

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON FALLOUT PROTECTION

A Statement by Governor Rockefeller  
on the Need for State and Local  
Initiative

April 23, 1960



Under the 1958 amendments to the national civil defense legislation, the Congress expressly declared, as its policy and intent, that "a system of civil defense for the protection of life and property in the United States from attack is provided and that the responsibility for civil defense shall be vested jointly in the federal government and the several states and such political subdivisions."

The Congress plainly believed that the not-really-capitulate of the problems of protecting our civilian population from the consequences of thermonuclear attack would call not only for the best, but for the fullest, cooperative effort by all levels of government, federal, state and local. This approach seems extremely wise.

One of the enduring merits of our federal system is its flexibility. It does not require that strict jurisdictional lines be drawn between the state, local or federal responsibilities other than those which the Constitution has expressly assigned. A multitude of cooperative arrangements is possible under which the central thrust for action may come either from local, or state, or federal agencies as the time, the occasion, and the need may warrant. Arrangements under which federal, state and local government officials cooperate with a commonly shared and well-defined purpose can achieve solutions that might well be beyond the capacity of a single level of government, acting independently of the others.

So, in the case of fallout protection, a cooperative approach, involving all levels of government, should permit us to achieve that delicate and complex balance between the desirable goals of central strength and federal leadership, on the one hand, and local freedom of action and initiative, on the other. Technical, jurisdictional or legalistic arguments as to where the "paramount" responsibility may lie do not contribute to the constructive solution of what is an urgent problem for all of us.

This afternoon the federal officials will support to us the extent of the effort that can and will be made by the federal government in the foreseeable future to achieve fallout protection and to support the states in their effort to provide such protection for their people. Regardless, however, of the level of effort of the federal government, regardless of the level of funds that the federal government may make available, regardless of the incentives and incentives which the federal government may offer looking to the development of fallout protection, there will remain as an essential part of any successful program for providing fallout protection for our citizens, the need for state initiative.

Fallout threatens the health and the safety of every individual, and in a highly personal way, even within the security of his own home. The health and safety of our citizens and the security of their homes is a classic area of state and local concern and local responsibility. This concern is no less when the threat arises from fallout than it is when the threat lies in fire, pollution of water, air pollution, unsafe or hazardous structures, or lawlessness, crime or disorder.

Fallout protection lies well within the normal range of operation of local codes and regulations, and of the normal inspection and enforcement which enable us to live properly and productively. Building regulations, fire codes, police protection, and healthy working conditions, the movement of school children away from their homes, adequate housing, the maintenance of sanitary facilities, and the provision of food and medicine in these conditions - these are all subjects of community activities which are of a normal and personal nature. Their volume and complexity require local initiative.

Since such matters as these are already matters of extensive state and local regulation, inspection and enforcement, any adaptations of these regulatory systems as may be needed to deal with new hazards of radioactive fallout must, if we are to avoid the possibility of regulation and administrative confusion, necessarily come from state and local initiative and not from federal action.

The National Plan, promulgated by the President, makes dramatically clear the exceedingly personal and local nature of the fallout protection problem. The National Plan makes plain the demand for each and every individual citizen with these words:

"Each person and family must be prepared to meet individual survival requirements for the weeks following an attack without dependence on outside assistance."  
(Underscoring supplied.)

This obligation, which rests on all of us as individuals, to prepare to survive without assistance for the first two weeks after attack is followed, under the National Plan, with state and local government responsibility to assist, during the succeeding two-week period, in meeting the survival needs of their citizens. Not until the fifth week following an attack is it anticipated that the federal government would be able to render assistance either to the states or to local communities or to the individuals who may be in greatest need of it.

For the first four weeks after a nuclear attack, therefore, under the National Plan with which our nation is operating, survival is a personal, a local, and a state responsibility. As matters now stand, our citizens and our state and local communities are not prepared or able to meet these vital responsibilities. As will they be able to meet them adequately without a full measure of state initiative. This is a matter of private personal and of public concern to every Governor.

State initiative, accordingly (supported by the fullest federal participation that is attainable), is required by the nature of the fallout hazard, by the measures which are required to protect against it, and by the steps which are needed to survive in its presence.

There is also another compelling reason for state initiative. Only if the people in all of our fifty states fully understand the nature of the fallout hazard and how they may combat it successfully will a fallout protection program be truly effective. This calls for a tremendous educational job. And, no matter how imaginatively or resourcefully we use the media of communication, the best educational results will be achieved only if individual citizens participate, on the local level, in the concrete, understandable, step-by-step to work out fallout protection for themselves, their families, and their neighbors.

In the last analysis, only by a local, community-wide effort, which is credible to its participants, will the public truly be alerted to the danger and truly informed as to how to meet it should the awful eventuality of nuclear war ever come to our country.

Much has been said about the apathy of the American public toward civil defense measures. I am persuaded that we are witnessing a phenomenon which is not so much apathy as it is frustration and fear in the face of the unknown. If the American people understand the essentiality of fallout protection and the feasibility of achieving it and then participate directly and locally in the affirmative steps to achieve it, the so-called apathy will be replaced by vigorous action and a healthy confidence in a peaceful future. When I think we can have some measure of assurance that, no matter how terrifyingly, or realistically, nuclear blackmail may be threatened to those who might be tempted to impose their own reasonableness on the face of peace, we, as a nation, could begin to enjoy liberty and life.

