

PRESIDENT PLEADS FOR OUR INLAND WATERWAYS

Washington, Feb. 26.—President Roosevelt today sent the following special message to congress: To the Senate and House of Representatives:

I transmit herewith a preliminary report from the Inland Waterways Commission, which was appointed by me last March in response to a widespread interest and demand from the people. The basis of this demand lay in the general and admitted inability of the railroads to handle promptly the traffic of the country, and especially the crops of the previous fall.

This report is well worth your attention. It is thorough, conservative, sane, and just. It represents the mature judgment of a body of men exceptionally qualified by personal experience and knowledge of conditions throughout the United States, to understand and discuss the great problem of how to best use our waterways in the interest of all the people. Unusual care has been taken to secure accuracy and balance of statement. If the report errs at all it is by over-optimism. It contains findings and statements of fact, a number of specific recommendations, and an account of inquiries still in progress, and it is based in part on statistics and other information contained in a voluminous appendix. The subject with which it deals is of critical importance both to the present and the future of our country.

Our river systems are better adapted to the needs of the people than those of any other country. In extent, distribution, navigability, and ease of use they stand first. Yet the rivers of no other civilized country are so poorly developed, so little used, or play so small a part in the industrial life of the nation as those of the United States. In view of the made of rivers elsewhere, the failure to use our own is astonishing, and no thoughtful man can believe that it will last. The accompanying report indicates clearly the reasons for it and the way to end it.

The Commission finds that it is unregulated railroad competition which prevented or destroyed the development of commerce on our inland waterways. The Mississippi, our greatest natural highway, is a case in point. At one time the traffic upon it was without a rival in any country. The report shows that commerce was driven from the Mississippi by the railroads. While production was limited, the railroads, with their convenient terminals, gave quicker and more satisfactory service than the waterways. Later they prevented the restoration of river traffic by keeping down their rates along the rivers, recouping themselves by higher charges elsewhere. They also acquired water fronts and terminals to an extent which made water competition impossible. Throughout the country the railroads have secured such control of canals and steamboat lines that today inland waterway transportation is largely in their hands. This was natural and doubtless inevitable under the circumstances, but it should not be allowed to continue unless under careful Government regulation. Comparatively little inland freight is carried by boat which is not carried a part of its journey by rail also. As the report shows, the successful development and use of our interstate waterways will require intelligent regulation of the relations between rail and water traffic. When this is done the railroads and waterways will assist instead of injuring each other. Both will benefit, but the chief benefit will accrue to the people in general through quicker and cheaper transportation.

The report rests throughout on the fundamental conception that every waterway should be made to serve the people as largely and in as many different ways as possible. It is poor business to develop a river for navigation in such a way as to use its use for power, when by a little foresight it could be used for both purposes. We can not afford needlessly to sacrifice power to irrigation, or irrigation to domestic water supply, when by taking thought we may have all three. Every stream should be used to the utmost. No stream can be planned in advance. When such plans are made, we shall find that, instead of interfering, one use can often be made to assist another. Each river system, from its headwaters in the forest, to its mouth in the coast, is a single unit and should be treated as such. Navigation of the lower reaches of a stream can not be fully developed without control of floods and low waters by storage and drainage. Navigable channels are directly concerned with the protection of source waters, and with soil erosion which takes the materials for bars and shoals on the richest portions of our farms. The uses of a stream for domestic and municipal water supply, for power, and in many cases for irrigation, must also be taken into full account.

The development of our inland waterways will have results far beyond the immediate gains to commerce. Deep channels along the Atlantic and Gulf coast and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes will have high value for the national defense. The use of water-power will measurably relieve the drain upon our diminishing supplies of coal, and transportation by water instead of rail on the whole will tend to conserve our forest protection, without the permanent will at the same time help to postpone the threatened timber famine, and will secure us against a total dearth of timber by providing for the perpetuation of the remaining woodlands. Irrigation will create the means of livelihood for millions of people and supplies of pure water will powerfully promote the

health. If the policy of waterway improvement here recommended is carried out, it will affect for good every citizen of the Republic. The National Government must play the leading part in securing the largest possible use of our waterways; other agencies can assist, and should assist, but the work is essentially national in its scope.

The various uses of waterways are now dealt with by Bureaus scattered among four Federal departments. At present, therefore, it is not possible to deal with a river system as a single project. But the Commission here recommends a policy under which all the commercial and industrial uses of the waterways may be developed at the same time. To that end, Congress should provide some administrative machinery for coordinating the work of the various departments so far as it relates to waterways. Otherwise there will not only be delay, but the people as a whole will fail to get from our streams the benefits to which they are justly entitled.

The Commission recognizes that the cost of improving our inland waterways will be large, but far less than would be required to relieve the congestion of traffic by railway extension. The benefits of such improvements will be large also, and they will touch the daily life of our people at every point, uniting the interests of all the states and sections of our country. The cost and the benefits should be equally distributed by cooperation with the States and communities, corporations and individuals, beneficially affected. I heartily concur in the Commission's recommendation to this end. Such cooperation should result in united effort in carrying out the great duty of improving our inland waterways. While we delay, our rivers remain unused, our traffic is periodically congested, and the material wealth and natural resources of the country related to waterways are being steadily absorbed by great monopolies.

Among these monopolies, as the report of the commission points out, there is no other which threatens, or has ever threatened, such intolerable interference with the daily life of the people as the consolidation of companies controlling water power. I call your special attention to the attempt of the power corporations, through will introduced at the present session, to escape from the possibility of Government regulation in the forests of the people. These bills are intended to enable the corporations to take possession in perpetuity of national forest lands for the purposes of their business, where and as they please, wholly without compensation to the public. Yet the effect of granting such privileges, taken together with rights already acquired under State laws would be to give away properties of enormous value. Through lack of foresight we have formed the habit of granting without compensation extremely valuable rights amounting to monopolies on navigable streams and on the public domain. The renunciation at great expense of water rights thus carelessly given away without return has already begun in the East, and before long will be necessary in the West also. No rights involving water power should be granted to any corporation in perpetuity, but only for a length of time sufficient to allow them to conduct their business profitably. A reasonable charge should of course be made for valuable rights and privileges which they obtain from the National Government. The value for which this charge is made will ultimately, through the natural growth and orderly development of our population and industries, reach enormous amounts. A fair share of the increase should be safeguarded for the benefit of the people from whose labor it springs. The proceeds thus secured, after the cost of administration and improvement has been met, should normally be devoted to the development of our inland waterways.

The report justly calls attention to the fact that hydroelectric power, which has been one of our most successful industries, and waste of natural resources, and emphasizes the fundamental necessity for conserving these resources upon which our present and future success as a nation primarily rests. Running water is a most valuable natural asset of the people, and there is great need for conserving it for navigation, for power, for irrigation, and for domestic and municipal supply.

The Commission was appointed to obtain information concerning our waterways as related to the general welfare. Much work was done, but more remains to be done before a plan for their development can be prepared in detail. We need additional information on the flow of our streams, the condition of channels, the amount and cost of water traffic, the requirements for terminals, the area in each watershed which should be kept under forest, and the means of preventing soil-waste and the consequent damage to our rivers. But it is neither necessary nor desirable to postpone the beginning of the work until all the facts are obtained. We have suffered heavily in the past from the lack of adequate transportation facilities, and unless a legislation is promptly made, we shall suffer still more heavily in the future.

Being without funds as an expert staff, the Commission has confined itself to principles affecting the local problem and the entire country. Its report is a plea, in the light of actual facts, for simplicity and directness in dealing with the great problem of our inland waterways to the interests of all the people. It contains no specific plan or recommendations, but it sets forth the most important principles which should govern the work of the Government in this respect. It is a plea for the adoption of a policy which will secure the largest possible use of our waterways; other agencies can assist, and should assist, but the work is essentially national in its scope.

development will directly affect half our people. The Mississippi would be made a loop of the sea and work upon it should be begun at the earliest possible moment. Only less important is the Atlantic inner passage parts of which are already under way. The inner passages along the Gulf coast should be extended and connected with the Atlantic waters. The need for the developing of the Pacific coast rivers is not less pressing. Our people are united in support of the immediate adoption of a progressive policy of inland waterway development.

Hitherto our national policy of inland waterway development has been largely negative. No single agency has been responsible under the Congress for making the best use of our rivers, or for exercising foresight in their development. In the absence of a comprehensive plan, the only safe policy was one of repression and procrastination. Frequent changes of plan and piecemeal execution of projects have still further hampered improvement. A channel is no deeper than its shallowest reach, and to improve a river short of the point of effective navigability is a sheer waste of all its costs. In spite of large appropriations for their improvement, our rivers are less serviceable for interstate commerce today than they were half a century ago, and in spite of the vast increase in our population and commerce they are on the whole less used.

The first condition of successful development of our waterways is a definite and progressive policy. The second is a concrete general plan, prepared by the best experts available, covering every use to which our streams can be put. We shall not succeed until the responsibility for administering the policy and executing and administering the plan is definitely laid on one man or group of men who can be held accountable. Every portion of the general plan should consider and so far as practicable secure to the people the use of water for power, irrigation, and domestic supply as well as for navigation. No project should be begun until the funds necessary to complete it promptly are provided, and no plan once under way should be changed except for grave reasons. Work once begun should be prosecuted steadily and vigorously to completion. We must make sure that projects are not undertaken except for sound business reasons, and that the best modern business methods are applied in executing them. The decision to undertake any project should rest on actual need ascertained by investigation and judgment of experts and on its relation to great river systems or to the general plan, and never on mere clamor.

The improvement of our inland waterways can and should be made to pay for itself so far as practicable from the incidental proceeds from water-power and other uses. Navigation should of course be free. But the greatest return will come from the increased commerce, growth, and prosperity of our people. For this we have already waited too long. Adequate funds should be provided by bond issue if necessary, and the work should be delayed no longer. The development of our waterways and the conservation of our forests are the two most pressing systems needs of the country. They are interdependent, and they should be vigorously, together and at once. The questions of organization, powers and appropriations are now before Congress. There is urgent need for prompt and decisive action.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT
February 26, 1908.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The commission makes the following recommendations:

A. We recommend that hereafter plans for the improvement of navigation in inland waterways, or for any use of these waterways in connection with interstate commerce, shall take account of the purification of the waters, the development of the control of floods, the reclamation of lands by irrigation and drainage, and all other uses of the waters or benefits to be derived from their control.

B. We recommend that hereafter both local and general benefits to the people shall be fully considered in any such plans for the improvement of navigation in inland waterways, or for any use of these waterways in connection with interstate commerce, and that wherever practicable Federal agencies shall cooperate with States, municipalities, communities, corporations, and individuals, with a view to an equitable distribution of costs and benefits.

C. We recommend that hereafter any plans for the navigation or other use of inland waterways in connection with interstate commerce shall take full account of transfer facilities and sites, and of the location of tracks, grades, bridges, dams, depots, and other works on navigable and source streams with a view to equitable cooperation between water way and railway facilities for the promotion of commerce and the benefit of the people.

D. We recommend that any plans for improving the inland waterways shall take account of the present and prospective relation of rail lines to such waterways, and shall ascertain so far as may be whether such waterways when improved will be effectively used in the face of railway competition; and that the relation between railroads and waterways be further examined with the view of devising means of rendering the two systems complementary and harmonious and making such use of waterway traffic that rates and management may be coordinated economically and with benefit to the country.

E. We recommend the adoption of means for ascertaining regularly all facts related to traffic on the inland waterways, and for publishing the same in a form suitable for general use.

F. We recommend the adoption of means for ascertaining and rendering available, at such rate as to meet public necessities, all requisite data related to the physical character and general utility of the navigable and source streams of the country.

G. We recommend that hereafter

any plans for the use of inland waterways in connection with interstate commerce shall regard the streams of the country as an asset of the people, and shall take full account of the conservation of all resources connected with running waters, and shall look to the protection of these resources from monopoly and to their administration in the interests of the people.

I. We recommend that the Congress be asked to make suitable provision for improving the inland waterways of the United States at a rate commensurate with the needs of the people as determined by competent authority; and we suggest that such provision meet these requisites, viz: expert framing of a definite policy; certainty of continuity and coordination of plan and work; expert initiative in the choice of projects and the succession of works; freedom of selection of projects in accordance with terms of co-operation; and the widest opportunity for applying modern business methods of management.

J. We recommend that the Congress be asked to authorize the coordination and proper development of existing public services connected with waterways; and we suggest that such enactment might provide that the president of the United States be authorized, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to appoint and organize a national waterways commission to bring into co-ordination the corps of engineers of the Army, the Bureau of Soils, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Corporations, the Reclamation Service, and other branches of the public service in so far as their work relates to inland waterways and that he be authorized to make such details and require such duties from these branches of the public service in connection with navigable and source streams as are not inconsistent with law; the said commission to continue the investigation of all questions relating to the development and improvement and utilization of the inland waterways of the country and the conservation of its natural resources related thereto, and to consider and co-ordinate therewith all matters of irrigation, swamp and overflow land reclamation, clarification and purification of streams, prevention of soil waste, utilization of water-power, preservation and extension of forests, regulation of flow and control of floods, transfer facilities and sites and the regulation and control thereof, and the relations between waterways and railroads, and that the commission be empowered to frame and recommend plans for developing the waterways and utilizing the waters, and as authorized by Congress to carry out the same, through established agencies when such are available, in co-operation with the States, municipalities, communities, corporations and individuals, in such manner as to secure an equitable distribution of costs and benefits.

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