

SPECIAL MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT

TRANSMITTING THE

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION COMMISSION

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

I transmit herewith a report of the National Conservation Commission, together with the accompanying papers. This report, which is the outgrowth of the conference of governors last May, was unanimously approved by the recent joint conference held in this city between the National Conservation Commission and governors of States, state conservation commissions, and conservation committees of great organizations of citizens. It is therefore in a peculiar sense representative of the whole nation and all its parts.

With the statements and conclusions of this report I heartily concur, and I commend it to the thoughtful consideration both of the Congress and of our people generally. It is one of the most fundamentally important documents ever laid before the American people. It contains the first inventory of its natural resources ever made by any nation. In condensed form it presents a statement of our available capital in material resources, which are the means of progress, and calls attention to the essential conditions upon which the perpetuity, safety, and welfare of this nation now rest and must always continue to rest. It deserves, and should have, the widest possible distribution among the people.

The facts set forth in this report constitute an imperative call to action. The situation they disclose demands that we, neglecting for a time, if need be, smaller and less vital questions, shall concentrate an effective part of our attention upon the great material foundations of national existence, progress, and prosperity.

This first inventory of natural resources prepared by the National Conservation Commission is undoubtedly but the beginning of a series which will be indispensable for dealing intelligently with what we have. It supplies as close an approximation to the actual facts as it was possible to prepare with the knowledge and time available. The progress of our knowledge of this country will continually lead to more accurate information and better use of the sources of national strength. But we can not defer action until complete accuracy in the estimates can be reached, because before that time many of our resources will be practically gone. It is not necessary that this inventory should be exact in every minute detail. It is

essential that it should correctly describe the general situation; and that the present inventory does. As it stands it is an irrefutable proof that the conservation of our resources is the fundamental question before this nation, and that our first and greatest task is to set our house in order and begin to live within our means.

The first of all considerations is the permanent welfare of our people; and true moral welfare, the highest form of welfare, can not permanently exist save on a firm and lasting foundation of material well-being. In this respect our situation is far from satisfactory. After every possible allowance has been made, and when every hopeful indication has been given its full weight, the facts still give reason for grave concern. It would be unworthy of our history and our intelligence, and disastrous to our future, to shut our eyes to these facts or attempt to laugh them out of court. The people should and will rightly demand that the great fundamental questions shall be given attention by their representatives. I do not advise hasty or ill-considered action on disputed points, but I do urge, where the facts are known, where the public interest is clear, that neither indifference and inertia, nor adverse private interests, shall be allowed to stand in the way of the public good.

The great basic facts are already well known. We know that our population is now adding about one-fifth to its numbers in ten years, and that by the middle of the present century perhaps one hundred and fifty million Americans, and by its end very many millions more, must be fed and clothed from the products of our soil. With the steady growth in population and the still more rapid increase in consumption, our people will hereafter make greater and not less demands per capita upon all the natural resources for their livelihood, comfort, and convenience. It is high time to realize that our responsibility to the coming millions is like that of parents to their children, and that in wasting our resources we are wronging our descendants.

We know now that our rivers can and should be made to serve our people effectively in transportation, but that the vast expenditures for our waterways have not resulted in maintaining, much less in promoting, inland navigation. Therefore, let us take immediate steps to ascertain the reasons and to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan for inland-waterway navigation that will result in giving the people the benefits for which they have paid but which they have not yet received. We know now that our forests are fast disappearing, that less than one-fifth of them are being conserved, and that no good purpose can be met by failing to provide the relatively small sums needed for the protection, use, and improvement of all forests still owned by the Government, and to enact laws to check the wasteful destruction of the forests in private hands. There are differences of opinion as to many public questions; but the American people stand nearly as a unit for waterway development and for forest protection.

We know now that our mineral resources once exhausted are gone forever, and that the needless waste of them costs us hundreds of human lives and nearly \$300,000,000 a year. Therefore, let us undertake without delay the investigations necessary before our people will be in position, through state action or otherwise, to put an end

to this huge loss and waste, and conserve both our mineral resources and the lives of the men who take them from the earth.

I desire to make grateful acknowledgment to the men, both in and out of the government service, who have prepared the first inventory of our natural resources. They have made it possible for this nation to take a great step forward. Their work is helping us to see that the greatest questions before us are not partisan questions, but questions upon which men of all parties and all shades of opinion may be united for the common good. Among such questions, on the material side, the conservation of natural resources stands first. It is the bottom round of the ladder on our upward progress toward a condition in which the nation as a whole, and its citizens as individuals, will set national efficiency and the public welfare before personal profit.

The policy of conservation is perhaps the most typical example of the general policies which this Government has made peculiarly its own during the opening years of the present century. The function of our Government is to insure to all its citizens, now and hereafter, their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If we of this generation destroy the resources from which our children would otherwise derive their livelihood, we reduce the capacity of our land to support a population, and so either degrade the standard of living or deprive the coming generations of their right to life on this continent. If we allow great industrial organizations to exercise unregulated control of the means of production and the necessities of life, we deprive the Americans of to-day and of the future of industrial liberty, a right no less precious and vital than political freedom. Industrial liberty was a fruit of political liberty, and in turn has become one of its chief supports, and exactly as we stand for political democracy so we must stand for industrial democracy.

The rights to life and liberty are fundamental, and like other fundamental necessities, when once acquired, they are little dwelt upon. The right to the pursuit of happiness is the right whose presence or absence is most likely to be felt in daily life. In whatever it has accomplished, or failed to accomplish, the administration which is just drawing to a close has at least seen clearly the fundamental need of freedom of opportunity for every citizen. We have realized that the right of every man to live his own life, provide for his family, and endeavor, according to his abilities, to secure for himself and for them a fair share of the good things of existence, should be subject to one limitation and to no other. The freedom of the individual should be limited only by the present and future rights, interests, and needs of the other individuals who make up the community. We should do all in our power to develop and protect individual liberty, individual initiative, but subject always to the need of preserving and promoting the general good. When necessary, the private right must yield, under due process of law and with proper compensation, to the welfare of the commonwealth. The man who serves the community greatly should be greatly rewarded by the community; as there is great inequality of service, so there must be great inequality of reward; but no man and no set of men should be allowed to play the game of competition with loaded dice.

All this is simply good common sense. The underlying principle of conservation has been described as the application of common sense to common problems for the common good.