10-3-1967

Copper Strike 1967 - Congressional Record Reprint Page 14039

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Draft 10/5/67

Statement in Support of an Executive Order to Establish a President's Council on Land Resources

Needs for a Land Council

The establishment of a President's Council on Land Resources would promote coordination of Federal responsibilities for land programs and policies. Increasing demands on our Nation's land resources affect the type, direction, amount, and quality of change in open country and urbanized areas. The welfare of rural and urban people alike defines a need for comprehensive, coordinated, and consistent policies, plans, and programs for the conservation, development, and use of these lands.

The primary purpose of the President's Council on Land Resources would be to assist in the development of consistent policies and plans for the conservation, development, and use of the nation's land resources. Needs for land for such basic activities as agriculture, timber production, urban development, industrial use, transportation, recreation, and other uses would be considered. The Council also would coordinate Federal policies and programs providing technical and financial assistance for comprehensive land use planning by State and local governments. It would facilitate programming, planning, and budgeting by extending these activities, where practical, along functional lines among Federal departments. An executive officer and a small supporting staff would be needed to service the Council.
The Department of Agriculture has assigned responsibilities for agricultural, forestry, and rural development programs affecting 80 percent of the total land area of the 50 States. For example, 70 percent of the land in the 48 conterminous States is in private ownership. Most of the Nation's crop, livestock, timber, and wildlife production comes from this land. More than one-third of all land in public ownership is managed by the Forest Service for timber production, recreation, and other multiple uses. In addition to programs of technical assistance and credit, the Department conducts a broad-base program of research on many aspects of natural resource conservation and development. In view of these responsibilities and concerns with overall natural resource policy and those assigned by Executive Order 11307, it is appropriate that the Secretary of Agriculture take the lead in a Council whereby the mutual interests of the various Federal departments and agencies may be considered fully.

The National Advisory Commission on Food and Fiber in its report recommended "that the United States develop a comprehensive and integrated natural resource policy." At present, no mechanism for developing overall land policy exists. The need for such a function is based on the following existing and emerging issues:

1. Population increase in the coming decades will require explicit Federal and State programs to help guide location
of urban populations. An orderly development of the Nation's land and related resources for new urban centers including associated land requirements will require the coordinated effort of many agencies.

2. Nonagricultural uses of the Nation's land are expected to increase at a more rapid rate than population. In addition to land requirements for urban uses, coordinated programs affecting multiple use for such purposes as outdoor recreation, timber production, wildlife habitat, natural beauty, transportation, and industry location are needed to facilitate compatible, as well as efficient land use.

3. Long run needs for food and fiber in the U. S. and in the world must be carefully weighed in developing our own land policies. The Nation's export policy should consider not only the needs and productive capacities of other countries, but also should be based on a careful analysis of our own agricultural productive capacity and land resource requirements. The Nation's land and water policy may need to minimize shifts in land use that would reduce potential abilities to produce food and fiber.
4. As a corollary to the preceding point, long-term needs of land as sites or for other critical spatial needs such as dams, reservoirs, transportation systems, or recreation or scenic uses need to be identified and may need to be reserved for future uses by appropriate institutional means. Formulation of policies of reserving critical sites for areas should consider kinds of economic activities suitable for retaining such uses, to include farming, forestry, and grazing, as well as ownership or control arrangements for minimizing public expenditures.

5. Timber, rangeland, and related land resources are relatively abundant, but current trends in use and expected requirements indicate that much more intensive management of these resources may be needed. In the international setting, the United States may be required to depend more fully on its own natural resources even though less costly sources may be available elsewhere. To hold down or adjust to rising supply costs, the Federal agencies should coordinate their programs to insure an efficient conservation and development program for these resources from the land.

Land Council Functions

The Council would develop policies and guidelines for programs in at least three areas: (1) comprehensive local-State-Federal planning for land resource use, (2) coordinated Federal-State land conservation
and development programs, and (3) integrated basic statistics program for land resources. Coordinated programs are conceived as those being consistent among agencies serving common purposes and goals. Comprehensive programs and plans are regarded as those that consider all existing and potential uses of land resources including rural and urban uses. Finally, land resource programs must be supported by sound statistical data and analysis to determine meaningful alternatives and identify "best" uses.

At present, there is no uniform authority or single source of financial assistance for comprehensive planning. The legislation proposed by President Johnson for a new program of grants to extend multi-county comprehensive planning to rural areas would be one avenue in which programs could be developed for the Nation's entire land area. But, the comprehensive land utilization plans at the multi-county level will be inadequate unless consistent and purposeful programs are coordinated at State and Federal levels. Moreover, the programs should be based on well-defined objectives and goals for development and use of land resources for rural and urban purposes alike. A coordinated program of technical and financial assistance also is needed to support these comprehensive plans.

A review of programs and activities of departments with somewhat mutual interests in the executive branch indicates considerable interdependencies and, consequently, a need for coordination. This does
not imply that interagency coordination is absent. Much has been done.
All of these activities, however, need to be brought together and
related to a broader and more comprehensive coordinated overall land
resource policy. The President's Council on Land Resources is designed
to perform this function.

Land Council Activities and Concerns

Specific concerns of the Council would include: (1) development
of a common statistical base for making projections of important
economic and social factors pertinent to establishing land resource
needs and desirable land resource patterns for both urban and rural
purposes, and (2) development of a consistent national program to
facilitate land use, responsive to present and future needs including
(a) consideration of the rates of land use change, conservation, and
development that are consistent with needs for products from land
resources, and (b) consideration of land requirements for metro-
politan expansion, industrial growth, transportation, and recreation
development that are consistent with economic growth and environmental
needs of society.

A prime responsibility of the Council would be to promote the
development and maintenance of adequate basic land use statistics.
Information on existing patterns of land use is essential. The various
agencies' programs of resource inventory and mapping (soil, for example)
would be important inputs in this area. This need for information
suggests a comprehensive system for handling data with a rapid infor-
mation retrieval capability. Also, the Council could promote the
development of a uniform coding and identification system for land parcels to facilitate tax assessment, deed recording, zoning, and communication in general among agencies and offices throughout the country.

Another major activity of the Council would be the encouragement of research programs that would concentrate on those problems that seem most critical from an overall point of view. For example, as an aid to program formulation, socio-economic research would be fostered in order that landowner response patterns could be estimated more accurately. Research on land development potentials and needed conservation uses of land, as well as studies on ownership and control of land resources would be considered. Wise use of land resources over time will have a significant influence on the Nation's economic strength relative to other countries. While basic land resources in the U. S. are relatively abundant, they may become more expensive as competition for land increases. The implication is that the use of land resources should be considered in a supply-demand context to determine desired rates of flow. Also, studies may be needed concerning efficient patterns of resource use as influenced by the level and mix of resources required. Such studies are necessary if consistent plans and programs for the efficient use and development of land resources are to be formulated.

The Council would be concerned with relating estimates of population growth patterns to associated land needs and relating employment surplus areas to land-resource-oriented industrial development opportunities. It would consider programs that involve the development
of transportation systems and new urban developments or relocation that would facilitate national and regional growth. Proposals for technical and financial assistance programs would be reviewed with respect to desired migration and land use patterns.

Guidelines for a comprehensive land use plan should be developed for the Nation's urban, industrial, and supporting transportation system spatial needs. Such a plan should foster national and regional growth and at the same time provide the amenities of life and high standards of living. The Council would consider such factors as: (1) the land requirements of specific programs to develop new towns and relocate urban population concentrations; (2) the role of resource-oriented industries in present and future national and regional growth; and (3) the relationship of land to the development of transportation systems that will provide for easy population access and resource development. The needs for land resources to satisfy requirements for recreation, natural beauty, parks, and historical site preservation will be formulated in cooperation with, and coordinated with, the President's Council on Recreation and Natural Beauty.

A major activity would be in providing information to State and local planning units concerning needed shifts in land use that would be consistent with regional and national goals. Such information would be helpful to local communities in providing for the proper infra-structure within a region and in formulating internally consistent land adjustment programs, credit programs, and extension-education programs. It also would help in drafting a coordinated program of technical and financial assistance.
The Council on Land Resources would be a full complement to the existing Water Resources Council, each capitalizing on the work of the other and developing coordinate plans. A periodic assessment of the Nation's land resources could be made in a manner similar to the assessment of the Nation's water resources undertaken by the Water Resources Council.

In the work of the Council, there may be need for the establishment of local, State, and national committees for technical, planning, and advisory purposes. Such committees could assist in identifying land resource development potentials, establishing land resource policies, or carrying out land resource planning activities. These committees could be formed at the discretion of the Council or by amendment of the executive order after due consideration. Consideration should be given also to utilizing duly elected State and local officials especially when dealing with planning functions. Numerous advisory committees already exist, some of which might be utilized to serve the advisory function for natural resource programs and policies.

Legislative proposals pertaining to land resources can be originated within the Council. The Council and supporting staff can provide a forum through which new authorities and funding can be recommended and developed. For instance, model legislation for States can be considered that would enable comprehensive land use planning. Such a legislative proposal also could provide technical and financial assistance to carry out the planning function at local levels.
Additional proposals might be considered for (1) public land purchase programs to provide orderly development in and around urban areas, and (2) programs for the preservation of prime land for agricultural use, scenic beauty, and other purposes.