**REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN F. KENNEDY, WISCONSIN DEMOCRATIC DINNER, GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN, AUGUST 22, 1957**

It is a great honor for me to be with you in Wisconsin at this time. In my few hours here on my first visit, I have been both charmed and impressed by your State, your climate and particularly your people. (The climate must be particularly invigorating, in view of the amazing changes it has effected in the Braves since they left Boston). But Wisconsin for me has always meant something more than the Braves and the weather – particularly this year. For this is the home of one of the greatest Senators in the history of the United States Senate, one who was among the five outstanding Senators of the past selected by the Special Committee I headed this spring whose portraits are to be hung in the Senate Reception Room – Senator Robert M. La Follette, Sr. In reporting our findings to the Senate, I summed up my personal tribute to Senator La Follette in these words which I would repeat to you now:

*"Ceaseless battler for the underprivileged in an age of special privilege, courageous independent in an era of partisan conformity, he fought memorably against tremendous odds and stifling inertia for social and economic reforms which ultimately proved essential to American progress in the 20th century. Determined to make law serve the rights of persons as well as property, to make Government serve the interests of great social justice as well as great political parties, his constructive pioneering efforts to promote the general welfare aroused the slumbering conscience of the national and made the Senate more responsive to it. The bitter antagonisms stirred by his unyielding opposition to international commitments and conflict were ultimately submerged by widespread admiration for his dedicated lifelong fight against political corruption and corporate greed."*

I am deeply honored to be in Bob La Follette’s home State at this time and to land my efforts to the election of a worthy successor to his seat. This leads me to the second reason why I am honored that you have asked me to come to Wisconsin today. For this Senate race is of vital interest to Democrats in every state of the union. It is the opening shot in the campaign to continue Democratic control in the 86th Congress, as well as to firm up our control of the 85th. This campaign can mean the beginning of a new string of victories for the Democratic Party extending from here to 1960.

I realize that to many Democrats, this kind of prediction when applied to Wisconsin is necessarily a matter of hope rather than celebration. And yet the Democratic trend sweeping the Middle West indicates that your hope is not a forlorn one. If Kansas, Iowa, and other supposedly solid Republican States could throw off the shackles of one-party rule in 1956, let no one say that it is impossible for Wisconsin to elect a Democratic Senator in 1957.

I do not pretend to be an expert on Wisconsin politics. But to those of you who are concerned with the effects of one-party rule in this state, let me remind you that until 1928, Massachusetts was solidly, permanently Republican, just as New Hampshire and Vermont are today, and just as Maine was until 1954. We in New England have seen first-hand the deteriorating influence of one-party government. The party in power becomes lazy, inefficient and ineffective. It looks upon the state as its private property, and upon voters as a necessary nuisance. Victory after victory makes them smug and contented, increasingly insensitive to the real problems of the state and its people.

At the same time, the minority party in a one-party state also suffers; Younger voters are not interested in offering their talents to a party which seemingly has no hope of success. National candidates and administrations also pay little attention to the one-party state and its problems, convinced that nothing could affect the Presidential elections in such a state. and so the one-party states in New England suffered in the past – from a lack of attention at home and in Washington, from a lack of new ideas and new leadership. Our states suffered – and so did the ideals of democracy.

But in Maine, to take the most recent example, the voters decided to do something about it. In 1954 they elected their first Democratic Governor in 20 years, Maine’s third Democratic Governor since the Civil War. In 1956, the elected their first Democratic Congressman in 22 years, the fourth since the Civil War. Maine is now a two-party state. Its voters are now offered a real choice of candidates and programs – its young people are now interested in political activity – and the entire state, and both parties in it, are more alert, more alive and more productive than ever before.

This is an inspiring story for Wisconsin, I am sure, as it is for the entire nation – for all of those who complained in 1952 that 20 years was too long for any one party but who forgot to apply that saying to their own state. Perhaps in 1957 the nation will be saying: "As Maine went, so goes Wisconsin."

I think the voters of Wisconsin, regardless of party, will recognize the advantages to their state of ending its reputation for one-party rule by the election of an unusually able and well-qualified Democrat, Bill Proxmire. I had heard a great deal about Bill Proxmire before I came to Wisconsin, from mutual friends and party leaders – and I know that he is particularly well suited to represent the interests of Wisconsin in Washington. That is most important to all voters, it seems to me. For the Democrats are in control of the Senate today and every expert political observer agrees that they will remain in control after next year’s election. Wisconsin is not represented in that Democratic leadership – you have no voice in the councils of the majority party when it shapes the policies of labor and other problems of particular interest to your state. You have no one in the Senate who is personally and intimately familiar with your special needs and problems – and that is why I am confident that Wisconsin will see the wisdom of sending Bill Proxmire to Washington.

I am told that this election represents, among other things, a test of "modern Republicanism." We are very much interested in this in Washington, because no one seems to know just what modern Republicanism is. Of course, there are a good many definitions in existence. Republican Representative Mason of Illinois says "Essentially Ike’s New Republicanism is a *form of bribery*, a program to buy votes with the voters’ own money." Senator Goldwater, Chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, says Modern Republicanism stands for "persistent indulgence of proven extravagance" and “a betrayal of the people’s trust." Nebraska republican A.L. Miller says a Modern Republican is a "free-wheeling free-spender."

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But the real clue was delivered by Republican National Chairman Alcorn. "I*would like to see us (Republicans) develop,*" he said, "*a greater pride in partisanship* – *a feeling that anything Republican is good because it is Republican*."

I only hope that the Democratic Party never becomes that "modern." I trust that we shall always put our nation first, that we shall consider each proposal on its merits regardless of its source, that we shall defend the President not only against his enemies abroad but also against his friends at home, and that we shall support the President whenever we think he is right – whether he is a Republican President in 1957 or a Democratic President in 1961.

Perhaps, to obtain a satisfactory definition of Modern Republicanism, we should ask ourselves: What is new and different about the Republicans today? The first that comes to mind is Mr. Eisenhower's budget – the highest peacetime budget in the history of our country, a budget with more Federal employees and more alphabet agencies than Franklin Roosevelt ever dreamed of. Mr. Eisenhower's five budgets exceed the last five Democratic budgets under Harry Truman by nearly 74 *billion* dollars, enough to run the whole Federal government for an entire year even under a Republican Administration.

Now Republicanism is breaking some other records, too. The cost of living is at an all-time high, so high that it will cost the American people nearly 7 billion dollars more just to live through 1957 that it did in 1955. There are more monopolistic business mergers that ever before, more small business failures and bankruptcies under Modern Republicanism. There are more children going to school part-time, more farms being foreclosed, more national resources being given away under this Modern republican Administration … like man’s wife asking for money, money, etc.…

The only real way to determine whether the Republican leopard has really changed his spots is to look at the record – and on the whole, the Republican record hasn’t changed much in twenty-five years. In fact, if you measure the President’s actual record against his speeches and philosophy, there’s some doubt as to whether Mr. Eisenhower himself is an Eisenhower Republican. Most members of his party are still just as negative as the 95-year old Republican, etc.

The Republicans, of course, are also confidently predicting victory for their party – and they say, with an eye on the history books, that prosperity is on their side. But I ask you: prosperity for whom? Where is the prosperity for our small farmers, who have seen their prices and income go steadily down as their debts go steadily up? Where is the prosperity for our small businessmen, who have seen their profits decline 52% while business failures jumped to record highs? Where is the prosperity for our working men and women whose average earnings have increased less that 1/6th as much as the increase in the profits of our largest corporations? Where is the prosperity for our consumers, who see prices at an all-time high, their installment debt increasing and their personal savings declining? What kind of prosperity is it that sends children to overcrowded schools, that sends the sick and disabled to overcrowded hospitals and that maintains pockets of chronic unemployment in all parts of the nation?

Every time President Eisenhower says this so-called prosperity is equally shared by all segments of our economy, I am reminded of the rabbit stew served during the meatless days of World War II, etc.

If the voters will look at the record – look at the parties and their leaders – they will agree, I am sure, that the Democratic Party, not the Republican Party, is the party of prosperity and the party of the future. A Democratic-controlled Congress, which Wisconsin can help insure, can carry on its impressive record of accomplishment built in recent years as well as the distant past – with new legislation to bring a prosperity and opportunity to businessmen, farmers, workers, teachers, and all the people. We will take action to protect the rights of labor – including, let me emphasize, the protection of those rights and labor’s good name from the racketeering, profiteering practices of a few wrongdoers who are preying upon the reputation and privileges of the labor movement as a whole for their own personal gain. I can assure you that in this sense the investigation of the Special Senate Committee on labor racketeering, as long as the Democrats are the majority party, is pro-labor, not anti labor; and to the extent that legislation is recommended by the Senate Labor Subcommittee of which I am Chairman, it will be in the interest of the millions of honest working men and women.

Permit me to mention in particular this problem of small business, because that is of special importance to both Massachusetts and Wisconsin – for the prosperity of our cities and towns in both states is heavily dependent upon the prosperity of the small and independent businessman. Since Inauguration Day 1953, the profits of our largest corporations have increased 61 per cent. But small business profits have declined 52 per cent, business failures have increased and new business starts have declined.

Little or nothing was done by the Republican Administration to meet these problems – until the campaign started. Little or nothing has been done to stop the growth of monopolies, with mergers at their highest point in history. Little or nothing has been done to give more defense contracts to small businessmen, with 68 per cent of all contracts going to the 100 largest firms. Little or nothing has been done to replace the credit opportunities taken away from independent businessmen by the Republican tight money policies. For government loans from the Small Business Administration have been shockingly few while the interest rate has been shockingly raised.

We Democrats refuse to agree with the Republican official who said: "Let’s face it. Big business is going to get bigger and small business is going to get smaller and there is nothing we can do about it."

We think we can do something about it. We can give small business an agency that will really represent them and really help them – help them get working capital and long-term credit – help them get a fairer share of government contracts – and help them in other ways survive a world of economic giants. We can tighten up and enforce our anti-monopoly and restrictive trade legislation. And we can revise our corporate tax laws to give small businessmen the relief they deserve. Small business has been the neglected stepchild of the Republican Administration, and we Democrats propose to bring it back into the family.

I have tried to outline briefly only a few of the pressing domestic problems which require the election of a Democratic Congress and the participation of Bill Proxmire. But my time grows short. I have not had an opportunity to even mention the deterioration of our nation’s role in world affairs and our failure to meet such challenges as that presented by Poland, having touched on those issues earlier today. I have not mentioned the Republican failure to redeem their pledges on agriculture, immigration and a host of other issues – or their failure to give effective support to the kind of Federal aid for school construction that Bill Proxmire is courageously and correctly supporting.

But what is perhaps more important to the Democrats than our record, our issues or the personality of our leadership is – the spirit which, if we keep it alive through the election of Democrats like Bill Proxmire, will keep our party moving ahead with the same foresight and progress and imagination that have moved us in the past.

I want to see Democratic Party abide by the spirit of a man who was once a Republican but whose conscience could not permit him to remain in that party then – as I believe it would not permit him to join it were he alive today – Robert La Follette. The Democrats of Wisconsin and the country approach this special election with the same spirit with which Bob LaFollette approached the 1924 Presidential election, when he said in the first political address ever delivered solely to a radio audience:

*"Our faith is in democracy. Upon that faith we enter this contest, ready to meet falsehood with truth, to confront the claims of privilege with the demands of justice, to restore the government to the American people and to establish economic freedom throughout the land."*

We need throughout the country today the courageous and determined spirit of Robert M. LaFollette – and I believe in all sincerity that the Democratic Party is best-equipped to provide that kind of spirit and leadership. for we, too, have learned to meet falsehoods with truth – and that those who heaped abuse and ridicule and slander upon our programs and policies a generation ago now recognize their inherent value to the nation.

So long as there is one child without milk, so long as there is one family without a decent home, so long as there are aged persons without pensions, working mothers without fair wages, struggling farmers without income, so long as there are overcrowded schools, inadequate hospitals and families on relief, so long will the need for the Democratic Party continue – so long will we be called upon to assume the responsibilities of leadership.

I do not pretend to say that the future will always be rosy, even under a Democratic Administration. There will be crime, there will be problems. But only the Democratic Party has the enthusiasm and the determination and the new ideas necessary to meet those problems. We can build the schools and the hospitals and the homes and the dams that our nation needs. We can wage unrelenting war against drought and poverty and illiteracy and illness and economic insecurity. We can build, through strength and justice and realistic leadership, a lasting peace. And we can go forward to a new and better America, never satisfied with things as they are, daring always to try the new, daring nobly and doing greatly. It is in this spirit that we meet here tonight. It is in this spirit that we will win in Wisconsin in 1957 and sweep the nation in 1958 and 1960.

*Source*: Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Senate Files, Box 898, ["Wisconsin Democratic Dinner, 22 August 1957."](https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0898/JFKSEN-0898-003) John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.