

December 8, 1964

The Honorable Lyndon B. Johnson
The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I am satisfied that whatever constructive proposals you suggest to employ unskilled labor on necessary conservation projects in our city parks and rural areas will be favorably received by the public.

I would like to suggest that you consider a program of matching fund grants to states, cities and municipalities for hiring labor for conservation projects to be supervised and administered at the local level by state and local employees.

The program would not require expansion of the federal bureaucracy. It could be expanded or contracted to meet local needs. When youth unemployment is high in the cities during the summer the program could easily be expanded.

There are literally thousands of urgent and constructive jobs to do to develop our rural areas, to save our streams and rivers, to clean up the mess in our parks and undeveloped areas in our cities and along our highways, to develop our timber and water resources, and to begin the job of meeting the expanding recreational needs of the nation.

At the end of the last session of Congress, I wrote to hundreds of conservation and recreational officials in every state. More than 450 responded to my inquiry. They supported a program to put men to work on our backlog of conservation tasks.

Officials from every state in the union approved the idea; no state official objected to it; only one state reserved judgment; and 49 out of 50 states were in favor of such a program.

I am including for your use a copy of hearings on legislation I introduced last June outlining one possible approach to such a program. This approach could perhaps now best be implemented through an expansion of the legislative authority of the Office of Economic Opportunity. It would be a logical second phase in the war against poverty.

Also included in the hearings are the results of my survey. As you will see there are more than 425,000 man-years of work on constructive projects which could be started immediately if new legislation were approved by Congress.

On page 77-335 of the hearings are reprinted 467 letters from officials in all fifty states. These show enthusiastic state-by-state support from the men who would administer the program. Hundreds of specific projects, ready to go, are described. In my own state of Wisconsin the Conservation Department has 177,000 man-months of employment in constructive work planned and ready to go.

I am sure that a more detailed survey would show thousands of other important tasks which could put unemployed men to work tomorrow.

Jobs for idle men would do more than make a valuable contribution to our national conservation effort:

They would lift men and families out of the tragic cycle of poverty.

They would give hope to men who despair of every working again.

They would give job experience to young men who have never known the discipline of regular employment.

They could do much to ease the tensions, bred of unemployment and poverty, which have erupted in racial disturbances in many parts of the country.

At the end of last year, in the midst of a violent racial confrontation in Jersey City, New Jersey, Mayor Thomas Whelan of that city sent me a telegram which said in part:

"...The Older cities of the United States can no longer live off their own flesh. If we are to save our cities, the Federal government must move vigorously in these areas..."

Mayor Whelan's statement can equally be applied to our rural areas, and I believe that were you to propose a program to give jobs to unemployed men on constructive conservation and community development work, it would receive strong support from many parts of the nation.

Yours sincerely,

GAYLORD NELSON
U. S. Senator

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Enclosures