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Growth Centers of WI:
their Identification and
Characteristics

THE POLITICS OF PLANNING FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

by Senator Gaylord Nelson

Many who have worked for years in the conservation movement and planning have been tempted to hope for an effective "no growth" policy which would make sense, I think, if it could be an effective "no growth" policy.

The destructiveness to the environment and the pressures upon our diminishing world resources and the unchecked exploitation of natural resources makes such a policy seem reasonable.

Unfortunately we do not seem to have that choice.

Demographers tell us that by the year 2000--now only 27 years away--our population--now at 209 million--will increase by at least 88 million people, and perhaps to as many as 300 million. The increase will take place even if we maintain the replacement birthrate of 2.1 children per couple. For even at "zero population growth" it will take 70 years for the population to stabilize.

Where are we going to put this incredible increase in population? Where shall we find the resources to clothe them, the energy to keep them warm in winter and mobile the year round?

Where will they live? Are we to repeat the disasters of New York, and the Los Angeles metropolitan areas, and others elsewhere in the nation?

The obvious answer is plain. It would seem clear that our hope for a livable future lies in a balanced growth policy--with the enlarging population deflected from the largest, most expensive, hardest to



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govern metropolitan areas and drawn instead to many growth centers-- like, for example, the Eau Claire area.

Growth centers where careful environmental and economic planning have made it possible to provide a livable environment for many, many thousands of people.

But let me suggest that the difficulties of moving from our present chaos of really no planning into a more rationally ordered future are by no means easy to resolve.

The problems we face in America in establishing the mechanisms for democratic planning are extremely formidable.

An analogy is often drawn between our extraordinary success in reaching the moon and our inability to solve the crisis of the cities. It does seem absurd that we were able to develop the technology to send a fragile metal habitat thousands of miles into space to the moon and retrieve it safely, yet we cannot provide decent housing at reasonable cost on the southside of Chicago.

But there are crucial differences which must be understood between space technology and economic and land use planning that are often overlooked. For the problems of reaching the moon were technical problems. The goal was clear to everyone.

The political decision on going to the moon was an early one, and a fairly easy one to make. Almost nobody wanted Russia to win the race to the moon, and gain the lead in rocketry and other military related technology such a victory would represent.

Once the political decision was made the problems--although



extremely complex--were all technical. It was the force of gravity, not the force of tradition and vested interests that had to be overcome.

But when we speak of economic and land use planning the political questions are much more difficult. For economic planning requires the government to say "We will help, one way or another, we will help this area to grow and not that area."

The conquest of outer space is not the only triumph of organized American ingenuity, and perhaps not even the most impressive.

The opening of the west and the organization of American agriculture represent the triumph of a series of social policies stretching back to colonial days, and indicate the great creativity of the leadership, both in and out of government, over that period.

The nation's land was extended to the west coast by the Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican War.

The Northwest Ordinances provided for public education.

The Homestead Act provided land to the settlers.

Grant of land to railroads assured a transportation system.

Land Grant Colleges provided higher education.

The County Agent system disseminated the knowledge of farming techniques which means our farmers are the most productive in the World.

And, since the depression, a whole network of price support and credit institutions have kept American agriculture growing more and more productive.

The leadership of the nation met the challenge of those times by devising creative policies essential to the development and population of the west in a way that made land and economic opportunity available



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to individuals and families. These policies established the foundation for democracy as well as a productive economy in those vast regions.

Now we are faced with a challenge even more fateful. For if we continue to postpone and temporize with the issues of unplanned, uncontrolled, exploitative development, and uneven economic growth we shall lose the great heritage of this magnificent Wisconsin northland and indeed of the entire nation.

While we praise the memory of those who drafted the Homestead Act and the legislation setting up the land grant college system for their foresight and commitment to democratic development we must ask ourselves what will our grandchildren think of the record that we are making today.

Either we match our forebears in creativity and resolve, or this generation shall be remembered as little men, unworthy of public trust, who allowed the interest of private greed and quick profit to destroy the nation's heritage.

There is another darker side of the study of the triumph of American agricultural efficiency: The vast shift of population from farm to city. A vast shift for which no planning whatsoever was done. A vast shift of population that lies at the heart of today's urban dilemma.

In 1930 we had more than 10 million people, 26 percent of the workforce, engaged in agriculture. Now we have less than 4 percent.

Between 1950 and 1960 some rural states lost half their agricultural workforce. In Wisconsin agricultural employment is expected to decline



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another 37 percent between 1969 and 1980. Right now we have rural counties with unemployment of over 10 percent.

If there were an adequate supply of jobs in the cities then the shift in population--forced by the headlong mechanization of agriculture--would have been a smooth process. However, except for a period during the second world war when the nation achieved true full employment, this has never previously been the case nor since.

We all know that in Wisconsin, as elsewhere, the family farm is being squeezed to the wall by rising equipment and other costs. As the number of farmers dwindle, efforts to attract industry are made by smaller towns and cities. With very little in federal help and no adequate economic planning their efforts are frequently not too successful. Young people then leave for the big city to seek their fortunes.

While we are crowding too many people into the huge metropolitan areas--in Wisconsin stuffing more and more folks down in the southeast corner of the State--smaller cities are losing people and resources elsewhere around the State.

We must recognize that there is a parallel in our waste of human resources--continued chronic unemployment--and our waste of natural resources--through unplanned growth.

Some encouraging progress is now, finally, being made on land use planning in some states and at the National level. Legislation to provide for adequate land use planning ought to have been on the books and strictly enforced at least for one quarter of a century ago.



But at least we are now beginning.

At the last session of Congress the Senate passed a bill by Senator Jackson providing funds for State planning to guide growth in development. Legislation dealing with this issue was also approved by the House Interior Committee.

This session Senator Jackson has re-introduced his legislation and the bill is reaching the final stages of committee markup now.

The measure will include a substantial financial support to states for land-use planning, some \$800 million over the next five years, and sanctions for those States that do not develop acceptable plans.

Sanctions in the nature of loss of highway trust funds, airport construction support and land and water conservation funds, depending upon how successfully Senator Jackson can persuade the majority in that committee to stand by his position in being sure there are some substantial sanctions.

We have offered an amendment to the Jackson bill that would halt the destruction of rural areas by unplanned and unwise home development. This proposal of mine would require states localities to set up a permit system for all developments larger than 25 acres or including more than 50 units. In applying for a permit under this proposal a developer would have to put together an environmental impact statement to demonstrate that the proposed development would not be destructive to the landscape.

The proposed land-use legislation crucially important as it is-- is not enough.

It grows, of course, out of the environmental movement and its chief concern is to protect the physical beauty and viability of the land and to prevent the uncontrolled proliferation of ugly developments and rural slums.

But what of our human environment?

What of the smaller city or town, for instance, where the down-town businessmen are destroyed by a shopping center that springs up in a meadow 5 miles outside of town. The shopping center might very well be environmentally fine. But the economic impact could be disastrous and in many instances has been. For the center does not create more business--it simply draws business away from the local merchants. And declining business for the town's stores mean a declining tax base and all the people of the town suffer. There ought to be designed some way tax benefits or otherwise to help the smaller cities and towns and communities develop and rehabilitate themselves rather than simply uneconomically create and duplicate all the services and stores outside the village limits someplace else.

Who is to speak for the public interest in the development?

How can we organize so that economic growth doesn't destroy communities while profiting just a handful of people.

Once upon a time it was widely believed that the free market economy working without let or hinderance resulted in the greatest good for the greatest number.

Long ago we abandoned that all encompassing simplistic doctrine. We do not allow cutthroat competition in basic utilities--we do not allow two railroads to lay tracks side by side. We do not have competing telephone or utility companies. For we recognize that when



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the welfare of the entire community is at stake then the private interests of individuals and companies must give way.

Nowhere is the contrast between private gain and public interest so clearly in conflict as in the shaping of new growth over the next quarter to one-half century.

The legislation to begin to control land use now moving through the Congress represents a promising beginning.

But, as I said, it is only a beginning.

Like our ancestors faced with the hard decisions concerning the development of the west we must face the hard decisions about the development of American society and the American landscape in the next half century.

There is a great deal of skepticism in this nation about the wisdom of officials, politicians or bureaucrats--and planners. Some of it, of course, justified.

We hope the nation can reach the year 2000 without getting trapped in 1984.

So we desperately need institutions in which planning and the political decision-making process can be brought together.

Simply laying out goals in terms of generalities is not enough.

The Employment Act of 1946 is more than a quarter of a century old. Just recently on television the President again endorsed the concept of a job for everyone who seeks work. Yet we do not have full employment. And we do not have planning for full employment.

The 1974 budget is the Administration's clearest testament of where it stands on these issues.



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The budget proposes, for example, to eliminate all funding for the Economic Development Administration and its Regional Action, Regional Planning Commissions including the Upper Great Lakes Regional Development Commission.

Funding for the E.D.A. has always been entirely too small-- under \$300 million for the whole nation. It was passed nearly a decade ago, after nearly a decade of effort by the way it was passed, the author being the great former Senator from Illinois, Paul Douglas. Twice it was vetoed by President Eisenhower, but it was one of the first major bills signed into law by President Kennedy. Now all support for the program is to end unless the Congress is able to overcome the President's wishes. Legislation to extend the program has now passed both Houses of Congress and I would hope the President may be persuaded to sign it.

It seems clear to me that we desperately need a serious, adequately funded economic development program for growth centers in rural areas. The policy must be aimed at achieving balanced growth for the nation as a whole and full, well thought-out use of all of our resources, human as well as natural.

To achieve this policy is not impossible, though very difficult. We have accomplished difficult things before. America's democratic institutions are time tested and very strong.

As we go forward to build public support for planning to solve our national growth dilemmas let us not make the mistake of over simplifying the difference between social planning, economic planning



and technological planning or planning for a business firm. When you are working on a plan for a city or a nation, you are working within a political context.

Some would despair at that thought.

But I disagree. I believe that we in America can work out the ways and the means to do the planning that must be done to guide the future growth of America. But it will not be done until it becomes an important political issue and I think that's the most important thing to be understood.

Many years ago, some of my friends in Planning thought that they weren't in politics. Planning is the toughest politics there is and until the time comes that it is that planning is part of the political discussion and the political dialogue, is a political issue in the country, then we aren't going to be able to successfully implement the plans that the planners draw.

I remember all through the years, talking for 20 years about the environment and the problems of the environment and the fact that it wasn't really part of the political dialogue of the country. And it occurred to me that we would never really be able to make the tough political decisions that have to be made in the environmental field until it became a political issue. It is interesting to note that in 1968 not one of the 3 candidates for President mentioned the environment as an issue in the whole campaign. And, however, since then everybody; Assemblymen, Senators, Governors, Congressmen, President, have been discussing the environment.

The reason I organized Earth Day was for the exact purpose of having a nationwide demonstration in order to convince the politicians



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that in fact the people of the country were concerned, that therefore it was a political issue and as soon as the environment became recognized as a necessary part of the political dialogue of the country by the elected officials of the country, then suddenly it became possible at the local, state and national levels to implement plans for protecting the environment by making some blunt, tough political decisions.

So it's now time that a broad educational program be carried on all across this nation to convince people that you cannot allow the next 100 million people who are going to be here in the next half century or 60 years, or thereabouts, to continue to go into the unmanageable cities and we cannot permit this country to develop with no plan whatsoever, destroying as we go the greatest assets that the country has. Once that's understood, that it's in the best selfish interests of everybody in this country to plan for the growth of the future, then your ideas and your plans can be politically implemented and until then they cannot be.



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