

## REMARKS

THE HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

URBAN CRISIS SEMINAR

MACALESTER COLLEGE

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

JUNE 18, 1969

Ours is an urban civilization becoming more so. The way the vast majority of Americans earn a living causes them to live in cities or in immediately surrounding sub-cities.

∟ We are wealthier as a nation because of the shift from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly industrial economy.

∟ But, as with every other major human transition, the fact of change itself created problems we had not imagined ... and problems we were not prepared to handle.

-2-

∟ We know what our problems are. We have known for some time.

∟ We have studied the causes of urban problems. We have witnessed our cities in violent crises, and now -- now, not tomorrow or next year -- we must begin to treat those causes or resign ourselves to hand-wringing impotence in the future.

∟ To treat those causes is, above all, a political decision.  
That is, we have in part inherited, and in part created, a society with a particular set of social and economic problems and promises. But to resolve these problems -- and fulfill these promises -- we must act politically.

We have to see America whole. ∟ No city is an island unto itself -- no town, no farm, no neighborhood, no suburb.

Urbanization means dependence of each upon all.

-3-

We are no longer self-sufficient yeoman farmers. We are urban, and our technological magic -- jet planes, super highways, radio and TV, plus our intricately interlaced economy -- have welded us into a geographic unity.

Let me repeat: the problems of urbanization will yield only to political decision. *National Decision*

Yet all over America we witness the obstructive phenomenon of municipalities with overlapping responsibilities -- with widely varying and usually outdated building codes -- with zoning regulations which lack uniform standards. And we have designed piecemeal rather than integrated programs to correct these deficiencies, knowing all the time that piecemeal efforts will not be sufficient to the task at hand.

Units of political decision organized on functional lines -- port authorities, transit authorities, school districts, fire

-4-

districts -- most with the legally authorized power of taxation -- generally conflict and work at cross purposes with political units based on geographical area -- cities, counties, states, and the federal government as well.

↳ This is government by anachronism -- government that suited the old days of rapid industrial development when we were creating the problems that now plague us.

↳ 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 our survival requires.

↳ The fragmentation of decisions on the allocation of resources -- in combination with the lack of sustained political commitment -- has seriously crippled our capacity to act decisively over a significant period of time -- even after we knew what our problems were and had a good idea of how to

-5-

go about solving them.

Without cooperation and coordination among disparate governmental units at the federal, state, county, municipal and functional levels, resources are frittered away, valuable time is wasted, and the seemingly endless debates among governments consume the energy, confidence and vision of urban leaders. (Airport - Safe Streets)

This final result of the fragmentation of the decision-making power is perhaps the worst.

The moral energy which arises from recognizing injustice and degradation is not self-perpetuating. It is said of Americans that they are an impatient people.

As Americans, we owe it to ourselves -- as a national community with the highest ideals of individual freedom and opportunity -- to put our impatience to work.

-6-

~~Let me state here my firmest faith:~~ as a nation, we possess just as great potential for justice and progress as any other nation -- past or present.

We are now searching for ways to achieve that potential.

*Local Role*  
The Model Cities Act points the way toward a more effective federal role in attacking today's problem of urban decay -- a problem that tomorrow can be transformed into an opportunity for urban growth.

It is well to remind oneself that cities and every other political unit in America have the single purpose of serving the constituent citizens. All of our governments are 'service corporations' to serve their shareholders. In a phrase, Model Cities is not about houses; it's about housing -- for people.

-7-

We need also a Model States program to bring federal, state and local governmental muscle and will into full and constructive partnership in national urban policy.

From the federal viewpoint, I believe strongly that the federal government should provide financial rewards to those states which demonstrate initiative in modernizing their governmental and tax structures, including constitutional reform.

↙ Federal rewards should go to those states which adapt their programs and expenditures to the needs of an urbanizing society by creating state departments of urban affairs, and in revising procedures to foster responsible local action by abolishing outworn legal jurisdictions.

We must, in short, make it a national policy to discard empty rhetorical appeals for good government in favor of

-8-

significant financial and other incentives which will make productive cooperation between cities, counties and states profitable.

This kind of action is aimed to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of our common resources. It also is founded on the notion that the purpose of government is not to find out how much people will put up with, but rather it is to bring the power of common effort to bear on those problems which people cannot handle alone. We speak of collective security in international affairs. We need a lot more collective action in internal, domestic affairs -- among people and governmental jurisdictions.

And we need that action now.

\* \* \*



-9-

In testimony before the National Commission on Urban Problems, the mayor of one large city identified urban problems in these words: "I have sometimes characterized the three major problems (of cities) as being money, finances, and revenue."

*State  
help!*

It is a fact of our lives that many cities today are teetering on the brink of financial collapse. The influx of technologically displaced rural families into the central city created a heavy demand for welfare and other costly public services without creating the productive tax base to pay for those services. The suburban escape hatch for middle and high income families -- coupled with racism, that most un-American of all attitudes -- further eroded the tax base of the cities.

-10-

There are two general levers to help the cities help their citizens. Both have the ultimate purpose of service to the individual.

The first <sup>is the general subject</sup> ~~can be subsumed under the rubric of~~ education, but not education in the narrow sense of attending school for so many years -- the kind of education where one receives a certificate of attendance but not the knowledge or skill to live in our urbanized society.

↳ I mean education in the broadest possible sense -- from Head Start to Adult Literacy, from special skill centers to train people for jobs in local demand to a vastly expanded program to teach deprived people how to make all those economic decisions other Americans take for granted.

↳ Since we are an urban society, we are going to have to learn how to learn in an urban setting. And cities cannot become

-II-

viable economic units with the fiscal power to serve their citizens until the citizens themselves have achieved the productive power to make common cause and common attack on these problems.

② { The second general approach is in correcting immediate environmental decay -- typified by crowded and substandard housing, by rat-infested alleys, by uncollected garbage, by all the other manifestations of neglect of the people who live at the centers of our urban society.

To get at these terrible causes of human indignity, I have proposed a National Urban Development Bank financed through subscription of public and private funds. The Bank would underwrite unusual risk investments involved in meeting the most difficult and most critical urban problems -- low cost private housing, for example. Securities sold by the Bank would

-12-

attract private investment capital, and federal funds would be appropriated to get the Bank started.

A National Urban Homestead Act could subsidize land costs for qualified private housing developments to allow the use of relatively highpriced urban and suburban land in relieving the population pressures in the central city.

A program of federal support for state equalization of vital community services -- education and welfare, for example -- within metropolitan areas would provide immediate assistance to hard-pressed local communities, particularly where the property tax has been exhausted as a realistic means of taxation.

All of these measures are, obviously, political decisions. We have made starts, but we have lacked the political staying-  
power when it was needed most. 2

See  
Editorial  
Index

-13-

I would recall to you that the Housing Act of 1949 boldly proclaimed as its goal a "decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family" and authorized 135 thousand new public housing units a year for the next six years -- a promised total of 810 thousand new units.

What is the record since setting that goal twenty years ago? We have actually built about 500 thousand units -- or only two-thirds of the six-year goal announced twenty years ago.

( If the new Federal Housing Act of 1968 does not improve on this record of meeting promise with results, the nation will indeed have cause to doubt its will to do what cries out for doing.

So let's quit kidding ourselves. There can be no solution to the urban crisis until this nation by public and private expenditure cleans out the filthy of the slums and provides decent housing for everyone.

-14-

We can build highways on schedule. We can launch an Apollo mission to the moon precisely on schedule. Now why can't we do a far more simple task -- that of building houses for people -- also on schedule?

We can. But it will take forbearance and understanding from Americans who have not suffered the alienation and despair generated in ghetto and slum.

Some of their money will go to help people who are not their immediate neighbors -- to help people whose life style is different.

But the American nation is not a collection of competing individuals. We are the first nation to organize ourselves around an ideal -- the ideal that we will always measure ourselves collectively <sup>and</sup> by how well we collectively serve each other as individuals.

-15-

What happens in our cities happens to America. It is there that our ideal and our democratic government will either succeed or fail -- either flourish or perish.

By the quality of life in our cities we must judge ourselves. And it is that by which American civilization will ultimately be judged.

# # #

H. R. H.  
Urban Crisis Seminar  
Mac  
June 18

Ours is an urban civilization becoming more so. The way the vast majority of Americans earn a living ~~causes~~ causes them to live in ~~the~~ cities or in immediately surrounding subcities. We are wealthier as a nation ~~because~~ because ~~the~~ ~~transition~~ of the shift from a ~~predominantly~~ predominantly agricultural to a predominantly industrial economy. But, as with every other major human ~~transition~~ transition, ~~the~~ ~~transition~~ ~~has~~ ~~not~~ ~~been~~ ~~beneficial~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~majority~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~population~~ ~~and~~ ~~some~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~benefits~~ ~~have~~ ~~gone~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~minority~~ the fact of change itself created <sup>imagined . . . and problems</sup> problems we had not conceived, ~~and for which we~~ ~~we were not prepared to handle~~ ~~sought the political means to resolve.~~

We know now what ~~is~~ ~~wrong~~ are problems are. We have known for some ~~time~~ time. We have ~~devoted enough study effort to study~~ studied the ~~causes~~ causes of urban problems. <sup>We</sup> our cities have ~~what~~ witnessed ~~the~~ ~~transition~~ in violent ~~crises~~ crises, and now-- <sup>-- but</sup> now, not tomorrow or next year-- must begin to treat those causes or resign ourselves to hand-wringing ~~in~~ impotence in ~~the~~ the future.

To treat those causes is, <sup>above all,</sup> a political decision. ~~It is not an economic or a social or a psychological decision.~~ That is, we have in part inherited, and in part created, a ~~social~~ <sup>a</sup> society with ~~its~~ particular set of social and economic ~~problems~~ problems and promises.

<sup>But to</sup> ~~and, as we have understood these problems and promises, so also do we know that~~ ~~we must resolve the problems and fulfill the promises through political action.~~ <sup>we must act politically.</sup>



2

~~the~~ we have to see America whole. No city is an island ~~and~~ unto itself, no ~~town~~ town, no farm, no neighborhood, no suburb. Urbanization ~~means, means~~ means ~~interdependence~~ dependence of each upon all. We are no longer self-sufficient yeoman farmers. We are urban, and our ~~xxxx~~ technological ~~magic, magic~~ magic--jet planes, super highways, radio and ~~TV, TV~~ TV plus our intricately ~~interlaced~~ interlaced economy--have welded us into a geographic unity.

~~Yet all over America we witness the~~

Let me repeat: the problems of urbanization ~~will~~ will yield only to political decision.

Yet all over America we witness the obstructive phenomenon of municipalities with overlapping responsibilities, with widely varying and usually outdated building codes with zoning regulations ~~which~~ which lack uniform standards, ~~and~~ *And we have designed* piecemeal rather than *knowing all the time that* integrated programs to correct these ~~deficit~~ deficiencies, ~~that simply will not be corrected~~

~~xxxxxx piecemeal~~ through piecemeal ~~efforts~~ *will not be sufficient to* the task at hand.

~~Functional units~~ Units of political decision organized on functional lines--port authorities, transit authorities, school districts, fire ~~district~~ districts--most *generally* with the legally authorized power of taxation--~~conflict and work~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ *with* *geographical* ~~xxxxxx~~ cross purpose ~~to~~ political units based on ~~xxxxxx~~ area--cities, counties, states, and the federal government as well.

This is government by anachronism--government that suited the old days of rapid

3

*we were creating*  
~~xxxx~~ industrial ~~developme~~ development when ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the problems  
*that now plague us.*  
~~we have now created~~

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

The fragmentation of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ decision *the* on ~~xxxx resource allocation~~  
*of resources - - in combination*  
allocation ~~throughout the federal system~~ combined with the lack of sustained  
political commitment--has seriously ~~xxx~~ crippled our capacity to act ~~xxxxxxxx~~  
decisively ~~after~~ over a significant period of time ~~even after we knew full well~~  
what our ~~xxxx~~ problems were and had a ~~pretty~~ good idea of how to go about ~~xxx~~  
~~xxxx~~ solving them.

Without cooperation and coordination among disparate ~~xxxx~~ governmental units  
at the federal, state, county, municipal and functional ~~xx~~ levels, resources are  
frittered away, valuable time is wasted, and the seemingly endless debates among  
governments consume ~~the~~ the ~~xxxxxx~~ energy, confidence and vision of urban ~~xxx~~  
leaders.

This *fatal* result of *the* fragmentation of *the decision-making power* ~~which the power of decision~~ is perhaps  
the worst. *which arises from recognizing*  
The moral energy ~~generated in recognition of~~ injustice and degradation  
is not ~~self-perpetuating~~ self-perpetuating. It is said of Americans that they are an impatient

4

As Americans, we -- a  
people anyway. ~~The All-American~~ owe it ~~to~~ ourselves as national

community with the highest ~~of human ideals embodied in our~~ ideals of individual

freedom and opportunity ~~embodied in our founding documents~~ to put our ~~impatience~~

impatience to work. ~~Perpetual frustration~~ <sup>over</sup> ~~the inability to do good works when~~

~~we possess the will to do them~~ is a dangerous situation for any nation.

as a nation,

Let me ~~reiterate~~ state here my firmest ~~belief~~ faith: ~~that~~ we possess just as

great ~~cap~~ potential for justice and progress

~~and will for good~~ ~~as any other~~

nation ~~exactly~~ past or present.

~~and~~ <sup>now searching for ways</sup> ~~we are finding creating methods of action to release that will.~~ achieve that potential.

The Model Cities Act points the way toward a more effective federal role in

Today's ~~that tomorrow~~ ~~homely work~~ ~~is a problem that tomorrow~~  
attacking ~~the~~ problem of urban ~~city~~ decay ~~that must become urban growth not just~~  
Can be transformed into ~~the~~ opportunity for urban growth.

~~in terms of numbers of people, but more importantly in terms of the collective power of~~  
~~urban citizens to deal with their urban needs.~~

It is well to remind oneself ~~now~~ that cities and ~~every~~ other political  
unit in ~~America~~ <sup>have the single</sup> ~~America~~ <sup>serving the</sup> purpose of ~~service to its~~ constituent citizens.

~~Model cities is not about houses, it's about housing~~ All of our governments are  
service corporations to serve their shareholders. ~~or~~ In a phrase, Model Cities is  
not about ~~housing~~ houses; it's about housing -- for people.

~~we~~ need also a Model States program to bring federal, state and local governmental

5 9  
muscle and will into full and constructive partnership in national urban policy.

From the federal view point, I believe strongly that the federal government should provide financial rewards to those states which ~~desert~~ demonstrate ~~initiative~~ initiative in modernizing their governmental and tax structures, including constitutional reform. Federal rewards should go to those states which adapt their programs and expenditures to the needs of ~~urban society~~ an urbanizing ~~society~~ society by creating state departments of urban affairs, and in revising ~~past~~ procedures ~~for~~ to foster responsible local action by ~~abolishing~~ abolishing outworn legal jurisdictions.

We must, in short, make it a national policy to discard empty ~~rethorical~~ rhetorical appeals for good government in favor of significant financial and other incentives which will make ~~the~~ productive cooperation between cities, counties and ~~states~~ states profitable.

This kind of action is aimed to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of our common resources. ~~It is~~ *founded on the notion that the* ~~It also has its philosophical base which is~~ *is* ~~that good government is not supposed to~~ purpose of government is not to find out how much people will put up with, but rather *it is to* ~~to find out~~ bring the power of common *which people cannot handle alone.* ~~effort~~ effort to bear on those problems ~~one government cannot do by itself.~~ We

speak of collective security in international & affairs. We need a lot more collective *domestic* action in ~~internal~~ internal affairs -- *among people and between governmental jurisdictions.*

And we need that action now.

\* \* \*

In testimony before the National Commission on Urban Problems, the mayor of one large city identified urban problems in these words: "I have sometimes characterized the three major problems (of cities) as being money, finances, and revenue."

It is a fact of our lives that many ~~cities~~ cities today are teetering on the brink of ~~an~~ financial ~~collapse~~ collapse. The influx of ~~displaced~~ technologically displaced rural families ~~into~~ into the central city created a heavy demand for welfare and other costly public services ~~without~~ without creating the ~~prosperity~~ productive tax base to pay for those services. The suburban escape hatch for middle and high income families--coupled with racism, that most un-American of all attitudes--further eroded the tax base of the cities.

There are two ~~very~~ general ~~approaches to this problem~~ levers to help the cities ~~with this because dependent on their own~~ help their citizens. Both have the ultimate purpose of ~~individualizing~~ service to the individual.

The first can be subsumed under the rubric <sup>2</sup>education, but not education in the narrow sense of ~~the~~ attending school for so many years ~~for which one~~ receives a

*urbanized*  
our society. certificate of attendance but not the ~~socializing~~ knowledge or skill to live in

I mean education in the broadest possible sense--from Headstart to Adult Literacy,

1

from special skill centers to train people for jobs in local demand to a vastly ~~increased~~ expanded program to teach deprived people ~~how~~ how to make all those economic decisions ~~as~~ other Americans take for granted. ~~ix~~ Since we are an urban society we are going to have to learn how to learn in an urban setting. And cities cannot become viable economic ~~units~~ units with the fiscal power to serve their citizens until the citizens themselves have achieved ~~that~~ the productive ~~signify~~ power to make common cause and <sup>Common</sup> ~~attack~~ <sup>have</sup> on ~~their~~ problems.

The second general approach is ~~in~~ in correcting immediate environmental decay-- typified by crowded and substandard housing, by rat infested alleys, by uncollected garbage, by all the other manifestations of ~~the~~ neglect of the people who live at the centers of our ~~urban~~ ~~society~~ society.

To get at these terrible causes of human indignity, I ~~believe~~ have proposed ~~and~~ a National Urban Development Bank financed through subscription of public and private funds. The Bank would underwrite unusual risk investments involved in meeting the ~~the~~ most difficult and most critical urban problems--low cost private housing, for example. Securities sold by the bank would attract private investment ~~xx~~ capital, and federal funds would be appropriated to get the bank started.

A National Urban Homestead Act could subsidize land costs for qualified private housing developments to allow the use of relatively high-priced urban and suburban land in relieving the population pressures in the central city.

A program of federal support for state equalization of vital community services -- education and welfare, for example -- within metropolitan areas would provide immediate assistance to hard-pressed local communities, particularly where the property tax has been exhausted as a realistic means of taxation.



All of these measures ~~and others~~ are, ~~the~~ obviously, political decisions, ~~based~~  
~~on the commitment available in America.~~ We have made starts, but ~~there is not~~ *we have lacked*  
~~the political staying-power when it was needed most.~~  
~~time now to repeat our old errors.~~ I would recall to you that the Housing Act

of 1949 boldly proclaimed as its goal a "decent home ~~and~~ and a suitable living  
 environment for every American family" and authorized 135 thousand new public  
 housing units a year for the next six years--a promised total of 810 thousand  
 new ~~ix~~ units. (What is the record since setting that goal twenty years ago?

We have actually built ~~inadequate progress~~ about ~~2~~ 500 thousand units--or only two-thirds  
 of the six-year goal announced twenty years ~~ago~~ ago.

If the ~~new~~ new Federal ~~H~~ Housing Act of 1968 does not ~~x~~ improve on this record of  
 meeting promise with results, the nation will indeed have cause to doubt its will to  
 do what ~~xxx~~ cries out for doing.



10  
/ (So) Let's quit kidding ourselves. There  
can be no solution to the urban crisis  
until this nation by public and private  
expenditure cleans out the filth of the  
slums and provides decent housing for  
everyone.

/ We can build highways on schedule.  
We can launch an Apollo mission to the  
moon precisely on schedule. Now why can't

/ we do a far more simple task -- that of  
building houses for people -- also on  
schedule?

We can. <sup>But</sup> It will take forbearance and understanding from Americans who have not

suffered the alienation and despair ~~of~~ <sup>generated in</sup> ghetto and slum. L Some of ~~their~~ their money will

go to ~~correct~~ help people who are not their ~~neighbors~~ immediate neighbors <sup>with whom</sup>

to help people whose life style is different, ~~and, hence, difficult to understand~~

~~because they have not had a choice between life styles.~~

~~But to make a nation takes understanding and generosity, for nations are not just  
collections of competing individuals. ~~Te~~ They are communities of communities of men~~

<sup>But</sup> ~~and women who share~~ the American nation is not a collection of competing ~~individu~~

individuals. We are the first nation to organize ourselves around an ideal ~~rather~~

~~that~~ the ideal that we will always measure ourselves collectively by how well we

each other  
collectively serve ~~each other~~ as individuals.

L What happens in our cities happens to America. It is there that our ideal and our

democratic government will either succeed or fail, <sup>neither</sup> flourish or perish. L By the

quality of life in our cities we must judge ourselves, <sup>And it is that</sup> ~~and~~ by which American civilization

will ultimately be judged.

#



# 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)