

DRAFT SPEECH
MOUNTAIN FORK WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM
JUNE 24, 1972

It is a pleasure to share with you the dedication of this new water system which will do so much to improve the quality of life in McCurtain County. Two years ago almost to the day, I was here to dedicate the Broken Bow Reservoir and Dam, the culmination of nine years of work and \$400 million of Federal funds invested in the future of this region. Now today, this Mountain Fork Water Supply System is the capstone to those efforts that your Oklahoma legislators have been engaged in for decades to meet the vital water needs of this state.

People in more bountifully endowed parts of the United States do not always comprehend our pre-occupation with water in Oklahoma. Whereas the great rivers of the East, the Midwest, and the far West provide abundant, perpetual supplies of water for crops, for drinking, for livestock, for industry, we in Oklahoma, from the earliest days, have been locked in an unending struggle to find enough water to sustain life and livelihood.

Thank God we have come far from the pioneer days when the vagaries of nature dictated where a homesteader could stop and clear land and, all too often, dictated as well when he had to admit defeat and search for greener acres. There are no statistics available to indicate how many of our State's first early settlers were driven still further West by the drouths and floods that have always plagued this region. Had we not learned to at least partially overcome our

dependence on the benevolence of a fitful Mother Nature, our great State would doubtless today be a sparsely inhabited dustbowl of little attraction to wanderers seeking a better life for themselves and their families.

Water has always been the key: First for the location of our communities, second for the crops to sustain life, and now for expansion of our economic base to insure that today's native Oklahomans shall not repeat the out-migration of the untold thousands who failed in their struggle to wrest a living from this land.

The turning point in our history came with the Federal government's involvement in the preservation and development of our precious water supplies. We can never forget the stimulus given to this work by the vision and the dedication of the great Senator Robert Kerr who made the development of Oklahoma's woods and waters the core of his life's work. It took a lot of doing, and many legislative battles were won and lost in the process. Today the visible evidence of the tenacity of Bob Kerr - and those of us who followed his inspired leadership - exists in the dozens of sparkling lakes behind dams and reservoirs throughout the State, the great Arkansas River navigation channel, and an abundance of water purification systems such as the one we are dedicating today.

I take great personal pride in the fact that Oklahoma now leads the nation in land and water resource development programs. Our State has more upstream flood control projects per square mile than any other State in the Union. And Oklahomans are today drinking water far superior to that of many regions of the country.

It is ironic indeed that as water begins to play an increasingly important role in the economic development of this State, many other Americans are suffering from the problems we underwent in the earlier part of the century. Not only are some major cities faced with a possible depletion of drinking water supplies before the end of the century, even more alarmingly, it has been discovered that residents of some States are consuming water considered below adequate standards of health and safety.

It is not that our technological prowess is inadequate to the challenge of purifying our water - it has been, rather, the lack of a sense of urgency in dealing with the accelerating problem of pollution. The unfortunate truth is that many modern treatment plants simply cannot handle the excessive volume of wastes pouring from homes, factories, and military installations in ever-growing amounts. It is not volume alone, however, but also chemical complexity that is resulting in insufficient treatment of water being cycled back to the community for drinking purposes. This is a problem of such magnitude that I fully expect the water purification bill we will enact this year will authorize the expenditure of at least \$20 billion in Federal funds over the coming years. When we contemplate the backlog of \$12 billion presently pending at the Department of Housing and Urban Development for water and sewer grants and loans urgently needed by communities throughout the land, we know we will have to run fast just to stay in place.

The evidence is overwhelming that the demand for water, as with all other natural resources, is in a geometric upswing as population rises dramatically, both here in the United States and throughout the world. A recent meeting of social scientists, industrial managers, and educators in Rome, Italy, produced some stunning predictions about population, industrialization, food supply, natural resources, and pollution with direst implications for the future of life on this planet. It took, for example, 100 years for the world's population to rise from one to two billion, 30 more years to rise from two to three billion, and now will take only 33 more years to rise from 3 1/2 billion to 7 billion unless war, famine, or plague intervene. This incredible forecast deals only with numbers. But it is also true that national growth in developed and undeveloped countries alike is proceeding at a rapid pace that leads to increasing demands for more water, more power, more goods and more space for the existing populations. The Rome conference ran figures through a computer on rates of depletion of important resources and found that, among others, the world's supply of mercury will be exhausted in 13 years, tin in 15 years, and petroleum as soon as 20 years from now.

As we look around us at the open space we are blessed with in Oklahoma, it is difficult to grasp the dimension of the growing space problem. This planet has 7 1/2 billion acres of arable land, and the most productive and economical half of that amount is already cultivated. It is estimated that every living person needs an average

of an acre of land to sustain his life. All of those who will be added to the population will need as much, plus another fifth of an acre for housing, roads, waste disposal, power lines, and industry. The conference came up with the gloomy prediction that with the utilization of every possible inch of land, present trends of population growth would run us out of land for the people trying to live on it before the end of this century!

And along with the disappearance of living space would be that crucial component of life, fresh water. In fact, the conference estimated that in many areas the limits on water will be reached before the land limit, evidence which is already foreshadowed in parts of the American Southwest where there is still vast uncultivated land space. And because of our technological expansion, pollutants are growing faster than the world population.

What all this makes clear is the need for intelligent planning, with the ultimate realization that this earth does not have infinite capacities to sustain growth and expansion. Our own country is a prime example of population imbalance, as the increasing opportunities in the cities and the mechanization of agriculture have brought us to the point where more than 70 percent of us live on 2 percent of the available land. These factors work together to create a crisis in rural America. Small towns are in decline, family farm ownership is shrinking, and one of every four rural dwellers now lives in a state of poverty. More than 30,000 rural communities have no waste disposal system, and another 30,000 towns without a water supply

system may well envy this fine new project serving the people of the Broken Bow area.

This new water system is one piece in the ongoing search for a solution to the often over-looked problem of rural America. Not only will it make the life of every person here healthier and more pleasant, but it is one more inducement in the campaign we are mounting to encourage people to stay in the communities where they have their roots and end the head-long rush to our swelling urban centers.

The need to reorder national priorities has never been more urgent. Partly because I have my own roots sunk deeply in rural Oklahoma, but also because it would be good for the whole nation, I want to see nothing less than a resurrection of small-town life throughout America. I want the family farmer to have the option of staying on the land and drawing a decent living from it. I want to see new facilities like this which will encourage industry to locate in rural areas and create all-important job opportunities. I want to see communities of every size across the length and breadth of this land enjoying the services available to city dwellers - whether it be health care, education, recreation, transportation, power, or water - in short, all of the ingredients we are accustomed to associating with the good life.

I can assure you today that some of us in the Congress are bringing to the attention of our colleagues the need for such a shift in emphasis away from an exclusive preoccupation with the problems of the cities. During this 92nd Congress alone we have

passed rural telephonebank legislation to provide capital for telephone cooperatives and companies serving rural America. We made permanent the temporary authority for farm ownership loans, water and sewer loans, and association loans under the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act. We passed a Farm Credit Act to raise the Federal land bank loan limit, to improve the operation of the entire farm credit system, and to authorize non-farm rural housing loans in communities of 2,500 or fewer people.

And soon to be enacted into law is a comprehensive Rural Development Act, passed by the House of Representatives last year and by the Senate two months ago. This legislation will expand programs that provide capital for rural areas in need of economic growth. It will enable the F.H.A. to make insured loans for industrial development and general business assistance, to help establish community centers, and to assist with the purchase of fire and rescue equipment. The Act will remove grant and loan ceilings from F.H.A. programs, particularly for water and sewer development. In addition, the Soil Conservation Service will be authorized to share the costs of creating municipal and industrial water supplies, to assist in soil and water pollution control, and to help rural areas obtain fire protection and solid waste disposal facilities. It would give priority to locating new Federal facilities and offices in areas of 10,000 or fewer people. And it will create a new Agricultural Land Development Corporation to guarantee a fair market for farmers who want to sell their land. Lastly, it will establish procedures for orderly development of urban-rural fringe areas, for parks, wildlife

refuges, and recreational areas that would be enjoyed by city and country folk alike.

All of these efforts of the Congress would come to little, however, if it were not for the active participation of concerned citizens in communities like this, striving to upgrade the quality of life for generations to come. The Mountain Fork Water Supply System is a shining example of the interaction of private citizens and public officials to make a community a better place in which to live. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to be able to come home and share an occasion like this with my friends and neighbors who have made it possible for me to work for the good of southeastern Oklahoma for so many years. To see the forward movement of my State is the greatest reward of a public life, and I thank you for all the support, encouragement, and inspiration that all of you have given me. This is a proud day for all of us, especially in that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will lead a better life for the work we have undertaken together. This water system is a legacy for the future, and I am grateful to have been able to play a small part in making it possible.
