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**SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE
 PROBLEMS OF OUR TIMES — PART V**



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POLLUTION: CAN OUR ENVIRONMENT BE SAVED?

by Congressman George E. Brown, Jr.

Mr. BROWN of California. Mr. Speaker, almost every thoughtful citizen of this country realizes that we face great problems in preventing further deterioration of our environment, to say nothing of restoring it to conditions of an earlier generation.

That awareness is reflected daily in the growing number of complaints from individuals concerning situations in their own communities, complaints which, I am sure, every Member has received. The increasing literature on pollution, the changing attitudes of many organizations as they focus on the problem, including conservationists, scientific and professional organizations, and political groupings, also reflect this growing awareness.

Congress is not insensitive to this growing pressure, and has, in fact been at work through many of its committees, and through the enactment of much legislation, in efforts to reach solutions.

POISONING OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

It is probably unnecessary for me to

cite detailed examples of how serious the situation has become. There is hardly a major urban area in which air pollution does not degrade the quality of living—and there are many, such as my own city of Los Angeles, in which it imperils life, property and normal workings of the community. Because this poisoning of the atmosphere increases slowly and insidiously over a long period of time—more than 25 years in the case of Los Angeles—corrective action has always been characterized as “too little and too late.”

Pollution of our Nation’s water supply has likewise crept up on us unaware. Major rivers and lakes are great sewers, water in them unfit for human consumption, or even human contact in most cases. This blight has spread to underground water sources in many areas, and increasingly we find the oceans themselves beginning to show the impact of man’s disregard for his environment.

The land suffers its own kinds of damage. Waste products of civilization spread over it. Garbage, rubbish, old autos—

eliminating this pollution. This requirement in itself may have a healthy effect in changing the overall sense of values about certain kinds of economic activities and products.

Our immediate peril is that already we may be "too little and too late" as seems to be the case in Los Angeles with its smog problem. I hope through my efforts to focus attention on these issues—now, by legislation and in other ways—to avoid that peril. And in the process, it may help create the more humane environment which we all desire and need.

THE OMNIBUS ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

Today, I am introducing legislation establishing what I consider the strongest program yet set before the Congress to determine national concern and national machinery to maintain environmental quality. I term my bill the "Omnibus Environmental Quality Act of 1969" because it brings together series of policies and tools—all of which I feel are necessities in this crucial area.

The bill contains the Declaration of National Environmental Policy already passed by the Senate; this policy objective is both comprehensive and powerful. In its key statement it recognizes that each person "has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment and that each person has a responsibility to contribute to preservation and enhancement of the environment."

The ultimate fate of Government control of environmental quality largely will be determined by the mechanism set up to do the job. At present, there is a proliferation of authority to act in a number of different Federal agencies. The Agriculture Department deals with pesticides, for instance, while the Interior Department deals with lakes and streams and the Coast Guard deals with coastal pollution. The Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare administers the air pollution laws.

Such diffusion of Government management of the environment has been one reason that serious problems have gone almost unnoticed until they are so large that they can no longer be avoided. Better coordination and regulatory power is imperative if Government can successfully act to contain the ever-mounting attacks on the environment. For that reason, my bill proposes a permanent National Commission for Environmental Protection, a regulatory agency for environmental affairs similar to already existing agencies which deal with other functional areas.

The five man commission would have the continuing responsibility:

To review proposed projects, facilities, programs, policies and activities of the Federal Government which may adversely affect environmental quality;

To review and appraise existing projects, facilities programs, policies and activities of the Federal Government which affect environmental quality and make recommendations with respect thereto to the President and the Congress;

To set priorities with respect to problems involving environmental quality;

To advise the President on matters involving environmental quality and to make recommendations to him with respect thereto;

To collect, analyze, bring together, collate, digest, interpret and disseminate data and information, in such form as it deems appropriate, to public agencies, private organizations, and the general public;

To conduct studies and research, by contract or otherwise, into problems and other matters involving or relating to environmental quality;

To develop criteria and promulgate standards defining desirable levels of environmental quality;

To consult with and advise other rep-

representatives of governments, and to utilize, with their consent, the services of Federal agencies and, with the consent of any State or political subdivision thereof, accept and utilize the services of the agencies of such State or subdivision;

To assist the President by clearing and coordinating departmental policies and activities affecting environmental quality;

To assist in the consideration and, where necessary, in the preparation of proposed Executive orders and proclamations affecting environmental quality;

To keep the President informed of the progress of activities by agencies of the Federal Government with respect to work proposed, work actually initiated and work completed by any such agencies which affect environmental quality;

To assist the President in efforts to achieve environmental quality in the community of nations; and

Where appropriate, to participate in behalf of the public interest as an intervenor in proceedings before State and Federal courts and administrative agencies.

The situation in Congress regarding the environment is greatly similar to that within the Executive agencies; it is horribly fragmented and uncoordinated. Short of comprehensive congressional reform and reshuffling of functional activities, I do not foresee major changes coming at the committee level. However, I do feel that we can better coordinate and plan congressional policies regarding the environment, and for that reason, I propose establishing a **Joint Congressional Committee on Environmental Quality**. The Joint Committee would: conduct a comprehensive study and investigation of appropriate matters contained in any environmental quality report transmitted to the Congress and recommend any such studies and inves-

tigations to the appropriate standing committees of the Congress; and make an annual report to the Congress and the appropriate committees of Congress on or before March 1 of each year on environmental quality.

Government activities must be synchronized with activities ongoing in the private sector if we are to achieve a complete national program for environmental control. Certainly, I feel that the indignation and anger I have seen coming from my constituents over the past months indicates that a large amount of alienation already exists over these issues. As with many other topics of both national and local concern, individual citizens feel they are left out when it comes to making decisions and acting on problems of the environment.

Therefore, my bill also contains a **Citizens Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality**. This committee would be composed of 15 members selected from Government and private sector, and hopefully would include representation from concerned citizen's groups.

The committee would report at least once each year to the President and to the Environmental Quality Commission on the state and condition of the environment; provide advice, assistance, and staff support to the President on the formulation of national policies to foster and promote the improvement of environmental quality; and obtain information using existing sources, to the greatest extent practicable, concerning the quality of the environment and make such information available to the public.

I believe this omnibus environmental quality bill would provide the direct and broadbased effort which is essential if we are to maintain and improve the world around us. I hope all my colleagues take a serious look at this approach and I hope to receive their support for it.