President Jimmy Carter
Remarks at the Annual Convention of the Civil Service Employees Association.
Niagara Falls, New York
October 1, 1980

President Bill McGowan and Governor Hugh Carey, Senator Moynihan, distinguished Members of the Congress, Speaker Fink, and others who are so important in my life and in your life. I'm glad to be here. If I can't be at home with Rosalynn and Amy, I can't think of any place I'd rather be than here with you and the CSEA.

I've been several places today: in Washington, on Air Force One, I've been in Detroit, I've been in Flint Michigan. I just had a chance to sign two very important documents that will affect the lives of people in New York. And I have to confess to you that that's not the first time I have heard "Happy Birthday" sung, but I can tell you without fear of contradiction that was the most beautiful rendition I have heard today. Beautiful.

One of the important things that a President must do is to look for qualified people to work with me on important elements of human life in the United States; people whose reputation and whose influence might be in a local community or a State community. The most difficult kinds of positions to fill are not those that relate to academics or science, but those that relate to human problems, because there you have to have a person with the qualifications of sound judgment, influence, experience, idealism, and a heart filled with love.

My wife and I have made a professional lifetime of commitment to those who have mental problems, the mentally retarded children of all ages of our nation. And yesterday I chose a person to serve on the President's Commission on Mental Retardation that fills all those requirements in a very fine way, and that's your president, Bill McGowan. Later on this month, in a few days, I will be signing into law a landmark piece of legislation called the mental health bill of 1980, and Bill McGowan will be helping me on a nationwide basis to make sure that law is implemented in the fullest degree for the benefit of our people.

That's not why I came up here. I came up here because of my respect for you and what you mean, but I came up here in particular because of my deep respect and friendship and my admiration for Jerry Wurf, because Jerry Wurf not only champions the cause of all of you but also the working families and the poor and the elderly and the afflicted and the deprived people of this entire Nation and indeed to a fairly unlimited way the people of the world. He is a man of great ideals and great influence, and I think that he has the makings of a great labor leader. The only thing is I believe his career would be enhanced if he would just speak up more often. He's a little bit too timid. [Laughter] So, Jerry, just don't be so bashful. If you've got something to say, speak up, speak up. [Laughter]

And I want to thank you for inviting me. If s a good way for me to spend the latter part of a special day in my life, and I'm especially grateful for your endorsement. Your president told me that this is the first endorsement of anyone for President in 70 years, and it's honored me and I hope I can honor you. Thank you for it.

I'd like to say just a few things to you, and I will try to be brief. But on November the 4th the people of this Nation will make a choice that will affect
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the quality of all your lives, the quality of the lives of people in your own family, of others that you love, and those who look to you for leadership. It's a choice as to whether we'll have a continuation of five decades of social and economic progress and whether or not our Nation will stand behind its commitments to justice and to equality and to freedom.

During the last 3 1/2 years you and I together and the State and public officials at the local levels have formed a very fine new partnership. Our urban program, our rural program has now been substantially implemented. When I was campaigning throughout this State and others in 1976, one of the common concerns expressed to me everywhere I went was our local communities have been severely damaged, our prospects for the future are dismal, the central city areas are deteriorating, we cannot let our voice be heard in Washington, we need a new partnership to be established. We've done that, and I believe in addition to that we've addressed some of the crucial issues of this Nation outside the government arena that are important to all of you.

Our Nation was becoming dependent upon foreign oil with a steady upward increase in imports, making us not only rob ourselves and import oil and inflation and unemployment but also put our Nation potentially under the control or influence of foreign powers who don't share the commitments and ideals that we hold so dear. I've only been in office 3 1/2 years, but we've made good progress. With the help of Pat Moynihan and the Congressmen who are here with me we've now forged a national energy policy. It's only been a brief time since those laws were on the books. But the American people have rallied, and we have actually cut the importing of foreign oil by 24 percent. And we've also measured it so that each day now, in 1980, we import 2 million barrels of oil less than we did the same day in 1977. At the same time, we've put into the consciousness of America the knowledge that we must conserve energy and produce more energy of our own.

I just came this morning from Detroit, from Flint, and saw a remarkable demonstration of the production of high-quality, safe, durable, efficient automobiles that made me proud as President, as an American, and I hope will make you just as proud, and I hope that in the future, when you get ready to trade your automobiles, that you'll go to the showrooms where American cars are sold and look at those new products. Compare and I don't think you'll find the American product wanting in any respect. I was really proud of what I saw this morning.

This year we'll produce more coal than any year in history. We're drilling more oil wells, more natural gas wells, than any year in history. And we have proven again to the rest of the world that when this country is faced with a serious challenge or a problem or an obstacle or a question, when we understand and unite together that this country has never failed. And I don't believe that we will ever fail.

So, now we've got a good basis in energy to move forward to address some other problems; some are economic. We need to rebuild the industrial structure of our country. I saw a little part of it this morning. Yesterday we unveiled a program that will revitalize our entire steel industry. We've got a lot of progress already under our belt, but we need to make sure that our Nation is
committed to full employment modern tools, modern factories, competitive exports, so that in the future every person in this country who wants a job can get a good job and hold it. That's what our goal is.

That's one of the measures of the quality of life. But another measure of the quality of life is the quality of the community within which one lives--jobs, yes, in the industrial sector. Most of our jobs are private jobs, five out of six. Others are public service jobs, and those one out of six in the broad range of our great country are what determines how people in America live--a safe nation, a secure nation, a happy nation, a well educated nation, a nation where the responsibilities of a community are held together, where the poor and the weak and the elderly have adequate services, where the police, the firemen, streets, the homes, the services, that pull a community together and inspire Americans to be even better than we have been in the past, to give our children a better life than even we've enjoyed. That's the role that's played by you; that's the role that's played by the President of the United States.

There's a partnership that exists--those of us who give our lives or a major portion of our lives to serving others. Sometimes it's a sacrificial commitment because many in this room could make more money and perhaps even to be more socially prominent and more influential if you worked in the private sector of our economy. That's the way it's always been. But to those of you who feel the gratification of taking what talent God gives you and letting that talent be used in the most extraordinary and productive way, not only for yourself but for others, I congratulate you and thank you for what you mean to me as President and to our country. Public Papers of the Presidents, Carter, 1980, p.2006

I just want to mention a few other things that we've still got to do. We need to reform our welfare system so that we can channel more benefits to our people and more fiscal relief to local and State communities, particularly those in New York, where you bear such a heavy burden. We need to make an emphasis on the work opportunities to make it always attractive; we need to provide more support from the Federal Government for the State and local governments. We need to work toward the $1 billion countercyclical aid program that's now being considered by the Congress, social security rebates of $680 million, and continuation of the shared responsibility for dealing with these and problems in the future that we might not even be able to foresee at this time.

The important thing is to have a continuum, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, where there need be no fear of one another and a recognition that we're not aliens or antagonists or enemies, but that we're on the same team, because every one of your constituents, every person that you serve is my constituent, and I feel that very deeply. We've got unmet needs in civil rights, in human rights. And one of the most important things that's impressed on my mind today: I'm the father of a beautiful little girl; I'm the grandfather of a beautiful little girl, and I want to be sure that when my daughter and granddaughter face the future, they have the same equal rights as men guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States.

I have to admit to you that I cannot understand people who deliberately distort this ERA amendment. What it says is--and listen to this--what it says is not anything about homosexuality; it's not anything about men and women using the same bathroom, it's not anything about women being drafted. That's a bunch of baloney. What the amendment says is that neither the Federal Government nor any State government can pass a law which discriminates against women. It's all it says. Got that? That's what it says.
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That's the kind of future that can only be spelled out through the political process. It's not just a matter of theoretical rights. It's a matter of guaranteeing working women, whose children depend on them, that when they do a full day's work equal to the man next to them, they get the same pay. Now a woman on the average in this country for the same level of work gets only 59 cents for every dollar received by men. There are hundreds of different laws all over this Nation, from one State to another, that deprive women of a right under certain circumstances to own an automobile or to get property if their husband dies, or to know how she can be continued in a productive and safe financial life. That's a serious blight on our country.

I don't want to mislead you, because you've endorsed me and because this is a happy day for me to be here. There will be times when I as President, even in spite of what I've said about partnership, will not always agree with you. That's obvious. I can't agree with every proposal you make and also agree with every proposal that other groups in this country make, as President. I cannot promise you that there'll be unlimited Federal resources to meet every demand that's presented to my desk in the Oval Office. I can't promise that every new program will be passed through the Congress without delay, even if you and I agree that it ought to be done. I can't promise you that there will not be difficult challenges in the future and tough decisions to be made. But I do tell you that we share the same goals and the same ideals and the same hopes in the future.

And as this election approaches, you need to remember what the consequences might be if the wrong decision is made, because I face a Republican candidate formidable in his political strength and in the finances accruing to his campaign, who offers us an uncertain kind of future based on improbable promises and ill-considered proposals that affect us at home and also affect us abroad.

He's spoken about the problems of working families and of the poor, yet he proposes the same formulas that long ago broke faith with the majority of Americans. He's praised publicly the newborn free trade unions of Poland, but he's failed to provide the same support for the free trade unions of the United States.

He's against full rights for American workers. He opposes the minimum wage. It's hard for me to believe that working people would vote for a President who has said, not a long time ago, but this year, and I quote: "The minimum wage has caused more misery and unemployment than anything since the Great Depression." He also said this about the Humphrey-Hawkins bill: "The Humphrey-Hawkins bill was a design for fascism." And he also said, "Fascism was really the basis for the New Deal."

Only a year and a half ago he backed the elimination of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and he still talks about drastically weakening OSHA. He once called unemployment compensation little more than paid vacations for freeloaders. He opposed Medicaid and was a nationwide leader in the campaign against Medicare.

He was against aid to New York City and against aid to Chrysler. As a matter of fact, when Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy, he said, "What's wrong with bankruptcy?" And his attitude toward New York City was identical when he said, "Every morning my first prayer and every night my last prayer of the day is that
the Federal Government will not bail out New York City." Now, a few weeks before the election, he said he's changed his mind. But when hundreds of thousands of jobs were at stake and the integrity of our greatest city was at stake, his voice was loud and clear.

Despite his record, he's campaigning as a friend of the working people and the man with all the simple answers. He says solving the energy problem is simple: No windfall profits tax—just turn it over to the oil companies; they'll make the decisions for us. Public Papers of the Presidents, Carter, 1980, p.2007 And solving our economic problems is just as simple: Pass a massive election year tax cut, Reagan-Kemp-Roth. It would be a windfall for the rich and an inflationary disaster for the working people. And when he got a chorus of criticism from economists of almost every persuasion, he revised his economic program about a month ago. But his numbers don't add up. Instead of budget surpluses or even a balanced budget, it would bring on massive new budget deficits and unpredictable levels of inflation, over $100 billion deficit in 1985 alone. And between now and 1987, the tax cuts that he proposes from the Federal Government amount to a thousand billion dollars.

This tax cut would pump those billions of dollars, consumer dollars, into an already inflationary economy and bid up the price of every consumer item that you would have to buy, without investing first, at all, in the productive capacity of the Nation, that we need. Only one dollar out of ten of his tax cut would go for job producing investments, and what's more, there's nothing in his simplistic answer for rebuilding the economy of our older cities, of the Northeast or the Midwest. There's nothing for ports, nothing for railroads, nothing for retraining workers, nothing for research. The result would be an inflationary whirlwind that would steal back. in higher prices the few dollars an average family would get in tax cuts.

Because of its inflationary impact even Business Week and former President Ford oppose this Reagan-Kemp-Roth tax cut, and George Bush earlier called it, accurately, "voodoo economics."

My opponent has another simple solution for Government spending. Two weeks ago he repeated his promise to place the burden of massive Federal programs on State and local governments. As you know, he had a similar proposal 4 years ago to turn back $90 billion in Federal programs. He said recently he wanted to put those Federal programs back, but of course, the price had gone up because of inflation.

This year he left out the details. What are all these programs he wants to turn back to be financed by local and State government? How will the local taxpayers pay for them? How much will property taxes have to rise, for instance, on your local and State governments if you have to pay the full cost of welfare? Think about the property tax burden that will fall on you. He owes the American people some of these answers, but so far we've not had any of those answers.

We don't need that one-dimensional kind of thinking that government is the source of all problems and that the solutions are so simple and so easy. The plain fact is that our problems require everyone to work together, a partnership of government and labor and management and business and the American public. We need to draw the best out of everyone to deal with problems that are genuinely difficult and complicated. We need to draw on our strength as we have when our Nation's been threatened in the past with the First World War, the Second World War, the Great Depression, the Vietnam war, the social problems that were brought about by the end of racial discrimination. Those are the kinds of
challenges that our Nation has met successfully if and when we worked together. They weren't resolved by simply lashing out at scapegoats like the Government or providing simplistic answers that wouldn't work.

Those are some of the reasons why I'm so happy to have your endorsement because I know that this country has the best and most productive public employees—Federal, State, and local—of any nation on Earth. I've worked at every level of government for the past quarter-century. I know from personal experience the dedication that you bring to your careers, public service. Most people know that public employees keep our Nation safe, our roads in good condition, our schools open, our water and air clean, our work places healthy and safe, our elderly and our sick cared for, our laws enforced, and perform countless other necessary services day and night. And I'm glad to give thanks where it's due. I thank you for the hard work and the professional skills that you bring to your jobs, and I thank you for your support.

I don't want you to forget the importance of a decision to be made 5 weeks from now. I'll do all I can; so will Fritz Mondale, your friend; so will my wife and others in my Cabinet and those on the stage. But the decision will be made by you and people like you. And I hope that this next 5 weeks that you will add some of the sacrifice that you have devoted to your own jobs to this campaign, because the result of what happens November 4th could have more of an impact on your life and on the future of your family and the future of this Nation than perhaps any other decision that you will make in a long time.

So, I hope you'll join me not only as partners in administering government but partners in this campaign. Your endorsement is wonderful, but your personal voice and your influence among your friends and those who listen to you and respect you, this next 5 weeks, will be crucial. New York State can make the difference in the entire election outcome for the Nation, and what happens in this region here and what happens in your own communities all over this State can spell out the difference for the future of our country.

I want to join together with you in sweeping New York State on November 4th. One more word: If you do your share, I'll do mine, and on November 4th we will whip the Republicans together. Right? [Applause]

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:54 p.m. in the Niagara Falls International Convention Center ballroom.

Flint Michigan

Interview With Joe Stroud and Remer Tyson of the Detroit Free Press. October 1, 1980