

Senator Gaylord Nelson
404 Old Senate Office Building



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

70-54

FOR RELEASE: SUNDAY A. M., APRIL 19, 1970:

COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND -- Senator Gaylord Nelson said Saturday he is proposing legislation that would create a \$4 billion a year Transportation for People Fund to finance suitable alternatives to the automobile in the nation's sprawling cities and head off a proposed second round of interstate highway building.

Nelson called this measure, which he will introduce next week, "a fundamental step in dealing with the gigantic environmental, social, and human consequences of the American automobile and its ever-expanding highway system.

"It is time we stopped paving America with concrete for an endless highway building program, tearing communities asunder and destroying our scenic resources, just to accommodate more automobiles and bring on more congestion and pollution," the Wisconsin Democrat argued at an eastern United States meeting of Sigma Delta Chi, a professional journalism society.

Under the measure planned by Nelson, the portion of Highway Trust Fund revenues now financing the Interstate Highway System would be directed to development and construction of alternative transportation modes--such as mass transit and pollution-free urban vehicles--when the interstate system is completed.

With about 30,000 of a total 42,500 miles now open to traffic, the interstate system is projected for 1975 completion.

Nelson said American cities, with major new aid from a Transportation for People Fund, must strive for "truly balanced transportation systems which provide the mobility of the automobile without its tragic social and environmental consequences."


Although other alternatives won't ever be the sole answer, Nelson said, "I hope someday we can turn some of our city streets into parks for children, some of our metropolitan highway routes into greenbelts and bicycle and hiking trails, some of our parking lots into playgrounds."

Nelson was a keynote speaker with Congressman Paul McCloskey, Jr., of California at the Region II meeting of Sigma Delta Chi newsmen and student

editors here. Nelson, who with McCloskey is a co-sponsor of the national environmental teach-in effort set for April 22, is making a month-long speaking tour that will take him across the country in connection with the Earth Day teach-in programs.

Calling transportation needs and effects "one of the major environmental issues," Nelson explained his legislation initiating the Transportation for People Fund would operate on the same scale as the interstate highway building program which has been an 18-year, \$60 billion project. Allocations for the interstate system have been at about \$4 billion a year in recent years.

The Transportation for People plan, Nelson said, would be a giant step toward "ending the transportation chaos of our cities, cutting automobile pollution and congestion, and meeting the transportation needs of all Americans, including the poor, the infirm, the aged and the young, those who often cannot afford or cannot drive cars."



Nelson argued that it is ridiculous to think that we can solve our transportation problems by automobiles and highways alone. Noting that proposals have been made for another round of interstate highway building, the Wisconsin Senator said the real need is for massive new urban funds for mass transit, city bus system, the development of special urban vehicles that do not pollute and yet meet city travel needs, and special monies for putting new city expressways underground where above-ground routes would destroy communities and parks.

Nelson said mass transit must be improved not only in quantity but in quality. "Present subways and elevated railroads are often unusable by invalids, the aged, and the crippled."

He said transportation must be provided that better serves the urban poor. "Too often, the automobile-highway system has actually isolated the poor and degraded the livability of the cities, instead of providing urban residents with decent mobility."

Regional inter-city rail travel "can and should be brought up to the level of the Washington-New York metroliner service, or better, in all regions," he continued.



He said the waste and pollution brought about by the automobile-highway system must be "drastically reduced," To meet this and other transportation problems, "cars of the future must be smaller and last longer, and we should therefore need to build fewer of them."

Nelson explained this step will not only help solve waste disposal and pollution problems, but will help alleviate urban congestion and ease the great drain on our resources and on the consumer's pocketbook."

In further comment on auto pollution, Nelson explained that emissions from automobile exhausts account for 60 per cent of the total air pollution problem in our metropolitan areas. In Los Angeles, he noted, smog has gotten so bad that the county medical department warned that students should not be involved in strenuous activities during heavy smog days.

The commitment to developing adequate transportation systems in our urban areas and between cities, Nelson argued, "is one that will require the same intensive planning, imagination, and resources that we have devoted to putting Man on the Moon and developing new defense weapons systems."

He said the Earth Day movement, which is climaxing on April 22, "is dramatically increasing the awareness of the American public, of all generations and philosophies of the grave environmental crisis faced by this country."

The next step, Nelson continued, must be sustained political action by groups in every community to achieve specific environmental goals.

"The environment has become everyone's issue," he said, "and the teach-ins have taught us that the environmental problems bridge any so-called generation gap, or political, social or economic gap. The environment is everyone's concern, and this month must mark a new era where this nation establishes quality on a par with quantity as an aim of American life."

#