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BETTER CITIES FOR TOMORROW

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
Vice President of the United States



Excerpts from remarks by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey before the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Dallas, Texas, June 13, 1966, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



MAYOR JONSSON, I want you to know what a special privilege it is to come to Dallas. I think that I speak for every single person in this audience today when I say that you and Dallas have really done a great job for all the mayors and the people here.

I gather that the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development brought you a message that meant a great deal to you. I want to say this, we are lucky and fortunate in this country to have a man who has devoted his life to the problems that face every one of us in our metropolitan areas, one who has been dedicated to making the American city

a better place to live. I salute Bob Weaver for giving unstintingly, unselfishly, and wholeheartedly of his talent and his life to the development and improvement of our great metropolitan areas. Secretary Weaver, every one of us is grateful to you.

We know what the problems are that face our cities and our rural areas as well. We are also quite sure of the solutions. The difficulty comes in how to apply the solutions and in what measure.

Individuality in an Urban Society

This Nation becomes more urbanized every day. But, with that knowledge comes a whole matter of evaluation and analysis of what urbanization means to the American individual. Can a person preserve his own individuality in the complex of a metropolitan urban society? Can we really maintain in our urban society the same values, the same ideas, and the same ideals that were given to us by the Founding Fathers in rural America? I think so, or I would not be here.

I think that these ideals of human liberty and freedom, of human dignity, are just as relevant and just as pertinent to the urban life as they are to a more simple and less complex life of early rural America. It is, however, a great challenge to make these ideals meaningful, practical, and realistic to the individual.

I like to speak in terms of the individual and not in terms of the mass. I like to think that our country represents personalities and not just a conglomerate, an aggregate. We are trying to build cities today that in a very real sense emancipate man from the tyranny of poor, or even hostile, environments, to give him a chance for individuality.

Needed: A National Commitment

So I say, our cities are in ferment. They are changing far more rapidly than many of us can comprehend. Another fact of modern-day life is that no single community can meet the demands made of it without some help. The local tax base is inadequate to the demands that are placed on the locality by an ever-growing population. A national effort must be made.

As a Nation, we are committed to many great causes. For example, I am Chairman of the Space Council of your Government. This Council is responsible for all of the development and research that go into the exploration of this whole new world called "outer space." I am for this effort; for it has added great things to our country by improving our industry, by advancing our educational system and research capabilities, and in general upgrading our skills. We are going to spend vast sums of money, but we must for our security, for our science, for our technology, for our education, and for the prestige of this Nation.

Breakthrough on Earth

But, any nation that can spend 25 to 35 billions of dollars to put a man on the moon also must make up its mind that it can spend what is necessary to help put a man on his feet right here on earth.

Economic Growth

This is a big country, this is a rich country, and we intend to keep it that way. We are approaching a gross national products this year of three-quarters of a trillion dollars. Our gross national product increase—just the increase this year—is greater than the total gross national product of all of South America. The increase in Federal revenues without any change in the tax schedule is about eight million dollars a year because of this GNP increase.

Our economy must continue to grow if we are to fulfill our many commitments. We have some problems. We have a rising cost of living and some indications of inflation. We must be very careful to avoid inflation. Because of certain warning signals, such as rising prices, we have asked local government officials to review capital expenditures now. We are not giving you any magic formulas; we are merely asking you to exercise your best judgment and defer for a few months any expenditures which will not put the health and welfare of your communities in jeopardy.

Patience and Experimentation

I know if I could just come here and promise you all the money you want and need, it would seem to be the solution to everything. Your Federal Government cannot furnish all the money to meet all the needs of every community in this country. I am not here to tell you that, and I don't think anybody else with any degree of responsibility is going to tell you that. We have made great progress, but accomplishing great tasks takes time. It takes time to build a business; it takes time to rear a family; it takes time to get an education; it will take time to rebuild our cities.

There is no formula for Utopia. In America, we must experiment. Our system contemplates failures and successes. History confirms our faith in this system, because no other country has been as successful.

A Voice for Our Cities

So, it took time to bring about the Department of Housing and Urban Development. But at long last, we have a representative of our cities in the President's Cabinet. It took time and it is going to take more time to get this whole establishment set. One of the things I admire Secretary Weaver most for is that he is taking the time to see that his de-

partment will be organized with the deliberateness necessary to have a good department. The mayors of the United States must surely realize this time factor. Who hasn't found that it takes months—sometimes years—to get agreement on an underpass or a redevelopment plan or other major public action?

A Great Beginning

We've been making some progress—new laws and new commitments. In education, there has been an explosion. There have been breakthroughs in health, social welfare, and we are consciously waging war on poverty. We are making great beginnings. It may take a few more years, but we are certainly closer than we were 10,000 years ago. We are turning the tide in our striving toward beauty. At least, people are conscious of the fact that when you drive along the highway you ought not to see all the refuse of humanity. There is a growing determination that the monument to this country is not going to be a gutter full of beer cans. We're making progress in cleaner air and purer water. Our search for economic growth and stability shows much progress. All of these benefit our cities and our people, but they are just beginnings.

Are we doing enough? Of course not. But we are accelerating our rate of progress—in some areas faster than it can be absorbed, I'm afraid. An example of this is aid to education. We are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into education, and there is hardly a State in this Union that has been able to use the funds allocated to it—including my own State. If we could pass a budget tomorrow morning for 10 billion dollars more for the cities, there would still be some cities that could not gear up to put that money to work.

What is important is the steady progress and our insisting that we do more. I think we are beginning to do that; we are accomplishing that steady progress within the expansion of our economy, within our available resources. And for this progress this Nation owes a debt of gratitude to the mayors of this country. You've been there in Washington at the critical moments, you've testified, and you've proven in your cities that progress can be made and that your ideas will work both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Full Citizenship for All Americans

Now despite our prosperity there are still more than 30 million Americans who suffer degrading poverty. Our biggest task in this country is to upgrade people, to help them improve their lives by developing talent and skills so that they become more productive. When people live in despair and hopelessness bred of filth and poverty, it is difficult to motivate them toward first-class citizenship. But, to accomplish our goals in urban areas, all must be first-class citizens. We have touched the

lifeline of every culture and every civilization so we are all entitled to first-class citizenship with its privileges and responsibilities.

Battling Slumism

There is a term I have been trying to impress upon the American people. Sometimes, we try to simplify our problem. When we think about the world today and we talk about violence and terror, assassination and aggression, and all of these things, we generally say it is communism. Well, it's not all communism. I happen to believe that if there never had been a Karl Marx or Lenin or Stalin that there would still be many problems in this world that would terrify us and shake us out of our complacency. We have some Communists, not many, but they are noisy, militant, and bothersome.

But, there is another and bigger problem facing us. I call it slumism, and slumism is more than just a dirty section of an old city or even a rundown section of a relatively new city. The enemy within our gates is slumism; it is poverty; it is illiteracy; it is disease; it is discrimination; it is frustration; and it is bitterness. Slumism is ungathered garbage and dilapidated buildings.

I want to say that many of our municipal services are upside down; we have the better schools in the areas where there is higher income. It should be the other way around, or at least the schools should be equal. The garbage collection is usually much better where you and I live. The streets that get the dirtiest are in the areas where the people have never been taught self-discipline.

Slumism is a family of eight in an unheated room in the northern United States. Rat-infested tenements in the richest country on the face of the earth are unpardonable. Slumism is danger in the park at night or on your own stairway. Slumism is the pent-up anger of people living on the outside of prosperity; it is a rent so high that a man becomes desperate—moved either to tears or to crime. It is a virus that spreads, that races like a malignancy through our cities, breeding disorder, disillusionment, and hate. We simply must declare war on this evil, just as we have on Communist aggression.

Planning for Action

Slumism is attacking our cities rapidly; it is taking over city after city.

We have the resources, we have the manpower, and we have the know-how. We can put these things to work if we have the will, the perseverance, and a plan of action.

But, we are not going to win any struggle overnight. Americans have to learn there are no instant solutions to age-old problems. We have to learn to be persevering, patient, and yet keep a sense of impatience.

Such a sense of impatience can best be put into well-thought plans of action. I learned this from General Westmoreland in Viet Nam. Some-

times, you get derailed; sometimes, things come up that you don't understand, that you did not contemplate. We need a plan of action to keep objectives and priorities in focus, and as a Nation we are developing one. We must have one if we are going to defeat slumism.

Viet Nam and Our Cities

The struggle in Southeast Asia takes a good deal of our resources. But let me point out it is not a much larger percentage of our Gross National Product than it was two years ago. The defense budget went from 7.7 percent of the GNP to 7.8 percent in that period. In the Korean conflict, that figure was almost doubled. So, it isn't as if we are draining all our resources; the figures are big, but so is the income.

That war is not going to last forever. Your Government is determined to find an honorable solution, a peace that gives the people in Viet Nam a chance for self-determination. We think that this is important for our Nation and for the world. We think it will be important in terms of our incomes and budgets for the years to come. If all of Southeast Asia goes down the Communist drain, I think we will have more to pay. The insurance we are fighting for in Viet Nam is a wise investment for security and freedom in this world. I have the same prayer that you have. No one is more unhappy about this tragic struggle than the man who is talking to you—unless it is the President.

That tragic struggle will come to an end. When it does, there will be more resources available for your cities. We have to be prepared to take advantage of that opportunity.

Tools of Opportunity: Rent Supplements

Among the programs looking toward that opportunity is rent supplements. You know what it is all about. You know how public housing works; when a family's income goes over the limit set for your community, even just a little, the family must move. Rent supplements offer the same standards of limitation with the exception that if the family can pay its own way in this housing, the supplement is withdrawn, the full rent is paid, and the family doesn't have to move. Now, public housing costs twice as much as the housing generated by rent supplements. This will be taxpaying housing. It is a better way to house families on their way up. I ask you to help us get the appropriation for fiscal year 1967 passed.

Demonstration Cities

Another tool of opportunity is the Demonstration Cities Program. Secretary Weaver has told you about it. This is an Administration bill; the President is for it; Secretary Weaver is for it; and the Vice President is for it. We are fighting for it, and we want it the way you want it. We want more than just planning money; we want planning and action money. We are committed to that.

The Demonstration Cities Program will be an increment of new money for your city. You will not lose a single program you have now. In addition to these regular, ongoing programs, special grants would be extended to demonstration cities. These grants would not be siphoned away from other Federal programs.

I want to emphasize also that the benefits of this program would be available to those cities—on a first-come, first-served basis—who have plans to show that they are ready to mount a full-scale attack on the slum problem. Get yourself organized; get your plans; and have a program that really makes your city a demonstration city.

Your Program and Your Challenge

Critics of this proposal do not attack it as a bad bill, but rather out of the fear, it seems, that it isn't big enough and that everybody can't participate immediately, or that only the big cities have a chance. Big cities need this program and can use it. But, the greatest beneficiaries will possibly be the smaller cities, because they are getting organized and this program would enable some of them virtually to eliminate slums and blight.

The ultimate size of the Demonstration Cities Program will be determined not by any figures or numbers game resulting from academic or even congressional debate, but by the cities themselves and their ability to put to work all these aids in a concentrated way. This will not be instant slum clearance. It will be a continuing program that begins with large-scale planning, continuous action, and social as well as economic rehabilitation. So my plea to you is: let's get the program started. Then, we can measure our rate of expansion by our readiness to put these demonstrations into large-scale operations.

The City Beautiful

Let me conclude with a word about committing yourselves to making the American city the city beautiful. The city should be the finest place in the world to live—with libraries, symphonies, radio and TV, cultural and recreational facilities, modern shopping areas, clean water and air, hospitals and health facilities. The city should be the finest institution of man's creation. It should be, but it isn't.

Now, if we could only have some examples of how you can build a magnificent community—not only in public structures, but in better, happier people and in removing tensions! The first American city that rehabilitates its structure and its soul, its facilities and its spirits, its buildings and its people, will ignite a flame which will attract the attention of every single citizen of this land.

That is what the Demonstration Cities Program is all about. I came down here to ask you to help create it.

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