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"THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ACT"

STATEMENT OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY (D., MINN.)
BEFORE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND MANPOWER
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & PUBLIC WELFARE
February 25, 1963

Mr. Chairman, I am honored and privileged to open the Senate hearings on the Youth Employment Act of 1963. I am particularly pleased to testify before the subcommittee chaired by my good friend from Pennsylvania, Senator Clark. His concern for problems of young people have been a distinguishing feature of his outstanding service in this body.

My testimony before the appropriate subcommittee of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee has become something of a bi-annual ritual. This is the third time I have appeared to urge the passage of legislation to establish the Youth Conservation Corps and the Hometown Youth Corps. While the earlier two sets of hearings did not lead to legislation, they were most valuable in gathering evidence, facts, opinions, and statements relating to the desirability of programs designed to fight the growing problem of youth unemployment.

But unless I read the signs and sentiments of the country incorrectly, I believe that the time has arrived for the prompt enactment of the Youth Employment Act. As you know, it was the first bill introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. I have pledged myself to making it the first major item of legislation in the 88th Congress. I deeply hope that this objective will be achieved before the Congress adjourns for the Easter recess.

It might be helpful for the committee if I briefly reviewed the past history of this legislation. I first proposed the establishment of a pilot Youth Conservation Corps program in the 85th Congress. However, no action was taken on this pilot proposal and the bill died. In the 86th Congress, despite the opposition of the Eisenhower Administration, the Youth Conservation Corps bill was reported favorably by the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, largely through the fine efforts and leadership of the senior Senator from West Virginia, the Honorable Jennings Randolph. The Senate passed this bill, S. 812, by a narrow margin of 47-45 in August 1959. The House of Representatives failed to act and once again the legislation died at the end of the 86th Congress. In the 87th Congress, my original bill to create a Youth Conservation Corps, S. 404, was supplemented with President Kennedy's proposals to establish a broader Youth Employment Opportunities Program. This Committee amended S. 404 to include a Hometown Youth Corps and favorably reported the bill in September 1961. The legislation remained on the Senate calendar throughout the second session of the 87th Congress waiting for favorable action in the House. Once again, this action was not forthcoming.

Mr. Chairman, this brings us to the 88th Congress and the introduction of S. 1. As you know, hearings have been underway in the House of Representatives for one week. The Senate hearings begin today. The President has endorsed this legislation and sent a special message on youth urging prompt enactment of S. 1. This morning I am here with the same message.

Major Provisions

Mr. Chairman, I believe the members of the subcommittee are quite familiar with the provisions of the Humphrey Youth Bill. Title I provides for a Youth Conservation Corps "to provide healthful outdoor training and employment for young men and to advance the conservation, development, and management of natural resources and recreational areas." The Youth Conservation Corps will be established in the Department of Labor under the immediate supervision of a Director who will be appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Enrollment in the Youth Conservation Corps will be open to young men 15 through 21. Minimum enrollment period will be six months with a maximum enrollment of two years. Enrollees will receive \$60 per month in wages and also receive board, lodging, clothing, tools and equipment, medical care, and other necessities. The present legislation calls for a YCC not to exceed 15,000 enrollees during the first fiscal year of operation and thereafter such size as Congress may determine through appropriations but not to exceed 60,000 enrollees at any one time during the next four years. I will comment further on the size of the YCC later in my testimony.

Two-thirds of the YCC will work on lands of the National Forests, National Parks, and other Federal conservation agencies. One-third of the Corps will be available for similar work on State Forests and Parks on a 50-50 matching funds basis.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that a summary of the provisions of S. 1 be printed in the hearing record at this point in my testimony.

(Insert)

Opportunity for a New Life

I am not here to provide the subcommittee with masses of statistical and technical data demonstrating the need for enactment of the Youth Employment Act. I willingly defer in this task to the many experts from the Executive agencies and private life who will appear in the coming days. But I am here to reaffirm the need for the programs contained in the Humphrey Youth Bill in view of the rising number of unemployed youth in this nation and in view of the vast amounts of useful and productive work that exist for such young people to do.

There are obvious similarities between the Youth Conservation Corps and the highly successful Civilian Conservation Corps that existed during the 1930s. Certain critics of the YCC have alleged that the problems of unemployed youths today are greatly different from the unemployment problems that existed during the great depression. Therefore they oppose the YCC as being inadequate to the needs of today. I would like to take several minutes to spell out why I reject this argument.

Most of the young men who will enroll in the Youth Conservation Corps will have dropped out of high school prior to graduation. They will have failed in the job of getting a basic education. Having dropped out of school, they will have attempted to secure some manner of employment to support themselves. Lacking adequate education and job skills, they have been unable to find steady employment. Once again, they will have failed. Now they are loafing around the streets, staying at home, getting in the way, and are reminded repeatedly of their failures in school and employment.

In short, their lives have been little more than a succession of failures. As one of its important functions, I see the Youth Conservation Corps providing these young men with an opportunity to break this pattern of defeat and frustration and substitute for it an experience of accomplishment and self-fulfillment. I recently encountered a study made of 272 boys who participated in the Civilian Conservation Corps. In some detail this study explored the operation of the Corps and its effect on this selected group of enrollees. I would like to quote from the conclusions of this study: "The values which these 272 boys received from their camp experiences seem to fall into two general classifications: those having to do with the more or less concrete factors of improved physical health, increased weight, and financial gains, and those having to do with the intangible but significant factors of greater maturity, increased self-confidence and general security. As we review the experiences and comments of these boys, we are impressed with the values from which many of them benefited, but we are impressed, too, by the responsibility placed on the individual boy for seeing and obtaining these values..."

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to include in my testimony portions of case studies of individual boys that relate to this specific point. This study, "The CCC Through the Eyes of 272 Boys," is highly objective. It does not praise every phase of the Corps operation; it contains a number of constructive suggestions. Those persons charged with organizing the YCC could learn a great deal from this study. But, in all objectivity, the burden of this study is highly favorable to the total results achieved through the Civilian Conservation Corps.

I believe this opportunity to create self-confidence in discouraged young men, to bring forth maturity in the immature, and to provide accomplishment in place of failure, will have lasting impact on the lives of many enrollees in the Youth Conservation Corps. Do young men ever outgrow the need for such feelings of self-confidence, maturity, and accomplishment? The answer to this question is self-evident.

If the Civilian Conservation Corps succeeded in providing such an opportunity to young men in the 1930s, I believe the Youth Conservation Corps can fulfill a similar need in the 1960s.

There are, of course, numerous other reasons to support the Humphrey Youth Bill. The enrollees will receive job experience and training that will vastly improve their chances of obtaining steady employment once they leave the Youth Conservation Corps. Let me cite some of the specific jobs that would have to be done by YCC enrollees: building fences, carpentry work, planting trees, driving trucks and tractors, stringing telephone lines, painting camps, jack-hammer jobs, fighting forest fires, fighting blister rust, surveying, machine maintenance, pick and shovel work, laying brick and stone, mixing cement, camp maintenance work, etc. Some of the work will be hard manual labor; other aspects of the work program will consist of more advanced and skilled training.

A minimum of ten hours per week of more formalized training will supplement the on-the-job experience. This training will be provided through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and state and local school officials. It will consist of supplementary academic subjects, such as writing, reading, and basic mathematic skills, and vocational subjects relating to future job opportunities. Also included in the total program available to each YCC enrollee will be the active efforts of the local state employment service to have a suitable job situation ready when the tour of duty has been completed.

This last factor is most important to the success of the total program. I intend to insist that no effort be spared by the local employment officers in every state to provide every YCC enrollee with at least one opportunity to demonstrate to the community what he has achieved through his enrollment.

Contributions to Nation's Resources

Mr. Chairman, up to this point in my testimony I have concentrated entirely on the benefits that will accrue to the young men who will enroll in the Youth Conservation Corps. That is entirely proper since we are primarily concerned with bringing unemployed young men back into the mainstream of society. But we should not overlook the great contributions these young men will make to the preservation and conservation of our national forests and parks. These are the dividends that will accrue to this country for many generations to come.

I am confident that the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior will provide full documentation of the extensive work that is ready and waiting in our national forests and parks. The figure runs to many billions of dollars and this is the type of work that will have direct financial return to the government for many future generations.

In the 87th Congress this Committee assembled figures relating to the comparable costs of conservation work performed by regular employees and YCC enrollees. On the basis of the data submitted by various departments, it would cost \$5,120 to support one regular worker per year; the comparable cost per YCC enrollee would be \$3,640. This suggests that the Federal and State governments will be getting a good bargain for the funds they invest in this program.

If those persons who criticize the Youth Conservation Corps because of so-called excessive cost would only deduct the eventual financial benefits from the initial operating cost figure, they would be hard pressed to continue their opposition on the basis of finances. I have always said that the entire Youth Conservation Corps program could be justified merely on the financial benefits that would eventually accrue to the United States. This would certainly be an extremely shortsighted view of the problem, but it could be done.

I am confident that testimony presented by the Executive Departments will fully confirm this statement.

Modest Size of YCC

I must also emphasize the relatively modest size of the YCC provided for in S. 1. As the Senators know, I have advocated a much larger corps in earlier versions of this legislation. S. 404, for example, provided for a YCC that would eventually enroll 150,000 young men. However, the Administration felt unable to support a YCC of that magnitude. A number of Members of Congress likewise had some hesitation about establishing a Corps of that size. The present legislation provides for a YCC not to exceed 15,000 enrollees in the first fiscal year and thereafter such size as Congress may determine through appropriations but not to exceed 60,000 enrollees at any one time during the next four years. I believe this represents a size that all interested parties can accept in good faith. Moreover, I am confident that Congress will be sufficiently impressed with the success of the YCC to increase its authorized strength considerably at the end of five years.

I wish to emphasize that President Kennedy supports the size of the YCC established in S. 1. The identical legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives. Never before in the history of this legislation has there existed such unanimous agreement over the particular details of the program. This, in itself, is impressive testimony to the fundamental soundness and reasonableness of the Humphrey Youth Bill.

Local Area Employment Programs

I do not wish to conclude my testimony before I comment on Title II, the local area youth employment programs or the Hometown Youth Corps. This program provides an extremely important complement to the Youth Conservation Corps, namely, an opportunity for both young men and women to receive the benefits of supervised and planned job opportunities in local public service agencies.

Enrollees will remain in their home communities and work on a full-time or part-time basis. Hopefully those persons working part-time will also maintain a relationship with their local schools. Those working full-time will be encouraged to return to school at the conclusion of an enrollment period. The program will be geared to providing sufficient job skills and training to enable the enrollees to maintain steady employment on their own or to reawaken in the enrollees a desire to resume their formal education.

This legislation provides that these local employment programs will be initiated by the State or local community. Specific programs will be proposed to the Secretary of Labor for his approval. Once approved, the Federal government will provide half the funds necessary to operate the entire program. It is projected that enrollees will receive approximately \$40 per week for their services.

What type of jobs will be available to the enrollees? There are a wide variety of jobs existing in the local public service agencies participating in the program. Let me suggest some that come to mind: secretaries, hospital and laboratory technicians, kitchen assistants, playground workers, gardeners, truck drivers, office helpers, athletic instructors, maintenance employees, etc. As in the Youth Conservation Corps, the actual job experience would be supplemented by personal counseling after hours, educational opportunities, and assistance in obtaining regular employment at the conclusion of the program.

S. 1 authorizes a Hometown Youth Corps of 50,000 enrollees on a 50-50 matching basis for a period of three years. I have as much faith in the success of the Hometown Youth Corps as I do in the Youth Conservation Corps. I predict that Congress will establish the program on a permanent basis once the initial three-year authorization has expired.

Mr. Chairman, I desire to keep my testimony brief. I know that members of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee are intimately familiar with the fundamentals of this legislation. It has been through the mill several times before, as they say.

However, with the permission of the chairman, I would like to submit for inclusion in the record of these hearings a number of documents that relate to the Humphrey Youth Bill. For example, I have located a short pamphlet that outlines the accomplishments of the Civilian Conservation Corps in my home state of Minnesota. This pamphlet provides compelling evidence for the establishment of a Youth Conservation Corps. I have a number of personal letters that testify to the great merits of this legislation.

In closing, I have this final comment: these proposals have been before the Congress for six years. There is nothing novel, radical, unknown, or irresponsible about them. While Congress has been considering these proposals, the problem of youth unemployment has become extremely grave. Recent unemployment figures relating to young people show that the problem is about to get totally out of hand. Therefore I say to the Congress, let us procrastinate no longer. The time has come for decisions, not additional years of consideration.

The opportunity is ours. Let us seize it with firm determination.

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