

Proceedings of the Conference of Governors

*Thy streams descend into our valleys; and Thou hast chosen us that we may be now the ministers of Thy will and enter into that harvest field.*

*Bless us now in to-day's service and those that are to follow, and may Thy servants return to their homes, alive in that light, clad in the Holy Spirit, willing to enter into Thy work and to go about our Father's business.*

Join me audibly in the Lord's Prayer.

*Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.*

1908

THEODORE

ROOSEVELT

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

*Governors of the several States; and Gentlemen:*

I welcome you to this Conference at the White House. You have come hither at my request, so that we may join together to consider the question of the conservation and use of the great fundamental sources of wealth of this Nation.

So vital is this question, that for the first time in our history the chief executive officers of the States separately, and of the States together forming the Nation, have met to consider it. It is the chief material question that confronts us, second only—and second always—to the great fundamental questions of morality. [Applause]

With the governors come men from each State chosen for their special acquaintance with the terms of the problem that is before us. Among them are experts in natural resources and representatives of national organizations concerned in the development and use of these resources; the Senators and Representatives in Congress; the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, and the Inland Waterways Commission have likewise been invited to the Conference, which is therefore national in a peculiar sense.

This Conference on the conservation of natural resources is in effect a meeting of the representatives of all the people of the United States called to consider the weightiest problem now before the Nation; and the occasion for the meeting lies in the fact that the natural resources of our country are in danger of exhaustion if we permit the old wasteful methods of exploiting them longer to continue.

With the rise of peoples from savagery to civilization, and with the consequent growth in the extent and variety of the needs of the average man, there comes a steadily increasing growth of the amount demanded by this average man from the actual resources of the country. And yet, rather curiously, at the same time that there comes that increase in what the average man demands from the resources, he is apt to grow to lose the sense of his dependence upon nature. He lives in big cities. He deals in industries that do not bring him in close touch with nature. He does not realize the demands he is making upon nature. For instance, he finds, as he has found before in many parts of this country, that it is cheaper to build his house of concrete than of wood, learning in this way only that he has allowed the woods to become exhausted. That is happening, as you know, in parts of this country at this very time.

Savages, and very primitive peoples generally, concern themselves only with superficial natural resources; with those which they obtain from the actual surface of the ground. As peoples become a little less primitive, their industries, although in a rude manner, are extended to resources below the surface; then, with what we call civilization and the extension of knowledge, more resources come into use, industries are multiplied, and foresight begins to become a necessary and prominent factor in life. Crops are cultivated; animals are domesticated; and metals are mastered.

We can not do any of these things without foresight, and we can not, when the nation becomes fully civilized and very rich, continue to be civilized and rich unless the nation shows more foresight than we are showing at this moment as a nation. [Applause]

Every step of the progress of mankind is marked by the discovery and use of natural resources previously unused. Without such progressive knowledge and utilization of natural resources population could not grow, nor industries multiply, nor the hidden wealth of the earth be developed for the benefit of mankind.

From the first beginnings of civilization, on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates, the industrial progress of the world has gone on slowly, with occasional set-backs, but on the whole steadily, through tens of centuries to the present day.

It never does advance by jumps, gentlemen. It always goes slowly. There are occasional set-backs, but on the whole it goes steadily.

But of late the rapidity of the process has increased at such a rate that more space has been actually covered during the century and a quarter occupied by our national life than during the preceding six thousand years that take us back to the earliest monuments of Egypt, to the earliest cities of the Babylonian plain.

Now, I ask you to think what that means; and I am speaking with historic literalness. In the development, the use, and therefore the exhaustion of certain of the natural resources, the progress has been more rapid in the past century and a quarter than during all preceding time of which we have record.

When the founders of this nation met at Independence Hall in Philadelphia the conditions of commerce had not fundamentally changed from what they were when the Phoenician keels first furrowed the lonely waters of the Mediterranean.

You turn to Homer—some of you did in your school days, even if you do not now [laughter]—and you will see that he spoke, not of the Mediterranean but of one corner of the Egean only, as a limitless waste of water which no one had traversed. There is now no nook of the earth that we are not searching.

When our forefathers met in Independence Hall, the differences were those of degrees, not of kind, and they were not in all cases even those of degree. Mining was carried on fundamentally as it had been carried on by the Pharaohs in the countries adjacent to the Red Sea. Explorers now-a-days by the shores of the Red Sea strike countries that they call new, but they find in them mines, with sculptures of the Pharaohs, showing that those mines were worked out and exhausted thousands of years before the Christian era.

In 1776 the wares of the merchants of Boston, of Charleston, like the wares of the merchants of Nineveh and Sidon, if they went by water, were carried by boats propelled by sails or oars; if they went by land were carried in wagons drawn by beasts of draft or in packs on the backs of beasts of burden. The ships that crossed the high seas were better than the ships that three thousand years before crossed the Egean, but they were of the same type, after all—they were wooden ships propelled by sails. There the difference was one of degree in our favor. On shore the difference was one of degree against us, for on land the roads, at the end of the eighteenth century, when this country became a nation, were not as good as the roads of the Roman Empire, while the service of the posts, at any rate prior to the days of Benjamin Franklin, was probably inferior. In the previous eighteen hundred years there had been a retrogression in roads and in postal service.

In Washington's time anthracite coal was known only as a useless black stone; and the great fields of bituminous coal were undiscovered. As steam was unknown, the use of coal for power production was undreamed of. Water was practically the only source of power, save the labor of men and animals; and this power was used only in the most primitive fashion. But a few small iron deposits had been found in this country, and the use of iron by our countrymen was very small. Wood was practically the only fuel, and what lumber was sawed was consumed locally, while the forests were regarded chiefly as obstructions to settlement and cultivation. The man who cut down a tree was held to have conferred a service upon his fellows.

Such was the degree of progress to which civilized mankind had attained when this nation began its career. It is almost impossible for us in this day to realize how little our Revolutionary ancestors knew of the great store of natural resources whose discovery and use have been such vital factors in the growth and greatness of this Nation, and how little they required to take from this store in order to satisfy their needs.

Since then our knowledge and use of the resources of the present territory of the United States have increased a hundred-fold. Indeed, the growth of this Nation by leaps and bounds makes one of the most striking and important chapters in the history of the world. Its growth has been due to the rapid development, and alas that it should be said!

to the rapid destruction, of our natural resources. Nature has supplied to us in the United States, and still supplies to us, more kinds of resources in a more lavish degree than has ever been the case at any other time or with any other people. Our position in the world has been attained by the extent and thoroughness of the control we have achieved over nature; but we are more, and not less, dependent upon what she furnishes than at any previous time of history since the days of primitive man.

Yet our fathers, though they knew so little of the resources of the country, exercised a wise forethought in reference thereto. Washington clearly saw that the perpetuity of the States could only be secured by union, and that the only feasible basis of union was an economic one; in other words, that it must be based on the development and use of their natural resources. Accordingly, he helped to outline a scheme of commercial development, and by his influence an interstate waterways commission was appointed by Virginia and Maryland.

It met near where we are now meeting, in Alexandria, adjourned to Mount Vernon, and took up the consideration of interstate commerce by the only means then available, that of water; and the trouble we have since had with the railways has been mainly due to the fact that naturally our forefathers could not divine that the iron road would become the interstate and international highway, instead of the old route by water. Further conferences were arranged, first at Annapolis, and then at Philadelphia. It was in Philadelphia that the representatives of all the States met for what was in its original conception merely a waterways conference; but when they had closed their deliberations the outcome was the Constitution which made the States into a nation. [Applause]

The Constitution of the United States thus grew in large part out of the necessity for united action in the wise use of one of our natural resources. The wise use of all of our natural resources, which are our national resources as well, is the great material question of today. I have asked you to come together now because the enormous consumption of these resources, and the threat of imminent exhaustion of some of them, due to reckless and wasteful use, once more calls for common effort, common action.

We want to take action that will prevent the advent of a woodless age, and defer as long as possible the advent of an ironless age. [Applause]

Since the days when the Constitution was adopted, steam and electricity have revolutionized the industrial world. Nowhere has the revolution been so great as in our own country. The discovery and utilization of mineral fuels and alloys have given us the lead over all other nations in the production of steel. The discovery and utilization of coal and iron have given us our railways, and have led to such industrial development as has never before been seen. The vast wealth of

lumber in our forests, the riches of our soils and mines, the discovery of gold and mineral oils, combined with the efficiency of our transportation, have made the conditions of our life unparalleled in comfort and convenience.

A great many of these things are truisms. Much of what I say is so familiar to us that it seems commonplace to repeat it; but familiar though it is, I do not think as a nation we understand what its real bearing is. It is so familiar that we disregard it. [Applause]

The steadily increasing drain on these natural resources has promoted to an extraordinary degree the complexity of our industrial and social life. Moreover, this unexampled development has had a determining effect upon the character and opinions of our people. The demand for efficiency in the great task has given us vigor, effectiveness, decision, and power, and a capacity for achievement which in its own lines has never yet been matched. [Applause] So great and so rapid has been our material growth that there has been a tendency to lag behind in spiritual and moral growth [laughter and applause]; but that is not the subject upon which I speak to you today.

Disregarding for the moment the question of moral purpose, it is safe to say that the prosperity of our people depends directly on the energy and intelligence with which our natural resources are used. It is equally clear that these resources are the final basis of national power and perpetuity. Finally, it is ominously evident that these resources are in the course of rapid exhaustion.

This Nation began with the belief that its landed possessions were illimitable and capable of supporting all the people who might care to make our country their home; but already the limit of unsettled land is in sight, and indeed but little land fitted for agriculture now remains unoccupied save what can be reclaimed by irrigation and drainage—a subject with which this Conference is partly to deal. We began with an unapproached heritage of forests; more than half of the timber is gone. We began with coal fields more extensive than those of any other nation and with iron ores regarded as inexhaustible, and many experts now declare that the end of both iron and coal is in sight.

The mere increase in our consumption of coal during 1907 over 1906 exceeded the total consumption in 1876, the Centennial year. This is a striking fact: Thirty years went by, and the mere surplus of use of one year over the preceding year exceeded all that was used in 1876—and we thought we were pretty busy people even then. The enormous stores of mineral oil and gas are largely gone; and those Governors who have in their States cities built up by natural gas, where the natural gas has since been exhausted, can tell us something of what that means. Our natural waterways are not gone, but they have been so injured by

neglect, and by the division of responsibility and utter lack of system in dealing with them, that there is less navigation on them now than there was fifty years ago. Finally, we began with soils of unexampled fertility, and we have so impoverished them by injudicious use and by failing to check erosion that their crop-producing power is diminishing instead of increasing. In a word, we have thoughtlessly, and to a large degree unnecessarily, diminished the resources upon which not only our prosperity but the prosperity of our children and our children's children must always depend.

We have become great in a material sense because of the lavish use of our resources, and we have just reason to be proud of our growth. But the time has come to inquire seriously what will happen when our forests are gone, when the coal, the iron, the oil, and the gas are exhausted, when the soils shall have been still further impoverished and washed into the streams, polluting the rivers, denuding the fields, and obstructing navigation. These questions do not relate only to the next century or to the next generation. One distinguishing characteristic of really civilized men is foresight; we have to, as a nation, exercise foresight for this nation in the future; and if we do not exercise that foresight, dark will be the future! [Applause] We should exercise foresight now, as the ordinarily prudent man exercises foresight in conserving and wisely using the property which contains the assurance of well-being for himself and his children. We want to see a man own his farm rather than rent it, because we want to see it an object to him to transfer it in better order to his children. We want to see him exercise forethought for the next generation. We need to exercise it in some fashion ourselves as a nation for the next generation.

The natural resources I have enumerated can be divided into two sharply distinguished classes accordingly as they are or are not capable of renewal. Mines if used must necessarily be exhausted. The minerals do not and can not renew themselves. Therefore in dealing with the coal, the oil, the gas, the iron, the metals generally, all that we can do is to try to see that they are wisely used. The exhaustion is certain to come in time. We can trust that it will be deferred long enough to enable the extraordinarily inventive genius of our people to devise means and methods for more or less adequately replacing what is lost; but the exhaustion is sure to come.

The second class of resources consists of those which can not only be used in such manner as to leave them undiminished for our children, but can actually be improved by wise use. The soil, the forests, the waterways come in this category. Every one knows that a really good farmer leaves his farm more valuable at the end of his life than it was when he first took hold of it. So with the waterways. So with the forests. In dealing with mineral resources, man is able to improve on

nature only by putting the resources to a beneficial use which in the end exhausts them; but in dealing with the soil and its products man can improve on nature by compelling the resources to renew and even reconstruct themselves in such manner as to serve increasingly beneficial uses—while the living waters can be so controlled as to multiply their benefits.

Neither the primitive man nor the pioneer was aware of any duty to posterity in dealing with the renewable resources. When the American settler felled the forests, he felt that there was plenty of forest left for the sons who came after him. When he exhausted the soil of his farm, he felt that his son could go West and take up another. The Kentuckian or the Ohioan felled the forest and expected his son to move west and fell other forests on the banks of the Mississippi; the Georgian exhausted his farm and moved into Alabama or to the mouth of the Yazoo to take another. So it was with his immediate successors. When the soil-wash from the farmer's field choked the neighboring river, the only thought was to use the railway rather than the boats to move produce and supplies. That was so up to the generation that preceded ours.

Now all this is changed. On the average the son of the farmer of today must make his living on his father's farm. There is no difficulty in doing this if the father will exercise wisdom. No wise use of a farm exhausts its fertility. So with the forests. We are over the verge of a timber famine in this country, and it is unpardonable for the Nation or the States to permit any further cutting of our timber save in accordance with a system which will provide that the next generation shall see the timber increased instead of diminished. [Applause]

Just let me interject one word as to a particular type of folly of which it ought not to be necessary to speak. We stop wasteful cutting of timber; that of course makes a slight shortage at the moment. To avoid that slight shortage at the moment, there are certain people so foolish that they will incur absolute shortage in the future, and they are willing to stop all attempts to conserve the forests, because of course by wastefully using them at the moment we can for a year or two provide against any lack of wood. That is like providing for the farmer's family to live sumptuously on the flesh of the milch cow. [Laughter.] Any farmer can live pretty well for a year if he is content not to live at all the year after. [Laughter and applause]

We can, moreover, add enormous tracts of the most valuable possible agricultural land to the national domain by irrigation in the arid and semi-arid regions, and by drainage of great tracts of swamp land in the humid regions. We can enormously increase our transportation facilities by the canalization of our rivers so as to complete a great system of waterways on the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf coasts and in the Mississippi Valley, from the Great Plains to the Alleghenies, and from the

northern lakes to the mouth of the mighty Father of Waters. But all these various uses of our natural resources are so closely connected that they should be coordinated, and should be treated as part of one coherent plan and not in haphazard and piecemeal fashion.

It is largely because of this that I appointed the Waterways Commission last year, and that I sought to perpetuate its work. There are members of the coordinate branch present. The reason this meeting takes place is because we had that waterways commission last year. I had to prosecute the work by myself. I have asked Congress to pass a bill giving some small sum of money for the perpetuation of that Commission. If Congress does not act, I will perpetuate the Commission anyway, [Great applause] but of course it is a great deal better that Congress should act; [Applause] it enables the work to be more effectively done. I hope there will be action. But the Commission will go ahead.

I wish to take this opportunity to express in heartiest fashion my acknowledgment to all the members of the Commission. At great personal sacrifice of time and effort they have rendered a service to the public for which we can not be too grateful. Especial credit is due to the initiative, the energy, the devotion to duty, and the farsightedness of Gifford Pinchot, [Great applause] to whom we owe so much of the progress we have already made in handling this matter of the coordination and conservation of natural resources. If it had not been for him this convention neither would nor could have been called.

We are coming to recognize as never before the right of the Nation to guard its own future in the essential matter of natural resources. In the past we have admitted the right of the individual to injure the future of the Republic for his own present profit. In fact there has been a good deal of a demand for unrestricted individualism, for the right of the individual to injure the future of all of us for his own temporary and immediate profit. The time has come for a change. As a people we have the right and the duty, second to none other but the right and duty of obeying the moral law, of requiring and doing justice, to protect ourselves and our children against the wasteful development of our natural resources, whether that waste is caused by the actual destruction of such resources or by making them impossible of development hereafter.

Any right thinking father earnestly desires and strives to leave his son both an untarnished name and a reasonable equipment for the struggle of life. So this Nation as a whole should earnestly desire and strive to leave to the next generation the national honor unstained and the national resources unexhausted. There are signs that both the Nation and the States are waking to a realization of this great truth—On March 10, 1908, the Supreme Court of Maine rendered an exceedingly important judicial decision. This opinion was rendered in re-

sponse to questions as to the right of the Legislature to restrict the cutting of trees on private land for the prevention of droughts and floods, the preservation of the natural water supply, and the prevention of the erosion of such lands, and the consequent filling up of rivers, ponds, and lakes. The forests and water power of Maine constitute the larger part of her wealth and form the basis of her industrial life, and the question submitted by the Maine Senate to the Supreme Court and the answer of the Supreme Court alike bear testimony to the wisdom of the people of Maine, and clearly define a policy of conservation of natural resources, the adoption of which is of vital importance not merely to Maine but to the whole country. [Applause]

Such a policy will preserve soil, forests, water power as a heritage for the children and the children's children of the men and women of this generation; for any enactment that provides for the wise utilization of the forests, whether in public or private ownership, and for the conservation of the water resources of the country, must necessarily be legislation that will promote both private and public welfare; for flood prevention, water-power development, preservation of the soil, and improvement of navigable rivers are all promoted by such a policy of forest conservation.

The opinion of the Maine Supreme Bench sets forth unequivocally the principle that the property rights of the individual are subordinate to the rights of the community, and especially that the waste of wild timber land derived originally from the State, involving as it would the impoverishment of the State and its People and thereby defeating a great purpose of government, may properly be prevented by State restrictions.

The Court says that there are two reasons why the right of the public to control and limit the use of private property is peculiarly applicable to property in land:

First, such property is not the result of productive labor, but is derived solely from the State itself, the original owner; second, the amount of land being incapable of increase, if the owners of large tracts can waste them at will without State restriction, the State and its people may be helplessly impoverished and one great purpose of government defeated. \* \* \* We do not think the proposed legislation would operate to "take" private property within the inhibition of the Constitution. While it might restrict the owner of wild and uncultivated lands in his use of them, might delay his taking some of the product, might delay his anticipated profits and even thereby might cause him some loss of profit, it would nevertheless leave him his lands, their product and increase, untouched, and without diminution of title, estate, or quantity. He would still have large measure of control and large opportunity to realize values. He might suffer delay but not deprivation. \* \* \* The proposed legislation \* \* \* would be within the legislative power and would not operate as a taking of private property for which compensation must be made.

The Court of Errors and Appeals of New Jersey has adopted a similar view, which has recently been sustained by the Supreme Court of the United States. In delivering the opinion of the Court on April 6, 1908, Mr. Justice Holmes said:

The State as quasi sovereign and representative of the interests of the public has a standing in court to protect the atmosphere, the water, and the forests within its territory, irrespective of the assent or dissent of the private owners of the land most immediately concerned. \* \* \* It appears to us that few public interests are more obvious, indisputable and independent of particular theory than the interest of the public of a State to maintain the rivers that are wholly within it substantially undiminished, except by such drafts upon them as the guardian of the public welfare may permit for the purpose of turning them to a more perfect use.

[Applause]

This public interest is omnipresent wherever there is a State, and grows more pressing as population grows.

Not as a dictum of law, which I cannot make, but as a dictum of morals, I wish to say that this applies to more than the forests and streams. [Laughter and applause] The learned Justice proceeds:

We are of opinion, further, that the constitutional power of the State to insist that its natural advantages shall remain unimpaired by its citizens is not dependent upon any nice estimate of the extent of present use or speculation as to future needs. The legal conception of the necessary is apt to be confined to somewhat rudimentary wants, and there are benefits from a great river that might escape a lawyer's view.

[Laughter] I have simply quoted. [Laughter]

But the State is not required to submit even to an esthetic analysis. Any analysis may be manequate. It finds itself in possession of what all admit to be a great public good, and what it has it may keep and give no one a reason for its will.

These decisions reach the root of the idea of conservation of our resources in the interests of our people.

Finally, let us remember that the conservation of our natural resources, though the gravest problem of today, is yet but part of another and greater problem to which this Nation is not yet awake, but to which it will awake in time, and with which it must hereafter grapple if it is to live—the problem of national efficiency, the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the Nation. [Applause.] When the People of the United States consciously undertake to raise themselves as citizens, and the Nation and the States in their several spheres, to the highest pitch of excellence in private, State, and national life, and to do this because it is the first of all the duties of true patriotism, then and not till then the future of this Nation, in quality and in time, will be assured. [Great applause]

After the conclusion of the opening address (the President being in the chair), Captain McCoy, Aide to the President, requested the Conference to pass through the main entrance in order that the President

might have the pleasure of greeting them personally; also that the Vice-President, the Justices of the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, the Governors of the States and other dinner guests of the evening before, including the members of the Inland Waterways Commission, should pass into the Blue Drawing Room before leaving the building.

The PRESIDENT: Information concerning the arrangements for the Conference and the entertainment of members can be obtained from Dr W J McGee, the Secretary of the Inland Waterways Commission, or from Mr Thomas R. Shipp, the General Secretary of the Conference.

In view of the large number of topics to be considered and the need of several of the Governors to be home soon as possible, the special statements by experts should be limited to twenty minutes, and ex tempore discussion to ten minutes, unless it is extended by the Governors themselves. A bell will ring once three minutes before the end of the time, and twice when the time has expired.

The Proceedings of the Conference will be recorded, and published in full; but it might be desirable to summarize some of the results. I would be glad, if the Governors see fit, to provide for a Committee on Resolutions to formulate general conclusions, should that meet with your approval. If you see fit to appoint such a committee, I think it should be appointed at the opening of the Second (or afternoon) Session. I make the suggestion to you simply as a suggestion, so that you may have something to work on. For the same purpose, I suggest that Governors Blanchard, of Louisiana, Fort, of New Jersey, Cutler, of Utah, Davidson, of Wisconsin, and Ansel, of South Carolina, might be named as such a committee. Those names have been suggested to me by various governors and others present. I simply put them before you for your consideration; you can of course name any committee you may desire. Resolutions should be referred to the committee without discussion, the discussion to follow the committee's report upon them.

Governor JOHNSON: Mr President, following your suggestion, I would move, if it is proper at this time, that the committee suggested by yourself be made the Committee on Resolutions of this Conference.

The motion was seconded by several Governors.

The PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, you have heard the motion, which has been seconded. Is any other motion offered, or is debate desired?

On demand for the question a viva voce vote was taken, and the motion was agreed to without dissenting voice.

Governor NOEL: I move that the second suggestion, that all resolutions shall be referred to this Committee without debate, be adopted.

The motion was seconded; and the question being demanded, the motion was put and was agreed to without dissent.

The PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, I shall now have the pleasure of meeting you personally as you pass through the Blue Room.

So the Conference rose at 12.05 p. m.