

THE FEDERAL ROAD BUILDING POLICY

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE EXPLAINS FEATURES.

Outlines Problems to be solved—Expresses Particular Interest in the Roads Used for Mail, For Transportation of Farm Products, and Getting Children to School.

David F. Houston, secretary of agriculture, delivered an address on federal cooperation in road building before the good roads convention held recently in Detroit, Mich. Secretary Houston said in part:

The organization of great national transcontinental roads appeals to my imagination, as does the suggestion of interstate roads connecting capitals or cities of commercial importance to my logical faculty and to the sense of pleasure that I experience in riding about the country in my friends' automobiles. But that the essential thing to be done is the providing of good roads which shall get products from the community farms to the nearest station and make rural life more profitable, comfortable and pleasurable, I entertain no sort of doubt, and it is obvious that the representatives of the people in congress are like minded. For in making their appropriation they stipulated that it should be used in improving the condition of post roads with a view to the economy and efficiency of postal delivery and for the transportation of farm products to the market. Such roads are equally essential to the establishment and operation of decent elementary and secondary schools for the benefit of the country boys and girls. I do not eliminate other things for consideration and I do not underestimate the rights and pleasures of the automobilists and the service they have rendered in the propaganda for road building.

There are complex problems to be solved in many states before the most efficient expenditure of money by states and communities for roads can be secured, and there are many more to be worked out before one can rationally expect the federal government largely to participate. Who shall say how aid should be apportioned so that the states may receive equitable treatment? Shall it be apportioned equally among the states on the basis of total population, farm population, area, taxable valuation, road mileage, or all these; and should federal money be expended exclusively through its own agencies for a certain system? What roads are to be improved? There are approximately two and a quarter million miles of publicly

owned roads in the nation. Half of this mileage is utilized for post roads and less than 10 per cent of the total can be classed as improved in any large sense. Shall we undertake to apply aid to all the roads or shall we consider this a task too gigantic? Shall we apply it to the rural routes or shall we regard this as equally beyond reason? Or shall we single out certain directions in which central roads shall run, and if so how? Is it not clear that this opens up a field where petty politics, community interest and individual selfishness may run riot? Assuming that we have settled this, for what purpose shall the aid be granted and in what proportion? Shall it be exclusively for construction, exclusively for maintenance, or for both? Shall it be to pay the entire cost of either or both of these items, or shall it be dependent on the equal or larger contribution by the states and communities? Shall the aid come through votes of money out of the treasury or from the sale of bonds? That the suggestion of federal aid to road building raises grave questions and involves possible dangers, no thoughtful citizen doubts. There are proposals before the public mind which would bankrupt the federal treasury and suggest possible abuses before which those of the worst pork barrel bills of the past would pale into insignificance. No proposal which does not carry with it the assurance of safeguarding the treasury in this direction seems to me to stand the ghost of a show of favorable consideration. It is not alone the fear that there would be no stopping place. There is the question of precedent. This is not the only proposal before the American congress involving the question of huge appropriations. There are others which, to their advocates, are just as important and are being just as insistently urged, and many of the veteran congressmen have naturally contracted the habit of halting automatically at such proposals.

It would be especially pernicious if such aid should result in stifling the spirit of local self help. In this field as in others the states have recently made great headway, and any action taken should unquestionably result in the fostering of this spirit, and in the efficient direction of these activities to which it may lead.

Another difficulty to be avoided is the over centralization of activity in these intimate intrastate matters and the building up of a great and powerful bureau in Washington, with an ever increasing control over the highways of the country. The dictates of prudence and experience are that so far as possible such agencies as may be required should be efficiently developed in the several states and that the federal agencies should work in a spirit of complete and helpful co-operation and assistance.

The first practical essentials in

the planning of road legislation would seem to be to recognize the states as the smallest unit with which the federal government might deal. This would give relief in a measure from the insistent demand that would come from every township and every district in the union for its share of state or federal assistance, without reference to the merits of the case or the practicability of the undertaking. As has been stated, many of the states now have efficient state highway departments, and thus afford organized agencies with which the federal office could deal. It would seem that the basic feature would be such co-operation between the states and the federal government as would leave with the states the initiative in the selection of roads to receive aid, and as much of the immediate construction and maintenance as would be practicable. In the case of roads on which federal money is to be expended it would seem essential and wise that the federal agency should have the requisite power of the approval of the selection, supervision of the construction and maintenance, and the right of inspection, for the plain and simple ordinary purpose of seeing that the federal money is applied to the purpose for which it was voted and is efficiently expended.

It is reasonably clear that, for every reason there may be some automatic check upon the demands to be made upon congress and that this should be afforded through the requirement that the states and the localities should contribute an amount, both for construction and maintenance at least equal to and

possibly double that contributed by the federal government; and that, in the apportionment of any possible federal funds a number of basic factors such as population, area, wealth, or minimum cost of construction, should control, I have not the least doubt.

There may be those who "will view with alarm" any suggestion that the federal government co-operate with the states financially in road building and more especially that it exercise an adequate measure of control and supervision even over the expenditure of its own funds. The cry of centralization—that the federal government aims unduly to extend its powers may again be raised. Yet, in a field of common interest and of inseparable activities what could be more natural than co-operation and mutual assistance? Why should the two jurisdictions serving the same people forever stand apart and view each other with suspicion and distrust while nothing is done or much is wasted? And is it not worthy of note that the alarm never seizes such people at the stage of the discussion in which it would be of most value? They are not in the least timid in their approaches to the federal treasury and their courage fails them only when it is suggested that the federal government has a right to see that the money of the people of the nation is wisely and efficiently expended. If they are to take counsel of their alarms let them do so before they determine to assault the treasury.

In short, as a practical program, I believe that this matter is one in which haste can best be slowly made. The people will sanction a reasonable expenditure of their money—and it is their money and theirs only, whether it be expended through the federal government or the state—when they are convinced that it is applied to a wise purpose and will yield the results anticipated. And I am impressed by the wisdom of the action of congress, in constituting a committee "to make inquiry into the subject of federal aid to the construction of post roads," in providing an appropriation of a half million dollars to be expended co-operatively with the states in the proportion of one to two, and in requiring the secretary

of agriculture and the postmaster general to report to congress the results of such expenditure "together with such recommendations as shall seem wise for providing a general plan of national aid for the improvement of postal roads in co-operation with the states and counties, and to bring about as nearly as possible such co-operation in the various states as will insure uniform and equitable interstate highway regulations." This indicates a desire to know the facts as well as a generous interest. Too short a time has elapsed to judge of the value of this undertaking, but that it is in the right direction few will question. That it might be attended with ample funds if aid is to be furnished most thoughtful men would concede; and the plan has the peculiar value of being susceptible of indefinite extension in case the results should be found to justify it.

NEWCOMERS PLAYING POLITICS

(Continued from page one.)

M. Peyton was the unanimous choice of the meeting for recorder.

Thos. Pouts was placed in nomination for councilman by W. C. Benfer.

Rex Miller was nominated by "Willie" Wise.

O. C. Nelson, who had stayed to participate in the proceedings, now placed in nomination the name of Albert Bryner.

H. A. Hark nominated Robert McKune.

O. C. Nelson, who had remained silent since the previous nomination, offered a motion that a committee of three to fill vacancies be appointed. The motion was carried and O. C. Nelson, one of those present, H. A. Hark and P. C. Plason were appointed as such committee.

Attorney Nelson called attention to the fact that it was necessary that the petition should receive fifty signatures in order that names of the nominees, as it should be legally presented to the city clerk.

After which action Mr. Nelson, the Carbon County News, "Willie" Wise and the others, who were also present, adjourned.

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