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Portland Evening Express

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PORTLAND EVENING EXPRESS

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Not Good Enough, Mr. Nixon

Last week, in his state-of-the-union message, President Richard Nixon proposed a \$10 - billion program to clean up the nation's waters in the next five years.

We are sure that many of his listeners gained the impression that the ten billion from the federal government's investment would be matched by more billions from the states and cities, so that by 1975 we could expect significant progress in anti-pollution.

But now it turns out that Mr. Nixon means to contribute only \$4 billions of the total, that the federal payments will be spread out over nine years and not five, and that in addition he plans to change the current matching formula so that 60 per cent of the expense of sewage - treatment facilities will have to be borne by the states and their cities.

So the President is sort of an Indian giver, delivering less than he seems to promise, and because of the confusion and uncertainty Sen. Edmund S. Muskie held a long press conference on Friday, to reveal his own disappointment and announce his own anti-pollution program.

The senator stated flatly, and few will disagree with him, that the White House program falls far short of what Americans should be doing to clean up their waters and improve the environment generally.

Mr. Nixon said nothing about air pollution, he said nothing about waste disposal, and he was silent on industrial pollution not associated with water resources. No one knows, at this time, if he will spend the \$800 millions Congress has appropriated for anti-pollution for the 1970 fiscal year, and even if his proposal becomes law he would allocate to the states and municipalities only \$40 millions in the next fiscal year, and \$200 millions in the next.

In short, this is a highly inadequate plan, and the senator is far more realistic in saying that over the next five years Washington should spend at least \$12.5 billions, with an equal amount coming from other levels of government, merely for cleaner waters.

Senator Muskie's proposals, to which must be added \$3 billions in the next five years for cleaner air and solid waste disposal, become all the more meaningful in view of the fact that water pollution, for one, is probably now outstripping the nation's efforts to control it. The Federal Government is beginning to threaten some prominent industrial offenders with deadlines, New York State is hoping to spend \$1.7 billions of its own to abate pollution, and some other states are copying Maine and its water classification program, and trying to catch up with it. But this is only a start.

The big job has yet to be done, the chief lack is money, and it will discourage many states to find they must put up 60 per cent of the total clean - waters cost. Presently the federal share runs between 30 per cent and 55 per cent, and the Greater Portland regional project the Portland Water District plans to administer is counting on the full 55 per cent federal share, with the state paying 30 per cent and the affected cities and towns the other 15 per cent.

In fact, Washington already owes over \$700 millions in state-and-city pre - financing, while Maine voters just approved a \$50-million bond issue for the same purpose. The White House program, if implemented, will greatly weaken the impact of the Maine bond issue and put an even larger burden on Maine taxpayers.

Sen. Muskie's approach is better; it should be the basis of any future congressional action.