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CONSERVATION -- AMERICA'S FRONTIER

Remarks of Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D., Minn.)
At the
Democratic Dinner Meeting
Eugene, Oregon
Tuesday, April 21, 1959

Anyone who travels over the great West, and sees the massive timber stands, the powerful rivers, the vast grazing lands, realizes that the West is the storehouse of America's great natural wealth.

Now, there is sometimes a tendency to believe that the West is the only part of the country that is deeply concerned about preserving and developing those resources.

Well, that might have been partly true a few years ago, when our conservation programs were moving steadily forward. Then many people were probably inclined to take these resources for granted.

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But in the last few years, everyone in America has had an education on the value of their natural resources and, believe me, the cost of tuition has been mighty high! For this Administration has not only failed to develop our resources - it has launched a program of giving them away!

I don't need to recite the full record for you people here in Oregon, for this is home territory for the Big Give-Away -- the Al Sarena land-grab, for example, and the fiasco about the Klamath Indian Reservation.

I am sure you know about the granting of special oil leases on wildlife refuges to favorites of the Eisenhower Administration, and the threat to the National Forests by a small group seeking special privileges.

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And there would have been more, had it not been for Democratic Senators and Congressmen, such as those from Oregon. They have sounded the alarm. They have focused a spotlight on the Big Give-Away.

Yes, the American people have been getting quite an education on the value of conserving natural resources. I suppose you might call it a liberal education!

But, the evils of the past are not as important as the needs of the future.

Now when I talk about the resource needs of America, I am not just thinking of the material resources -- the food and fibre, the minerals and chemicals it takes to supply a growing population. I am thinking of other human needs that must also be met -- non-material needs.

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I am thinking of the need for recreation, for example. America is abundantly supplied with bigger, better and more powerful cars to take the family off on a vacation, but America is not so well off in places for them to go to enjoy themselves. Our national parks are over-crowded; many of our streams and rivers are polluted -- hardly the ideal site for a family vacation.

America has a big job to do in assuring resources for the future.

Today there are 172 million people in the United States. By 1975 -- just about when today's babies will be getting out of school, the Census Bureau tells us there will be some 215 million people. By the year 2000, some say we will have 300 million people -- but estimates run as high as 360 million -- twice the population we now have!

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To supply this exploding population will require twice the agricultural output, more than again as much water as we are now using, 50 percent more timber growth and double the output of minerals.

How are we going to get these?

Well, one thing is certain. We are not going to achieve these goals unless we plan ahead. I don't need to tell you people here in Oregon that a tree doesn't grow in a year -- either in Brooklyn or in Oregon -- nor is a dam built or a grazing range re-vegetated in a matter of months.

In the field of resources, this country has been living on the heritage of two Roosevelts: Teddy Roosevelt, the first great conservationist President this country ever

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had, and another Roosevelt, who had the good sense and the imagination to put young men, as well as rivers, to work in rebuilding and conserving America's natural wealth. I mean, of course, the Democratic Roosevelt -- Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Harry Truman kept up the Roosevelt tradition. He knew the value of resource development. He too cared deeply for America's future.

But in the last seven years, we have been coasting along, living ^{on} the past, ignoring the pressing needs of the future.

Other nations through history have followed a similar course, and they have paid dearly for it. The price they paid is written in the seared, over-grazed and deforested Middle East. Where once stood the magnificent Cedars of

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Lebanon, there is barren desert; and the ingenious irrigation works of ancient Babylon are silted up from the floods that swept the over-grazed watersheds of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

America today is not the Middle East; far from it.

But the price of a do-nothing policy on resources is dear indeed.

What is the job to be done in protecting and building America's natural wealth?

One of the first jobs is to get an up-to-date accounting of just what resources America has. We are now a 49-state Union, and before the year is out there will be 50 states. I am told that two-thirds of the new state of Alaska has never even been subjected to an accurate geological survey. Who knows what wealth may lie in the unexplored areas of Alaska?

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Perhaps Hawaii has hidden natural treasures as well --

I am sure it has.

But there are pressing jobs to be done in developing the resources we have within our traditional borders.

For example, to meet the needs of our growing population, we will have to expand the output of our forests by 50 percent in the next fifty years. This means the reforestation of some 28 million acres of currently bare land.

It means timber stand improvement measures on 140 million acres of poorly stocked land.

It means an intensified effort to protect our forests against insects, disease and fire.

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These programs must begin soon, for a forest does not spring up overnight.

Next, our growing population demands urgent attention to the problem of water -- that precious substance we so often take for granted. How are we to supply a growing nation with an adequate supply of water -- clean, usable water? Today, there are thousands of miles of rivers and streams which are too polluted for municipal or recreational use without expensive treatment.

One of the urgent priorities for government action is the construction of the water treatment plants needed to serve not only the domestic needs but the growing industrial needs of America.

As one step toward meeting this problem, I have

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joined with Congressman Blatnik of my state in introducing legislation to rapidly expand our construction of pollution treatment facilities with federal assistance to states, municipalities and industries.

As could be expected, this Republican Administration opposes that measure. It wants to pile the burden of pollution control on to the already overburdened states.

But rivers flow across state boundaries, and they affect all our people. The responsibility here is clearly a Federal one. Even the Old Guard Republicans ought to recognize that.

Now, instead of devoting its energies to opposing a sound anti-pollution program, the Republican Administration

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ought to be throwing its full energies behind pressing forward at top speed toward a break-through in the desalting of sea water. For here lies the brightest hope, not only in America, but in water-starved countries the world over.

Fresh water cheaply available in the United States would bring prosperity to domestic areas that have too long suffered in drought.

Fresh water cheaply available in the Middle East, North Africa, and the arid parts of western South America, would bring a spectacular rise in the standard of living to some of the poorest areas of the world.

This is the kind of a struggle we should be seeking with the Russians -- a struggle to see who can

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break through first in research programs for
the desalting of sea water.

But instead of doing everything in our power
to accomplish this, the Eisenhower Administration is
making this vital research program a repository of
defeated politicians. Speaking for myself, I am
not enchanted by the thought of the water problems
of America running off a lame duck's back.

But water is not only a blessing; it can also be
a curse when it sweeps uncontrolled over our plains
and spills over the banks of our rivers.

Whether water be blessing or curse depends in large
measure on what we do with our watersheds -- whether we
permit them to lie bare or whether we cover them to stop

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or control the flow of water.

Nearly 300 million acres of watershed land need terracing, strip cropping, grass cover, or other water-arresting measures.

This, too, is an urgent job for America, if we are to control our water, and prevent our best soil from being washed off the lands and into the rivers.

On the range lands, such as those here in Eastern Oregon and throughout the intermountain area, overgrazing has taken its toll. Revegetation by newly developed methods of "brush busting" and re-seeding to crested wheat grasses can greatly improve these lands -- and offers the hope of doubling the cattle-carrying capacity of much of this land!

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Here again we have a choice: fertile, productive grazing lands, or intermittent dust bowls which permit much of our natural wealth to be scattered to the four winds.

There are other jobs to be done in the resource field: as productivity and leisure increase, so will the need for recreation areas. At the direction of a Democratic Congress, the government has just begun a review of our outdoor recreation resources, but already some private estimates indicate a need for acquiring and devoting some 3 million additional acres to recreational needs.

These are some, but by no means all, of the jobs that need doing if our country is to protect and develop her natural wealth.

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No doubt, those of us who advocate these programs will be labeled "spenders" -- that worst of GOP epithets.

But we are not spenders -- but prudent investors -- investors in the future of America -- the soundest investment on any market.

It is the Republicans who are extravagant; they are waster -- they are the exploiters.

Every pound of our soil that is washed from our farms by flood that could be saved by watershed cover is a waste.

Every drop of water that flows ~~in~~our rivers that could be harnessed to produce energy and power, but is allowed to run free to the sea is a waste.

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Every acre of timberland that is allowed to stand unimproved, every acre of grazing land that needs reseeding but lies bare, ~~it~~ is a waste.

The Democrats who believe in conserving and building resources are not the spenders.

It is the Republicans who pursue a do-nothing policy and a give-away policy on resources who are the real spenders -- spenders of our national wealth.

The way this Administration seems to size up things is this:

We can afford $4\frac{1}{2}$ million people out of work, but we can't afford to do the things needed to build our country's future.

To me, this just doesn't make sense.

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If there is one thing we can't afford, it is to have people without jobs. That is the biggest waste I can think of -- not just economic waste, but, more important, human waste.

One of the reasons I have recommended the establishment of a Youth Conservation Corps -- patterned after the CCC of Franklin Roosevelt -- is to put our young people to work conserving and building our resources. There is plenty of work to be done -- some estimate that it would take 150,000 men working for ten years to do the minimum conservation work that I have just described.

Isn't it tragic to allow this work to go undone while we permit millions of men to remain idle, unable to find work -- an inexcusable waste of men and resources.

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The Republicans have never understood the West.

They cannot understand the West, for the West is new; the West is frontier, while the Republican Party is addicted to the past and the status quo.

The Republican Party cannot understand the West because it is a Party based in the financial houses of the East.

It seeks to feed on the West, not to develop it.

What better proof of that could there be than the fact that since the Republicans took over in Washington six years ago, there has not been one single new start on a multi-purpose dam.

Harry Truman stood at Hungry Horse dam in Montana when it was inaugurated in 1952 and said, "Take a good look at this -- it's the last you'll see for a long time."

And he was right.

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It was the last dam we have seen -- and the last we will see until the Democratic Party regains the White House.

And regain it we will.

It the long, hard cold war with the Communists, our resources could well become the decisive factor.

Make no mistake, this will be a long struggle.

In part, it is a battle between men and systems of government and patterns of social order.

But it is also a contest of materials and resources.

The great Northwest, so rich in natural resources, represents the nation's stockpile and its reserves in the waging of the cold war.

The judgment of posterity will depend on how we,

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today, care for and develop those precious resources.



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