

REMARKS

THE HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

DECEMBER 7, 1969

If politics make strange bedfellows, I want to assure you that pollution is gathering a much odder bunch of disparate thinkers under the same bedcovers than ever drew together under a political blanket.

My concern for the befouling of our air and the consistent poisoning of our water is long known. Newer to the conservation scene is the incumbent governor of California who just three weeks ago jumped aboard the bandwagon with a pollution conference in Los Angeles.

Think: Ronald Reagan and Hubert Humphrey campaigning together! Welcome aboard, Governor.

I think your participation in the effort to halt further violence to man's environment is final proof that civilization is indeed in peril as a result of reckless disregard for man's natural heritage.

Speaking at the California meeting, Dr. Barry Commoner, director of the Center for Biology of Natural Systems at Washington University in St. Louis, warned that we are fast "approaching the point of no return" in our disruption of nature's chemical balances and said that we have only this generation in which to reverse our "suicidal course".

This is not a sudden threat.

Four years ago President Johnson warned of the penalty for continued discharge of sewage into our streams, of the consequences for continued dumping of industrial wastes into our nation's waterways.

Today, every major river system in the nation is polluted. More than 100 million Americans get their drinking water from rivers and streams into which 120 million dump their wastes every day.

We are plundering irreplaceable timberlands and wiping out unique marine life. From California -- where the natural nitrogen cycle is undergoing massive disruption, if not destruction -- to the New York Harbor -- where the waters are contaminated with bacteria -- we see the effects of man's callous disregard for his bountiful natural wealth.

A substantial portion of our economic growth and development has been achieved at a cost that does not yet appear on the nation's balance sheet. We have been spending -- and spoiling -- with abandon. Sixty-five thousand gallons of water to manufacture one automobile; 50,000 gallons to test an airplane engine.

We are polluting our West Coast water reserves with chemical fertilizers -- and it is showing up in rainfall as far east as the Midwestern corn belt.

The effects of atmospheric pollution are more familiar. A month ago attendees at the American Public Health Association's annual conference cited once again the destructive effects of air pollution on health, materials and vegetation and noted that there are ten to twenty detectable deaths a day from polluted air in New York City alone.

There is absolutely no way to excuse a society that allows its members to die at the hands of the air they breathe.

Two years ago President Johnson warned: "Either we stop poisoning our air -- or we become a nation in gas masks, groping our way through dying cities and a wilderness of ghost towns."

This year, the Administration's request for all natural resources totalled only 1.9 percent of the national budget -- the lowest appropriation in a decade.

Despite the promise of federally established limits on pesticide pollution, and despite the powerful public protest over automobile emissions, we are still woefully complacent of the destructive effects of agricultural and industrial wastes.

The administration request of \$214 million for sewage plant construction -- raised to \$600 million in the House and to \$1 billion in the Senate -- is still pending. Perhaps we need a moratorium day for our environment!

I would like to talk for a moment about some other aspects of the nation's environment.

With all the problems facing us in this decade, it is hard to find one tougher -- or more important -- than the failure of our urban systems. We are a nation of cities. Over 70 percent of our total population now lives in 212 urban areas and demographers tell us that by the year 2000 our urban population will rise to 250 million -- some 90 percent of the anticipated total population at the brink of the 21st century.

But these figures don't begin to describe the urban environment for only the top and the bottom of the economic spectrum remain in the central cities -- and the bottom predominates.

Already the inner cities have become the poor-houses of America, strangling in the tight white suburban nooses that surround them. Already industry is fleeing the cities in hot pursuit of the middle class employee they prefer -- who earlier fled in search of green grass, safe streets and decent schools for their children.

Left behind in the cities are those with all the options (families who can afford private schools and high rise apartments) and those with no options -- the families who can't afford to move.

Everybody worries about it. But the talkers who have made discussion of urban problems the intellectual parlor game of the 60's are often those who have escaped.

They live in the suburbs -- and worry. They occupy penthouses -- and worry. Much of the talk comes from people who don't like cities.

I do like cities. I like the heterogeneity and diversity, the gaudy and colorful contrasts and the intense throbbing vitality. The contemporary American city seems to me to offer the fullest, richest panoply of life experience available to any people at any time on any part of the globe.

In large part this is the result of America's fortunate cultural diversity. We have restaurants and theatres and films from every nation represented in our cities. Our major urban areas offer unparalleled shopping, recreation and cultural activity. The world's greatest symphonies and ballets, writers and lecturers offer their wares on our home turf.

Without leaving town we have the opportunity to view the Bolshoi and the Beattles. Our department stores offer Dior copies before the originals are off the runways in Paris.

Our restaurant offerings range from blintzes and Peking Duck to Shishkabob and Smorgasbord. Spaghetti and egg roll are so familiar that many of us think of them as American food.

The suburbs lack this cosmopolitan diversity. Of course they also lack the distressing every-day confrontation with poverty, filth and decay. With despair and dismay and delay.

Over two years ago I proposed a Marshall Plan for the cities, I did so from the conviction that only a program of this scope, only one of this vision, could generate the comprehensive support which is essential to the solution of the urban dilemma.

My years of observing the massive and complex problems of the cities have taught me a great deal of humility when it comes to having all the answers, but I think I can identify some causes of failure and point to some hopeful avenues we might fruitfully explore.

In reciting the facts and statistics of the urban crises, we usually forget that this is fundamentally a political crises -- an issue which, in the end, can only be resolved by concerted political action.

Our failures to date are primarily political failures -- an inability or unwillingness of the people's elected representatives to act on a scale which reflects the magnitude of the crisis.

I think the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations were moving on urban problems. Not that we had perfect wisdom -- no indeed. This is a trial and error business, my friends, and let no one tell you different.

But we did care about these problems and we did establish an urban policy and we did create a climate in which change could occur.

Landmark legislation such as the creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Model Cities Act and the Housing Act of 1966 were true steps forward. But institutional devices cannot progress in a vacuum. It is illusory to believe that sustained headway is possible without the political backing of our elected officials -- and without the support of the people who send them to office.

Today the national government is in retreat.

The mayors of our large cities are crying out for help -- and the Nixon Administration is pushing for the most extravagant and questionable weapon system in all of mankind's history.

Two months ago the City Council of one of our smaller cities -- Toledo -- declared a state of emergency and asked the assistance of Congress in subordinating the Supersonic Aircraft Transport program to urgent domestic requirements.

How did the Administration respond? With a request to Congress for nearly \$4 billion to rebuild the Merchant Marine fleet.

I do not mean to imply that the Federal government is responsible for the problems of our beleaguered municipalities, nor that the Federal government could, with the best of wills, solve these problems independently.

If we are assigning blame, it may be laid at many doorsteps. The nation's courthouses and city halls often seem to lack zeal for reform. There is plenty of limited vision and notable lack of dedication to be found among state governments.

All over America we encounter an endless vista of municipalities and special service districts with overlapping responsibilities -- with widely varying and too often obsolete building codes, with haphazard zoning regulations, and with piecemeal programs to correct these deficiencies.

We need a national urban strategy to define basic social, economic and environmental objectives in order to guide our urban, suburban and rural growth.

Let me be candid: our present governmental structure -- federal, state and local -- is incapable of planning and achieving the living environment our wealth and technology permit -- and which our survival requires.

New urban planning and other single-purpose governmental agencies have been layered upon old and fossilized institutional structures. When one unit of government is prepared to act, others are not.

Without cooperation and coordination of these disparate units, our resources, energy and confidence are frittered away and lethargy sets in.

The Federal government -- the only government common to us all -- has one notable advantage in this arena. It has money.

And make no mistake, my friends, money is more than the mortar -- it buys the bricks. Money may not solve the problems of the cities, but it sure helps and I don't think we'll find many mayors saying no thank you, we'll take ideas instead.

But we need ideas too.

I have proposed creating a National Urban Development Bank financed through subscription of public and private funds. The bank would underwrite the special risks attendant upon solving our most critical urban problems -- low cost housing for example. Securities sold by the bank would also attract private investment capital for the revitalization of our cities. Federal funds would be used as seed money to get the bank started.

I have proposed a National Urban Homestead Act to subsidize land costs for qualified private housing developments. Such a subsidy would make possible the use of high-priced urban and suburban land to relieve the population pressure of the inner city.

I long ago proposed a program of federal support for state equalization of vital community services -- education and welfare, for example -- to provide immediate assistance to bankrupt local communities that have exhausted their property tax base.

Many of our cities are still using 18th and 19th century management models as we head into the 21st century.

I think we could profitably borrow some management techniques from industry and apply them to the wheezy machinery of local government. In the supersonic age, Americans seem more willing to modernize mechanical systems than management systems.

Habits become ingrained and the untried is often frightening. We know what we have, and we aren't a bit sure what we might get. But fear must be overcome. We must open some rusty windows and welcome constructive new ideas.

Absent change, we'd still be delivering mail by Pony Express instead of building nose cones and re-entry capsules.

Absent change, we would still be building with logs and stone instead of the rich range of contemporary materials at your disposal today.

I have proposed that on July 4, 1976, we dedicate a new American city, one which exemplifies the highest standards of beauty and excellence.

Bi-centennial City would test new ideas in land use, housing technology and community development. Its construction would attract the finest talents in America. By reflecting what is best as well as what is possible, it would become a pilot city for a new America. It would provide the visible evidence that progress is possible -- one of the essential factors in the success of any enterprise.

Our city needs are as diverse as the American metropolis itself. There is no perfect plan by which a city can best serve the needs of its residents. There is no optimum pattern to follow in forming buildings and land into the perfect city. There is no universal guideline that will guarantee a fit between our people and their dwellings and spaces.

The only generalization that we can make is that this conjuncture must come about.

Cities, like people, can have friendly or forbidding faces. We can no longer plan our cities as islands, we must plan them as broad avenues of invitation, two-way streets that beckon and invite passage and commerce between the urb and the suburb.

What the modern city needs is a sense of community -- of belonging. To humanize our cities, we need to think in terms of neighborhoods that offer their residents a full life. Our task is to bring people in closer proximity to their jobs, their schools, their health services, their recreation areas and their cultural institutions.

People must feel close to their public services and to those who provide these services. And these people -- the policeman and the educators and the health professionals -- must in turn identify with those whom they serve.

Jobs should be near people and industry should design development plans with such proximity in mind.

This is a matter of self-interest for industry. Facilities in inner-city locations will help eliminate turn-over and recruitment problems. The labor force will be right on industry's doorstep.

Such changes can make the city habitable; such changes can make living a pleasure -- rather than a constant chore -- for the city-dweller.

Most of today's cities grew like Topsy and their deterioration is proceeding in much the same fashion. The architects of their renaissance must re-structure our cities as radiant centers of high density land use.

High density does not necessarily mean overcrowding, low density does not preclude it. On Park Avenue, density is 1000 to the acre. In Watts it is 20 per acre.

But there are limits: if all of us were packed together like the residents of Harlem, the whole population of the United States -- over 200 million people -- could be squeezed onto Long Island.

The new frontier is not out -- sprawl -- but up -- high rise and multi-use residential and service centers.

Basically I am an optimist. I think we can cut the white noose around the neck of our cities. With our fast paced technological expansion, there is no reason why our cities should be dirty or dull or ugly or polluted or unsafe to walk in and impossible to drive in.

There is no reason why cities should not be good places in which to live and work and bring up our children.

What it takes -- in addition to money and ideas -- is concern. No responsible member of the community dumps trash on his neighbor's lawn, and industry must observe the same strictures in disposing of chemical and liquid wastes.

Housing codes must be enforced; by their neglect the city itself subsidizes blight, slums and sprawl.

Federal housing standards -- allowed to stand without revision for almost three decades -- must be brought in tune with today's housing expectations. As former HUD Secretary Robert Weaver said, the best answer to slum housing is to build enough good housing.

We have a long agenda for change:

- .. Schools are worst where educational needs are greatest.
- .. Garbage collection is slowest where the danger to health is greatest.
- .. Police protection is least effective where crime rates are highest.
- .. Health services are most limited where the need is greatest.
- .. Public transport is worst where private vehicles are fewest.

These things we know and they are arresting certainties. Equally arresting is our knowledge that it is a waste of time to remake our cities physically without a concurrent attack on the painful social problems bred by their decay.

This is a job for all of us and it is an urgent job for, if our cities fail, so in the end will our nation; and it is the personal investment of each of us that will in large part determine the ultimate outcome.

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of Minnesota  
500 Eighth Avenue S.E. ■ Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414 ■ 338-8789

RICHARD B. GRIFFIS, Minister

October 21, 1969

Mr. Hubert H. Humphrey  
1510 H. Street N.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20005      Attention: Ursula Culver

Dear Hubert:

Your choice of December 7 as the Sunday on which to preach from the pulpit of First Congregational Church is a good one with us. Thank you for your note of October 6.

In my letter in July I suggested that the emphasis of your remarks might be the search for quality in the future city, or something which draws attention to values and priorities essential in the minds of urban citizens. The pace of change makes almost all city dwellers forward-looking, but some with confident projections and dreams, and many others with apprehension and bitterness. As you look forward, what is essential to hold as fundamental and what dreams essential to hold on to? You may have an entirely different topic to develop, so I await any advance notice about your remarks you may want to send me.

I also suggested that the service give a major emphasis to your prepared remarks and to dialogue during which time you could receive questions from the congregation. This approach is increasingly effective in a number of churches - on special occasions.

It is practice this year to have a pot luck lunch after church on the first Sunday of the Month. We will continue that plan and also have a time for coffee in Pilgrim Hall after the service and before the lunch. You are invited, of course, to remain for additional conversation during lunch, all of which is usually over by 1:30.

I am not sure what attention from the press you may desire. I will await your suggestions.

We look forward to the 7th of December.

Sincerely,

*Richard B. Griffis*  
Richard B. Griffis

*A Member of the United Church of Christ*



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