

Address of Vice President Richard Nixon to the Governors Conference Lake George, New York July 12, 1954

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Governor Thornton, distinguished Governors of the States of the Union, the distinguished First Ladies of the States of the Union, guests of the Governors Conference:

I want you to know, first of all, that it is a great privilege for me to have had the opportunity to attend this conference for the brief time that I have today. There are a number of reasons for this. I haven't the time to mention them all, but there are two or three that I think would be of interest to you.

One is that I have had the opportunity to see really very well this beautiful New York countryside. As we have sat here in the Sagamore Inn and looked out on the view from this window on Lake George, I think that I can say without fear of contradiction that there is no view in the United States which excels this one.

Now, Governor Dewey, I know that you will agree with that. You will note that my language is very, very careful in that respect; and Governor Knight will agree with me that that is the highest praise that a Californian could pay to any other view in America.

And the second reason that I am very privileged to be here is that it has given me an opportunity to renew acquaintances with the Governors of the States, many of whom I have met at previous conferences that have been held in Washington, and in other areas.

One regret I have is that we have not had the opportunity to renew acquaintances with the First Ladies of the States, but I see them in front of me, rather than in back of me, as the Governors are, and that in itself is a reward, you can be sure.

May I say, too, that I realize that for each of us who is here tonight, that certainly it is a great disappointment that the President of the United States, who was scheduled to address you, is unable to be here because of the death of a member of his family who was very close to him, and very dear to him.

I am here, therefore, as a substitute. But no one, as you know, can substitute for the President of the United States, and I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to indicate to you that I could.

But the President had a message that he particularly wanted to deliver to the Conference. He was good enough to give me the notes that he had made for delivery of that message. Now, incidentally, I know that his appearance at the Conference was advertised as being an informal speech by the President, and I know that all of you will concur from his previous appearances before your Conference that in making this informal, such as previously, the President is very, very effective. But, having seen these notes, as you will learn in just a few moments, I can tell you that the President follows the rule that the best informal speech is the one that is very well prepared. And fortunately, those notes are available for me to talk to you this evening. Unfortunately, of course, the personality, the anecdotes, the interpolations, which make the notes live, as only the President can make the notes live, I cannot, of course, effectively bring to you. But I would like to bring to you the message as it has been set down in the notes, and then if time permits, perhaps to add at the end a few remarks of my own.

The 48 States are represented at this Conference, and each of them -- in area, in population, in wealth -- is greater than many independent nations in the world today. Each of them is great in potential achievement, because joined with 47 others, they form the mightiest of temporal teams -- the United States of America.

Now, against that background, where is the United States going, and by what road? What are the purposes of the United States of America? For the building of a cooperative peace, the strengthening of America and her friends are overriding purposes that must have a sound economic base? How can we assure such a base?

At home, the United States of America must be an example of national progress in its standard of living. Measured by the prosperity, the culture, the health of the free individual, America is the best market place for American products.

Abroad, the spiral in the world's standard of living means a spiral in purchasing power. And this, of course, is to the advantage of every American producer, every sound American investment in better world living standards will earn rich returns for America. And in a period of crises, ignited by circumstances often beyond present control or immediate remedy, we must maintain a military dike on our defense perimeter. But behind it we must achieve the fullest possible productive strength, exploiting every asset, correcting every deficiency in our economic situation. We don't want a blueprint for a regimented economy, but we must have vision, comprehensive plans, and cooperation between the States and Federal government.

And the road we should take is outlined by the American philosophy of government. What is that philosophy? The President likes to think of it in these terms: it is rooted in individual rights and obligations -- expressed in maximum opportunity for every individual to use rights and to discharge obligations -- maintained by keeping close to the individual his control over his government -- it is sparked by local initiative, encouraged and furthered by the Federal government. Financed traditionally by demanding of visible, tangible and profitable return on every dollar spent. A tax economy of enterprises, directly or indirectly, which are self-liquidating.

Now, that philosophy, applied to public affairs, is the middle road between chaos on the one side, and regimentation on the other.

It is significant that in the United States we talk of individual rights, we talk of States rights -- but not of Federal rights, because the Federal government is normally considered a depository of certain well-defined and limited obligations: for national security, for foreign affairs, for leadership within the community of 48 States.

Now, in that light, what are the domestic jobs that must now be done to further the purposes of America? What is the prospect before us?

First, on the bright side, we live in a dramatic age of technical revolution through atomic power, and we should recognize the fact that the pace is far faster than the simpler revolutions of the past. It was a very long generation from the Watts steam engine to a practical locomotive. It was less than nine years from the atomic bomb to the launching of an atomic-powered submarine. We have seen a revolutionary increase in opportunity, comfort, leisure and productivity of the individual.

Thirty years ago, the machine economy was almost entirely limited to factories and transportation. Today it is in every area of living, even in the garden patches and on the front lawns.

Look at the prospects in population. In 1870, the population of the United States was 38½ million people, and our population growth in the previous half century was one of the wonders of the world.

In 1980, the population of the United States, it is estimated, will reach 200 million. It will grow in the sixteen years as much as the entire population of the United States was in 1870.

So much for the credit side. On the dark side, as we look into the future, we see a shortage of 300 thousand classrooms in the grade schools of the country, a shortage of 813 thousand hospital beds, an annual increase of 250 thousand disabled who require vocational rehabilitation. And we have also dislocations in our economy requiring undesirable government intervention -- everything from subsidies even to outright seizure and control, in the recent past.

Also on the dark side, we have a transportation system which in many respects it is true is the best in the world, but far from the best that America can do for itself in an era when defensive and productive strength require the absolute best that we can have.

Now all of these needs must be attended to, along with the other unlimited problems in which we have common interests and common responsibilities. And all of them require some measure of Federal-State cooperation. Some are insoluble, except in closest cooperation.

For example, the top priority in our planning must be given to transportation, and to health and efficiency in industries to the national defense and the national economy. A Cabinet committee has just been established by the President to explore and to help formulate a comprehensive transportation policy for the Nation, taking into account the vital interests of carriers, shippers, the States and communities, the public at large. But more specifically, our highway net is inadequate locally, and obsolete as a national system.

To start to meet this problem at this session of the Congress, we have increased by approximately 500 million dollars the Federal monies available to the States for road development. This seems like a very substantial sum. But the experts say that 5 billion dollars a year for ten years, in addition to all current, normal expenditures, will pay off in economic growth; and when we have spent 50 billion dollars in the next ten years, we shall only have made a good start on the highways the country will need for a population of 200 million people.

A 50 billion dollar highway program in ten years is a goal toward which we can -- and we should -- look.

Now, let us look at the highway net of the United States as it is. What is wrong with it? It is obsolete because in large part it just happened. It was governed in the beginning by terrain, existing Indian trails, cattle trails, arbitrary section lines. It was designed largely for local movement at low speeds of one or two horsepower. It has been adjusted, it is true, at intervals to meet metropolitan traffic gluts, transcontinental movement, and increased horsepower. But it has never been completely overhauled or planned to satisfy the needs ten years ahead.

At this point in his notes, the President had a personal anecdote illustrating the problem. 35 years ago this month, the Secretary of War initiated a transcontinental truck convoy to prove that the gas engine had displaced the mule, even on our relatively primitive roads. A Second Lieutenant named Dwight Eisenhower went along as an observer. All-weather roads in the United States at that time totaled 300 thousand miles. The autos and trucks numbered 7 million, 600 thousand. That truck convoy left Washington July the 7th. It arrived in San Francisco on September the 5th, sixty days and 6000 breakdowns later.

Today, all-weather mileage is approximately one million, 800 thousand as compared with 300 thousand miles. But autos and trucks number more than 56 million, as compared with 7 million, 600 thousand.

It is obvious, then, that the increase in mileage has lagged behind the increase in vehicles. The road system, moreover, is fundamentally the same, either haphazard or completely arbitrary in its origin, designed for local movement, in an age of transcontinental travel.

Now, what are the penalties of this obsolete net which we have today? Our first most apparent [is] an annual death toll comparable to the casualties of a bloody war, beyond calculation in dollar terms. It approaches 40 thousand killed and exceeds one and three-tenths million injured annually.

And second, the annual wastage of billions of hours in detours, traffic jams, and so on, measurable by any traffic engineer and amounting to billions of dollars in productive time.

Third, all the civil suits that clog up our courts. It has been estimated that more than half have their origins on highways, roads and streets.

Nullification of efficiency in the production of goods by inefficiency in the transport of goods, is another result of this obsolete net that we have today.

And finally, the appalling inadequacies to meet the demands of catastrophe or defense, should an atomic war come.

These penalties warrant the expenditures of billions to correct them.

Now, let us look at the highway net as it should be. The President believes that the requirements are these: a grand plan for a properly articulated system that solves the problems of speedy, safe, transcontinental travel -- intercity communication -- access highways -- and farm-to-market movement -- metropolitan area congestion -- bottlenecks -- and parking.

Second, a financing proposal based on self-liquidation of each project, wherever that is possible, through tolls or the assured increase in gas tax revenue, and on Federal help where the national interest demands it.

And third -- and I would emphasize this, particularly at this Conference, because I know how deeply the President believes in this principle: a cooperative alliance between the Federal government and the States so that local government and the most efficient sort of government in the administration of funds, will be the manager of its own area.

And the fourth, very probably, a program initiated by the Federal government, with State cooperation, for the planning and construction of a modern State highway system, with the Federal government functions, for example, being to advance funds or guarantee the obligations of localities or States which undertake to construct new, or modernize existing highways.

And then I would like to read to you the last sentence from the President's notes, exactly as it appears in them, because it is an exhortation to the members of this Conference.

Quote, "I hope that you will study the matter, and recommend to me the cooperative action you think the Federal government and the 48 States should take to meet these requirements, so that I can submit positive proposals to the next session of the Congress."

And I know that in making this request to the Governors Conference, that the President believes it is essential that we have cooperation in this field. He believes that only with cooperation, and with the maximum of State and local initiative and control can we make a program which will deal with the problem and deal with it effectively.

And now I trust that you will not consider me presumptuous if in the very few minutes remaining I add a footnote to the message of the President of the United States.

We have been discussing tonight a 50-billion-dollar highway program over 10 years. And it may seem difficult to attain, because of the cost. But I think all of us are aware today that we spend about 50 billion dollars every year for national defense. I don't think we could have any more striking evidence of what a great vista of progress we have in store for our country, if we can have peace.

Now I don't propose to discuss this great problem in a very few minutes specifically, or to offer any new program to you here tonight. That is, of course, the prerogative of the President and the Secretary of State. But I do suggest that in considering the threat to the peace of the world, in considering why we spend the 50 billion dollars to meet that threat, the threat which is presented by the communist conspiracy, that we sometimes have a tendency to place primary and almost exclusive emphasis on the possibility of atomic war, and of armies marching across the border in the traditional pattern.

I think we should have in mind that there are two great factors today which indicate that the greatest danger we face in the future may not be traditional war or, for that matter, atomic war. And the first factor is the deterrent effect of the

atomic weapon itself.

It is significant that even some military men say that the atomic weapon in the long run may turn out to be one of the greatest forces for peace in the world.

Why is this the case?

I thought I had it very eloquently and effectively explained to me by a man it was my privilege to meet on the trip that Mrs. Nixon and I took around the world last fall. He had been described to me before I left by a man who has definite opinions on men and subjects -- General MacArthur. The man that he was talking [about] was General Slim, the Governor General of Australia, who served during the war in various commands.

And General MacArthur, before I went, said, "I urge you to have a conversation with General Slim" -- as I had planned to do -- "and I can tell you that in my opinion he is a hard-hitting, hard-bitten, hard-fighting man." I found that General Slim, the Governor General of Australia, was all of that, and that he was a man who was thinking very seriously of the grave problems confronting the world.

He developed this thesis that I have just mentioned, the thesis that the atomic bomb might turn out to be a force for peace rather than for war, and he pointed out that in the history of wars we find that a national leader does not start a war unless he thinks he can win it, or unless he thinks he can win more in the war than he will lose.

Now, how has a national leader to determine that he can or will win more than he will lose?

He does that when he feels that he has a clear advantage. In times past, that advantage could be obtained by increasing the quantity -- increasing the quantity, for example, of men, of bows and arrows, of funds, of planes, of tanks -- whatever the weapons happen to be at a particular time in our history. And once the quantitative advantage was obtained, a war could be risked with a reasonable chance of winning.

And then, General Slim pointed out, that now, for the first time in the world's history, we are approaching a period when numbers may no longer be decisive. Because once a nation has enough atomic and hydrogen weapons, and planes to deliver them, to destroy the power of its enemy, whether it has ten times as much makes no difference.

We may soon reach that point in the world, he pointed out, when no world leader at that time may feel that he can risk war as an instrument of policy, because the result will be, at best, double suicide.

That is the first factor which militates against the theory that the great danger to us today is a war of any kind.

The second one is in examining the tactics of the only potential threat to the peace of the world. In 1917, what was communism? Nothing but a cellar conspiracy. The communists did not control a government in the world. Today they control 800 million people, and a third of the globe.

How did they get this control? Secretary Dulles has pointed out that they have gained this control by armed attack across a border only in gaining two insignificant parts of Finland and Poland. All the rest -- the great gains -- have been obtained through the tactic of internal subversion revolution. For example, China was won to the communist side by Chinese. Czechoslovakia by Czechs. Hungary by Hungarians.

And so it would seem that the major danger we face in the world today may be that kind of action.

Now, where do we face that danger? Primarily in the uncommitted areas of the world, in areas which unfortunately have no tradition of freedom, or in many instances very little tradition of freedom. Those areas primarily are in Asia and in Africa -- Africa, the richest continent in the world, 95% of which is controlled in a colonial status.

These are the points of attack by the communists today, the primary points of attack. Now, what is the danger? Revolution, we have decided. But a revolution is not possible unless people follow leaders who are won over to a cause.

What is the appeal? Why are people won to the communist cause, particularly in these areas of the world?

I think, very simply stated, we must realize that people in Asia, these uncommitted areas, in Africa -- people are on the march, they want to better their lives, they are dissatisfied with the status quo. There are some significant things which are characteristic of most all of them. Some of these nations have just recently acquired their independence, others are still in colonial status, all want independence, and they want to maintain it, if they already have it.

Second, most of these are peoples who have suffered the greatest humiliation that a people can suffer, and that is, being looked down upon by other peoples in the world.

Third, all are substandard in their standards of living.

Fourth, all have suffered grievously from war.

And so, what do they want? Independence. Equality. Economic progress -- and peace.

They don't like the slavery, the cruelty of communism any more than we do. But they will take it if it promises some progress toward the goals which they want, in opposition to those who offer only to leave them where they are. And all the defense pacts, the armies in the world, will be useless if the people are on the other side. We saw that, in reverse, in Guatemala.

Now, what do we do about this problem? We are doing a number of things. First, of course, we exposed the communists, exposed the fact that while they say they are for all these things, in practice they produce the opposite.

And second, we are linking up the great moral power of the United States and the free nations, on the side of the aspirations of these people. And I thought the statement that Prime Minister Churchill and President Eisenhower issued at the conclusion of their conference, will have a great impact in those areas of the world in doing just that.

But, in order to give this kind of leadership, it means that we must have a sound base in America, a great example of freedom, of equality, of economic progress, for all the world to see.

Our economy must not be fat and static, but it has to be dynamic and expanding. And that is why it is so essential that the very best leadership in America, from both of our great major Parties, from all segments of our government, join together in making the American democracy sound and strong, and productive and free.

And now, may I conclude my remarks by reading a wire which the President sent to me, which is really to you.

"I am certain that in meeting with the assembled Governors, you will derive the same inspiration and the same increased confidence in the superiority of our form of government that I never fail to get in like circumstances.

"When the Prime Minister of Great Britain recently visited me, he asserted that our federal form of government gave to our country the great advantage of providing 48 training grounds for public service on the national level, while in the case of the most broadly experienced public servant of our time, the distinguished Governor of South Carolina [James F. Byrnes], this process has been successfully reversed.

"I am sure that the Prime Minister's observation is valid, but I believe that probably the greatest worth of the American political system is the opportunity it provides for keeping government closer to the people and for performing in our several State and territorial capitals government activities that would otherwise fall to Federal authority.

"Because of the size of our country, the climatic differences of its different sections, the economic interdependence of the States, any such centralization would inevitably lead toward greater and greater regimentation of our people. These facts also highlight the great need for cooperation between those two important echelons of government in the United States. Consequently, from the Federal viewpoint, the greatest value of the Governors Conferences, to which are invariably invited members of the national administration, is in the opportunity presented for discussion among us of problems affecting national and state government, and every individual.

"The recent visit to Korea by three members of the Governors Conference is merely another example of our great recognition that scarcely any public activity is of exclusive interest to any echelon of government. I would be most appreciative if you would extend to all the Governors present my very best wishes for a successful meeting, and for the happiness and the welfare of each. Signed Dwight D. Eisenhower."

May I add a closing word. The body over which I preside in the United States Capitol calls itself the most exclusive club in the world. It is the United States Senate. I would say that this body can properly claim to be even more exclusive. There are only 48 of you. There are 96 in the United States Senate.

And I want to express my appreciation to you for the privilege of being with you, for the magnificent service which you are rendering to your States and to the Nation, and for the inspiration that you give by your example to those of us who are serving on the national scene.
