

*Edited Copy*

*Housing -  
Newark & Wash.*

SPEECH ON HOUSING

There is no subject that is closer to my heart, nor is there any subject that should be closer to the hearts of the people in public life and in private life of America, than the housing of its people. I am proud that in my short few years of public service the goals of good, decent home and a good wholesome environment for every American are goals that I have held.

I have been here in Washington for more than four years. These have been turbulent years. They have been years of uncertainty and they have been years of great challenge to people of social sensitivity. As I say that, however, I realize there are forces in our society who would like to paralyze the social sensitivity of those who are in public life. There has been a program under way in our nation to take the life and the soul out of our far-seeing, progressive-minded liberals. Some of us, if we haven't lost our souls, have begun to lose all signs of life.

The time is at hand to call a halt to this retreat. The time is at hand to turn about and face the enemy and to prepare ourselves for a struggle that is here whether we like it or not. We must gird ourselves with the tools of information, of clean conscience, or worthy objectives and goals and go out and do battle on the terrain of American politics.

I have been a mayor of a city and I can talk very candidly about municipal affairs. This is one area in which I feel at ease and reasonably competent. I know that the central problem of the American city today is degradation and decay from within. It isn't the problem of the police force. You can fix that up if you've got courage and integrity. It isn't even the problem of traffic. The problem that faces the average American city today

is the fact that there is not enough living space for its people. And the living space available is often inadequate, obsolete and a disgrace to decent living standards in far too many instances. The problem of slums, of blight, of general degradation and decadence in the central core of the city and the suburbs has become the major perplexing problem of municipal officials. It can't be repaired by pious speeches about socialism and the threat to the American way of life, nor is it going to be corrected by the well-heeled, well-oiled and at times vicious lobbies which attempt to destroy every effort which is made to clean up these blighted areas through the cooperation of government and private groups.

I've got a burn on about housing, to put it in the vernacular. I think that some of us need to get aroused. I think some of us have been bludgeoned over the head so often, so many times and in so many localities that we have begun to think we can't win. Well, I am here to tell you that we can win and we must win. If we don't, the United States of America is in for a lot of trouble in the days to come. The people of this nation who can or do receive a Sears and Roebuck catalogue see what is available from the fruits of their labor. The people who read the slick magazines or see the marvelous ads in the Sunday papers about good homes and good housing for those in the upper income brackets are not going to be content politically or economically until they have a place in which to live that is worthy of human dignity.

Let's think back to the 1930's. All those New Deal years were great years. They were years when people in government had the courage to be creative and imaginative. They were years when people in public life were on the offensive and not retreating. We had an abundance of inspiration

and courage and strength and determination, even though we often had inadequate funds and sometimes the legislation was inadequate. We need these qualities right now. I have learned one thing in politics. The most that you can do with your enemies is to neutralize them. You seldom convert them, and you had better go on out and work toward the goals and the objectives that you have placed before the people and promised them.

There are too few of us today who are willing to go on the offensive -- willing to stick our necks out and fight for things that people really want. That is why these liberal, forward-looking programs always look as if they are going backwards. We have retreated because of the nature of the attack upon us -- not the quantity, but the velocity and the philosophy of the attack. This is true in a hundred and one different fields of government activity. We don't always need bigger appropriations to get some things done. They help, but they are not all. What we need today is a bigger demonstration with what appropriations we have and a greater desire and a willingness to fight it out. We must be willing to go on out into the highways and the byways of America and take this message of a rehabilitated, a reinvigorated and a more wholesome and decent America to the American people. The trouble is that people who live in slums can't fly to Washington to lobby, and the people that want other people to live in slums are flying to Washington all the time.

Back in 1937 the people were heard and Congress passed the United States Housing Act. It did two things. Number one; it pointed up that we had a housing problem -- which anybody in his right mind already knew. Number two; it gave us a housing opportunity. For the first time the government of the United States, in cooperation with cities and municipalities, counties and states, started to move ahead like a mighty phalanx against this

cancerous, malignant growth of blight and slums in the cities of the United States.

The 1937 program accomplished wonders. Over 190,000 public housing units were constructed in the United States in 278 cities across our land. It was a laboratory of housing experimentation. Of course, we made mistakes, but out of every mistake we gained some valuable information, and by the beginning of World War II this nation was well on the road to a comprehensive, over-all attack upon a major problem in the American municipality and city: the blight, the slums, the decayed areas and housing needs of low income groups.

Then the war years came and housing was held at a standstill. But I want to let you know a little secret about the war years. Not only were those years from 1940 to 1945 the greatest years of industrial production in the history of America, not only did we produce more food and fiber than ever before in the history of this nation, but let me let you in on something else. You know what else we were producing? Children. In abundance. That is right. All of the octogenarians who thought that society was drying up woke up one day to find out there was a new flood. Bundles from heaven. An avalanche of babies. So today we find ourselves with a housing shortage, with a school shortage, with a diaper shortage and with other pressing needs. And it is for one simple reason: human kind has not lost faith in itself. There are millions of new families. We are having babies in ever-increasing numbers. Read your facts. These are very important facts. The fact of the cradle, the fact of the family, the fact of the income of that family and the number in that family -- those are pertinent facts to the solution to any problem of economics or politics.

After World War II we started to re-evaluate these facts. Anybody who was fortunate enough to have a family knew what the facts were. I did. We increased the population in our family by 400 percent. It appeared to me that everybody I met had done the same. We knew there was going to be a school shortage even if some people in the taxpayers association didn't want to believe it. We knew there was a housing shortage because our young friends and their families couldn't find homes which they could afford to live in. And, after all, a housing shortage isn't based entirely on the number of houses. There is also the price of the house as related to the income of the people. There isn't any Cadillac shortage for some people, but there is for me. There isn't any yacht shortage for some people, but there is for me and most of the people that I know because they are short of the money that it takes to buy the yachts and the cadillacs. Today, no matter how you look at it, there is a housing shortage.

Congress started studying this whole housing situation. It reviewed and studied the housing need and our housing program. Finally, in 1949 it passed a far-reaching law -- the Housing Act of 1949. The specific provisions of this law are important ones, but even more important is the national policy laid down by the Congress.

Here it is:

"The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of sub-standard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."

Remember, this is public policy. It is part of public law. It was agreed to by the representatives -- the elected representatives, not the lobbying representatives -- of the people of the United States. Those who don't believe in it ought to have the courage to ask Congress to repeal it instead of gnawing at its timbers by constantly cutting the appropriations to carry it out. The sad truth is, however, that since its adoption this policy has been knifed repeatedly by the opponents of decent living conditions for the American people.

Their chief target has been the public housing program. The 1949 Act authorized the construction of 135,000 houses a year for a period of six years. That was a compromise figure. It surely didn't meet the facts. It is interesting how we in Congress sometimes legislate with only a side reference to the facts. The facts were that we needed well over 200,000 units per year for more than six years. We needed at least ten years of low-cost, low-income housing. But we compromised, and that is what you have to do legislatively. Without sacrificing the principle, we compromised on some of the details. And we entered upon this compromise authorization of 135,000 units per year for six years or a total of 810,000 low-cost, public housing units in the cities and the towns and the counties of the United States. Then what happened? ----

Last year we appropriated money for only 50,000 units.

You know there is a little gimmick you need to understand about our laws. Men can get themselves on record as being great, forward-looking statesmen in this country by voting for a lot of authorizations, but an authorization never built anything. All that an authorization does is fill up another page in the public law. What really counts is the

appropriations to back up the authorizations. The appropriation is the blood and the muscle on the skeleton of the authorization. I have watched some people in Washington stand up and proclaim themselves great friends of housing by voting authorizations. But when the appropriations come up, those same people step forward and say, "Well, this isn't the time. We've got to cut now. We have to reduce." There will never be the time that will meet their standards. There will always be an "emergency".

This year the House of Representatives is trying to cut the public housing program down to 5,000 units. The Senate is being more liberal, but the final agreement has not been reached. Therefore, I want to condition you for what I think may very well happen.

Frankly, we are fighting a rear guard action. We have retreated almost to the precipice. If we retreat any more we go over the cliff. The program for which we have fought and in which we believe is now at the point where we've got to stand up and make a last ditch fight. Call your shots and punish those who punish you. Go on out and get the, or they are going to get you and the American people. You can't just hold hands around here and say, "Well, he is a nice fellow", if you're going to save this program. The world is filled with nice fellows. What you need are nice fellows with the courage to be right when they are called upon to vote. What you need are people who are willing to stand up to fight this fight. What you need are people who are willing to be called socialists, to be called spenders, to be called every name in the books, but who go on out and fight for a decent home at a price which Americans can afford to pay. This program has got to be taken out into the highways and the byways. And you've got to explain it, you've got to sell it, you've got to meet these enemies of ours head-on. If you wait

for those enemies to meet you in Washington they are going to bypass you and come over here to the Congress and they will win their fight because no one else is here to act as a defensive force in behalf of liberal democracy and decent democratic living conditions.

We must take the offensive, friends. We must go to the people and explain to them just what our needs are and what our program is. We must emphasize the truth, and we must meet this issue of so-called socialism and all that hogwash head-on. Let me tell you about this socialism issue. You think you are the only ones that are being picked on? Why these same people don't even want good public schools. They are the very same people who lead the fights against better teachers salaries and better educational programs.

These folks say they want houses for everybody that can pay for them -- that is their argument. They say, "We want a house, but we don't want the government to build it. We want John Q. Public, Mr. Citizen, to be able to buy his own home." And what do they do about it? They are the very people who are fighting fair minimum wages laws. They are the people exploiting our migratory workers who live in housing conditions that are such a disgrace that Americans ought to bow their heads in shame. They are the very people who are fighting effective free trade unionism so a guy can get a dollar for his hour of work. They are the same people who are shouting "economy", and yet getting all the subsidies they can for themselves. These people are not just opposed to public housing, they are opposed to anything that is for the public. They are opposed to the public domain being utilized for the good of the American people. They are opposed to the natural resources of this country being developed for the good of the American people.

These are the people who have fought effective flood control. These are the people who have been more interested in a balanced budget than in a balanced America or a balanced diet or a balanced home or a balanced world. These are the people who are blocking effective river valley development. These are the people who have fought the extension of the social security. They even fought the beginning of it. That was socialism too, they said. These are the people, my friends, that have fought REA for the farmers.

These boys, these political dinosaurs, these men from the past, from the stone age of politics have been going out and separating and segregating the folks who want a better America in nice little compartments. They take you on one at a time and they beat you. But if you ever get together sometime they won't know what hit them.

They have played around saying they want every American to own his own home. So do I. Nothing would make me happier than to know that there was no need whatsoever for public housing. Nothing would please me more than to know that any man could step out and buy as good home as I have. Nothing would make me happier than to know that every man could have the opportunity to send his children to private schools if he wanted to. But we must deal with the situation as it is.

Sure, I join with them in the great ideal of every American having an income adequate to buy his own home. But I ask the people who berate these public housing projects, "What are you willing to do, Mr. Real Estate Lobbyist, to see to it that every American does have enough money to have his own home? What are you willing to do to see that he is paid an adequate salary for his work?"

How I wish this room were filled up with the mayors of the cities of

of the United States. They know what the problem of traffic and of community planning and recreation and education and housing is. They know it and they know that the best thing that ever happened to their city was when the local public housing authority was established to clean out the slums. They know the facts. So do you. They know, for example, what the facts are on some of the slum and blighted areas. The blighted areas have 45 percent of the major crimes and 55 percent of the delinquencies, 55 percent of the arrests and 60 percent of the tuberculosis, 50 percent of all diseases that are recorded by the Public Health Departments and 35 percent of the fires, and 45 percent of the city costs. The simple truth is, my friends, that the greatest luxury and the greatest extravagance that America now shoulders is the extravagance and the luxury of slum and blighted areas.

These areas take 50 percent of the city funds on the average, but they only bring in 5 percent of the city revenue. Even the present payments in lieu of taxes from public housing projects provide more than the amount which was collected before the areas were redeveloped. And if you'll get behind a bill which I have got in the Congress up here which would provide for a new method you will get even more funds in lieu of taxes.

I know that public housing has its limitations. I know that public housing facilities at best cannot have the fringe benefits that you and I enjoy so much. I know that they are crowded. I know that they often are not in the better areas of the city, but I know that they are a decided improvement. I know that in public housing projects the families learn how to live better. In fact, it is almost a training period for them until they get into that income group where they can march out to buy their

own home or rent their own home. I know that the areas around public housing become commercially developed -- become income producing areas instead of income absorbing areas. I know that American cities today must plan for recreation and community activity. I know that all these crocodile tears about juvenile delinquency are meaningless until the American people are willing to do something about the physical plans of American cities so that something constructive can be done to curb the delinquency and to rehabilitate the bodies, souls and lives of our children.

I get sick and tired of hearing people running around and piously talking about how the delinquency rate has increased. Let me just say this. The delinquency rate will continue to increase until everybody in America becomes sufficiently aroused to provide the finer things of life for the children of America -- until they are really willing to do something about housing, schools, health, and recreation. I don't have much time for the "moral police" who run around talking about delinquency, when they are not even willing to go on out and join in any fights for a better community. I have heard too many of them in my day.

Everybody is worried about the moral code of Washington, too. Well, there is a lot of room for improvement, but believe me the moral code back in the communities of America where people can become calloused to the terrible things that are happening is nothing to brag about. Many of the people who have been down here in recent weeks giving pious speeches about unethical standards and the moral fiber of our nation are the very same people who keep children living in filth and degradation, who fight against new school buildings or against new parks and playgrounds.

Yes, it is bad to put your hand in the till and to filch a few dollars from the public treasury. No one can condone that. It is wrong.

It is illegal. Those who are guilty should be punished. It is that simple. But let me tell you something, ladies and gentlemen. He who robs the strength and the health of a child or of an adult, he who denies that child the opportunity of an education, he who denies decent wholesome community standards and environment so that the family may grow and flourish is the really immoral one. I don't just mean the people who actively oppose these things either, I mean everybody who doesn't get out and fight for them.

What improvement there is to be made! I will tell you how to lift the moral standards of America: Think about people. Think about better people. Think about children. Think about giving them opportunities so they can improve their lives. Think about cleaning up your cities, cleaning out these cesspools of social infection. Think about better standards of social service. Think about better relationships between people. Think about breaking down prejudice and bigotry. This is the way to improve the moral code of America. You are not going to improve the moral code by just arresting somebody. Oh no. Fear will not improve the moral code of America. Fear of punishment is not the answer. The best kind of community is not one where there is strict law enforcement. The best kind of community is one where there is a wholesome law observance, and law observance only comes when you have a community that is in balance, when it is happy, when it works together, when there is a sense of equity and equality, when people are respected because they are people, when racial standards and bars are removed, when people begin to think in terms of individuals, of God's children. That is when America will be better and that is when the moral code of this country will be improved.

You can fire everybody from a government agency. You can go after those you can prove are guilty and those you suspect, but you will still not make America over. You will still not greatly improve it. What you have got to do is start right back there where you live in your town, in your village and in your block. Start rebuilding America from the basement up. Re-analyze it, re-assess it and improve it. This is what is needed and no amount of face lifting will do the job.

Now I want to say something to my friends in private enterprise, and believe me they are the most important people in the world. This is a private economy. That is the way I want it. The best answer to the public housing program is for the private developers to build a house that people can afford to live in or own, or to work with the rest of us to lift the incomes of people to meet the cost of these houses. The simple truth is that the gap between housing costs and family income is still just about as much as it was ten years ago. We can't ignore that fact.

Now what are the facts about income distribution in America? According to the 1950 census — the last we have — 69% of the families in the United States had an income under \$4,000 a year. In 1951, 80% of all the tax payers in America had an income under \$5,000 a year. 49% of all family income producers in America have an income under \$3,000 a year. These people have children, too. Lots of them. Now have you ever figured out how you would buy a house from private enterprise with a family income under \$3,000 a year? Children have tonsillitis. They get the measles. They have all kinds of troubles that cost money. — I want to find out how a person lives with an average family on \$3,000 a year.

31% of the families in America have incomes of over \$4,000. It is

They are the top third. It is that upper third at which the present private housing program has been directed. In other words, the program we have today is a one-third program. If the private housing industry wants to have no more public housing then I give them this challenge: Produce a house that is fit to live in that can be rented by these people with this kind of income. That is the answer. That is the whole thing. Some of them have done a pretty good job. Some of the veterans housing has been well done. Many builders have learned how to do a fine job of mass construction. They have learned how to cut costs and at the same time they have learned how to give a good piece of property. I am all for this, but it doesn't go far enough. They can't present to the American Congress and to the American people a completely and totally private program that will meet the needs of families with incomes between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a year. And by the way, there are 16% of the American families that have that kind of income. I ask them to present a private housing program that will meet the need of those families.

They know they can't do it. They ought not to want to do it. This low-income area should be spaced out for the kind of mutual cooperation and assistance which we have in public housing. Some of these other groups, middle income groups, are the kind of income groups that ought to be in cooperative housing. What America needs today is a balanced housing program: Private housing with government assistance; Cooperative housing where individuals can get together with low rates of interest through long amortization to build their cooperative housing projects; and the low-income, low-rent public housing for those who need it. That is a sound and a sane policy. That is the policy that we need. We have most of it in public law, except for good cooperative housing, but we need that, too.

We have the public housing law, but we don't have the appropriations. What is really being proposed by the House amendment to cut to 5,000 units is simply that those in the low-income groups shall not have any houses. They can sleep in the streets. They can live in the cellars and the basements. They can live in the vermin and the rat-infested tenements of the American cities. That is what they are proposing, and I dare them to come out and defend it. They talk economy. There is no economy in this. It is miserable miserliness that will only drive people to despair.

I want to ask those who would cripple these programs to tell me how they are going to house people with incomes under \$2,000 a year in livable quarters. And 31 percent of the American families have incomes under \$2,000 a year. These people are in essence saying, I repeat, that they don't care for the 31 percent. They are saying that they want nothing to do with them but to let them be. They believe in the equality of rich and poor. Both may sleep in the gutters and under the bridges. Except one has to and the others don't.

We have gone around now with these statistical charts and all these nice statements of ours long enough. The facts are on our side. Social justice is on our side. No man who has ever visited his church and sat in silent meditation can defend what has been going on. No man with even as much social sensitivity as a crocodile can defend what has been going on — and yet it has not been stopped. Why? Because there have been appeals to passion, to prejudice, and to purse. People have been pitted against people in communities that have spent 50 years in building good will. I know of what I speak, friends. I have been in communities where they have learned how to live together — Protestant, Catholic and Jew, white and black — communities where the ministry and the public officials and the educators have

have worked their heart out to get people to live as free and equal human beings. What has happened? The Real Estate Boards have come in there and fanned prejudice until today much of the work that we fought for so hard has been lost. I don't forgive these people for that.

I want them to make their money. I want them to make alot of it, but I don't want them to make it at the expense of tearing down the better things of community life. I don't want them to make it by fanning bigotry, discrimination and prejudice. I don't want them to make it by distorting the facts. I want to say that if American free enterprise is going to survive, it will have to be humane. It will have to be filled with compassion. It will have to emphasize humanitarianism. This is the difference between American enterprise and enterprise in other parts of the world. The real difference between our way of life and the totalitarian way of life is our concern for people. Any economic system or any economic program which disregards the needs and the hopes and the aspirations of any segment of the people is a program which is weak. It is filled with the seed of its own destruction and will ultimately produce trouble. Don't forget that.

The spirit of my country and the spirit of this nation is not the spirit of the dollar sign. The spirit of my country and the spirit of this nation is not the spirit of waving the banner of money, money, money. The spirit of this country is the spirit of human equality. It is the spirit of compassion. It is the spirit of affection and respect for one's neighbors. It is the spirit of humanitarianism. It is the spirit of the helping hand to the helpless. It is the spirit of character and of generosity. This is the strength of America.. The people who parade around here talking about the strength of America as a balanced budget have got

a business machine in their heads and a double entry bookkeeping method in their hearts.

The strength of this country isn't in the Federal budget. That is a poor reflection of the strength of America. The strength of this nation is in its families, in its homes, in its children, in its schools, in its libraries, in its playgrounds, in its communities -- and the sooner we drive this point home the better off we are going to be.

America will have a balanced budget when its people feel in balance. America needs a balanced budget, but it needs it as a part of a total community program of balancing out the economic and political forces in a community and in a society.

When you are through here, go to your political representatives and call on them. Tell them you are not there to hold hands, you are there to talk about housing. Tell them that you think we might at least spend as much for the housing of our people as we have spent, for example, on tracking down the hoof and mouth disease. That is a very serious disease, and we ought to track it down, but we ought to spend as much on the housing of our people as we do on some of these specialized subsidies. I am here to say that more money is expended in subsidies to commercial carriers in the United States of America for our transportation than has ever been expended on the housing of the American people who would use those means of transportation.

I ask you to enlist with me and with thousands of others in the struggle for the worthwhile project of the goals which were announced in the Housing Act of 1949. I ask you to enlist with me in providing a decent home and wholesome community conditions and environment for the American families and the American people. And you can do it if you but have the will and the determination. Thank you very much.



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)