 billion reform in ~~the federal tax system~~ ^{taxes}. Our tax structure is rigged against the working man. It's rigged against retired Americans. And it's rigged in favor of special interests who are rich enough and powerful enough to get their way in Washington.

I want a ^{\$10} billion ~~bill~~ reduction in payroll taxes for 85% of America's families. I want to slash the oil depletion allowance and close the loopholes that are tailor-made for the wealthy. I want a fair share program to stop \$14 billion in federal tax giveaways to big business each year. I have been in this battle for a long time. I intend to win it by winning the Presidency in 1972.

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And I'll tell you what I don't want to do. I don't ever want to sit in the White House and earn a \$200,000 salary while I'm wasting the taxes you pay. We should increase social security benefits by 20% instead of sending money to the moon in Richard Nixon's space shuttle. We should adopt a comprehensive program of National Health Insurance instead of spending seven billion dollars of your money to build an ABM. We should reform our tax system instead of giving \$250 million to Lockheed so it can move from bankruptcy back to incompetence. Those are the choices I would make as President. And if other presidential candidates won't make the same choices, then the voters of Wisconsin have to tell them that they are wrong.

Wisconsin has been fighting for fifty years to put government back on the side of the people. We can win that fight in 1972. Give me your help. Here, in Appleton, on April 4th, vote to change America.

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