

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON FALLOUT PROTECTION

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR ROBERT BEE

January 23, 1960

At their annual Conference in Puerto Rico last August, the assembled State Governors declared their personal and official responsibility, as Governors, for the protection of their people against the hazard of fallout in the event of a nuclear war. In keeping with this sense of responsibility, they unanimously adopted both the report of their Special Committee on Civil Defense and a four point resolution calling for:

- First - Vigorous state initiative in a campaign of education about the greatest hazard and protection against it.
- Second- Immediate steps by all levels of government, state and local as well as Federal, to assist their citizens to survive radioactive fallout and the related consequences of a nuclear attack upon our country.
- Third - State initiative to survey the adequacy of fallout protection in state owned or operated facilities and the steps which should be taken to achieve such protection.
- Fourth- State initiative in developing a protected seat of state government to assure government leadership and functioning, both during and after a nuclear attack.

This extraordinary resolution showed plainly that the Governors not only recognized the compelling urgency of the problem, but were ready to take initiative in its solution. In the five months since the Governors acted, potentially rewarding and constructive steps have been taken by a number of Governors in their home states. More will be done in the months ahead.

While the Governors at the Conference were willing to take initiative in this matter, it was apparent that the problem of fallout and protection against it involved many considerations of national policy, of the nature and effects of nuclear weapons, and of military policy about which they, as Governors, were not necessarily, not as currently informed as the responsible officials of the federal government. The Governors did not wish to take a step on the delicate and difficult matter of fallout protection without assurance from the responsible federal officials that such state action was considered by the nation's leaders in Washington not only as feasible but as an essential element of national defense, a major deterrent to nuclear blackmail or attack, and a positive force in the preservation of the peace.

To make sure, therefore, that state initiative would be well and wisely taken, the Governors' Conference unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the Special Committee on Civil Defense to meet with the President of the United States, and his Secretary of Defense and civilian leaders.

Such a meeting, they believed, would enable them to determine the nature of the threat, the essentiality of full participation and its importance to the nation's quest for peace. Such a meeting would also lay the basis for agreement on a common course of action and an allocation of the responsibility for carrying it out.

President Eisenhower, when advised of this suggestion, was quick to see its merit and act upon it. The result is this conference today. We are deeply grateful for the personal effort which the President and the leaders of his administration have given to make this briefing possible.

