

file  
PRESS RELEASE BASED UPON ADDRESS BY MAYOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY OF MINNEAPOLIS, PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BEFORE MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE'S ANNUAL CONVENTION, FORT SHELBY HOTEL, DETROIT, FRIDAY EVENING, OCT. 11, 1946.

For release: A.M. Editions,  
Sat., Oct. 12, 1946

A thorough Congressional study of the entire tax structure of the United States, with emphasis upon the development of sound reforms that will strengthen the financial position of American cities, was urged by Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey of Minneapolis in an address before the annual convention of the Michigan Municipal League in Fort Shelby Hotel in Detroit Friday evening.

Mayor Humphrey urged the Michigan League to join with similar organizations in other states and with the American Municipal Association and the United States Conference of Mayors in pressing for a "sweeping analysis of the nation's tax structure as the first step in a program that will help restore financial solvency to the rapidly failing units of government on a local level."

He stressed the importance of strong local governments to the continuance of a democratic society and warned that insufficient revenue threatens a financial collapse of thousands of municipal jurisdictions.

"We admit," he said, "the truth of the long-established axiom, the power to tax is the power to destroy. It should likewise be stated, however, that the inability to tax is the essence of disintegration for a government.

"If local government is to function effectively, if it is to be

responsive to the needs of its people, if it is to be self-reliance, if it is to assume responsibility for local direction, if we are to preserve our federal system, it is imperative that local governments be given the financial means with which to meet and solve the ever-increasing number of problems they are being called upon to face."

Mayor Humphrey declared that it was time the cities told their story, that they should "unite on a common program based on a recognition that we all share common problems, some in greater degree and intensity, but nonetheless the same."

He said that one reason for the plight that many cities find themselves in is to be explained in the apathy that dominates citizen bodies in many communities.

"No level of government," he said, "is shrouded in so much secrecy as is local government. When people think of government, they think immediately about what's going on in Washington, or they think about some state issue that is being dramatized.

"But how few citizens take a close interest in what is done in the city hall. The truth is that, day after day, the city hall is being pushed into the background because its resources are inadequate for the job it should be doing.

"Consequently, the citizens have looked to the state and federal governments for solutions to these problems. The municipalities meanwhile are being forced into a position of mediocrity. It is our responsibility to ask for and insist upon obtaining those means."

Mayor Humphrey declared that he feared governmental centralization and "the disease of bureaucracy."

"But," he continued, "I know that the safeguard against these evils is not speeches against centralization or against bureaucracy, nor is it nasty

little stories about Washington officials. The safeguard lies in making local government responsive by getting for it the means to enable it to do the job.

"The people who know best the problems of a community are the people who are part of that community. The farther removed one is from that community, the farther away is one from an appreciation and understanding of those problems.

"We in the municipalities are the shock troops of democracy, the front-line fighters. Others may devise policy and generate new ideas, but it falls to us to take these plans and put them into action."

Stressing his point that local governments are the first-line of defense for democracy, the mayor declared:

"One hears today on every hand talk of new forms of government, of streamlined, efficient, centralized governments, of new ideologies, some of which pose as democratic but which would concentrate power exclusively at the top.

"May I drive this point home to those of us who represent democracy: Here is democracy today. Democracy is not nearly as evident in the halls of Congress or in the State Legislature as it is in municipal government, because municipal government is close to the people; it belongs to the people. Municipal government is a mirror of the community of which we are a part.

"If our government is bad, it is because the people, through apathy and indifference, permit it to be bad. If our government is dynamic, it is because there is an alert and intelligent citizenry. If our government has perspective and vision, and, if it can profit from the mistakes of the past, it is because the people who selected that government has perspective and vision and a desire to perfect the machinery that services



their community.

"Recently one of our outstanding industrialists, Mr. Paul Hoffman, former chairman of the Committee for Economic Development, cleverly paraphrased an old political slogan, when he said, "As Main Street goes, so goes the nation."

"As Main Street goes, as the towns, the villages, the cities go, so goes our nation. As we hear discussions of how to achieve 60 million jobs and how to plan for a secure future, we would do well to ponder the profound truth implied in this wise axiom.

"We should remember that, if we are to have full employment, if we are to develop adequate health and welfare standards, if we are to establish decent educational opportunities, if we are to achieve and maintain a prosperous economy, our programs for realizing these goals must begin in our town. That's where we start; not in Washington, not in ~~St. Paul~~ <sup>Lansing</sup>, but in our own town."

Mayor Humphrey described municipal governments as "laboratories for experimentation in the finer processes of government."

"We are preoccupied today," he said, "with the means and methods with which we may build lasting peace, yet we know there is no hope for world peace if the desire for it is not universally felt and expressed on a local level both here and throughout the world. It matters little how much machinery is devised or how carefully organized is the United Nations, there will be no peace, if a sincere will and desire and a clear understanding of our responsibilities do not exist in all the local communities. Should the United Nations fail, it will not be because of its structure or because of its personnel or because of lack of authority or power. It will fail because the people did not have the will or the faith to make it live."





# 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)