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White House Conference on Fallout Protection

Introductory Statement by Governor Rockefeller

At their annual conference in Harrisburg 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 and a nationwide campaign of education about the threat of fallout hazard and protection measures against it.
- Second - Immediate steps by all levels of government, state and local as well as federal, to assist their citizens to survive and overcome fallout and the related consequences of a nuclear attack upon our country.

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- Third - State Initiative in development of principles of fallout protection in state owned or operated facilities and the steps which should be taken to accelerate protection of these facilities.
- Fourth - State Initiative in development of a protected area of state property to assist a government leader in flight and non tipping both internally and after a nuclear attack.

This extraordinary resolution showed that the Governors not only recognized the complexity and 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 is 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, of necessity, not as currently informed as the responsible officials of the Federal Government.

Governors did not wish to take action on the delicate and difficult matter of fallout protection without assurance from the responsible Federal Government that such state action was contemplated by the national leaders in Washington not only as feasible but as an essential element of rational defense, and as a response to nuclear blackmail or attack and a positive force in the preservation of the peace.

To make sure, therefore, that state action would be well and wisely taken, the Governors Conference unanimously adopted a resolution calling on their own committee on civil defense to meet with the President of the United States, the Congressional leaders and the key military and civilian members of his administration. Such a meeting, they believed, would enable them to determine the nature of the threat, the essential nature of fallout protection and its importance to the national quest for peace. Such a meeting would also lay the basis for agreement on a common course of action and allocation of the responsibility for carrying it out.

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

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The Need for State and Local Initiative

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

The Congress plainly believed that the nature and magnitude of the problems of protecting our entire population from the consequences of thermonuclear war would call not only for the best possible cooperative effort by all levels of government, state and local. This approach seems exceedingly wise.

One of the enduring merits of our federal system is its flexibility. It does not require the strict jurisdictional lines be drawn between state, local or federal responsibilities other than those which the Constitution has expressly assigned. A multitude of cooperative arrangements are possible.

which the central thrust for action may come either from local, or state, or federal agencies as the case, 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 objectives that may be beyond the capacity of a single level of government, acting independently of the others.

So, in the case of yellow perch 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 and state and federal leadership; on the one hand and the freedom of action and initiative, on the other. Technical, jurisdictional or legalistic arguments as to where the "paramount" responsibility resides do not contribute to the constructive solution of such an urgent problem for all of us.

This afternoon the federal officials who suggest to us the extent of the effort that will be made by the federal government in the future to achieve yellow perch protection and to support the states in their effort to provide such protection to their people. Regardless, however, of the best effort of the federal government, regardless of the level of funds which the federal government can contribute

available, regardless of the inducements and incentives which the federal government may offer. In the development of fallout protection, there will be as an essential of any successful program for fallout protection for our citizens, the selection of an initiative.

Fallout threatens the health and the safety of every individual, and is a highly personal matter 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 responsibility. This concern is no less when the threat arises from fallout than it is when the threat comes from fires, pollution of water and air pollution, or other hazardous structures, noxious odors, crimes or diseases.

Fallout protection falls well within the familiar range of operation of local codes and regulations, and of the local inspection and enforcement which enable us to live orderly and secure lives. Building regulations, fire codes, police protection, safe and healthy working conditions, the return of school children to their homes, adequate housing, maintenance of sanitation facilities, and the control of food and medicines to those in distress are all subjects of community activity which are of a local and personal nature. The problems and management of local handling.

Since such matters as these are the province of
of extensive state and local regulation, the plan for
enforcement, an adaptation of these regulations
systems as may be needed to meet the new hazards of
radioactive fallout risk, if we are to avoid the
of regulation and administrative confusion, must
be left to state and local initiative and independent
action.

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

"Each person and family must be prepared
to meet individual survival requirements
for two weeks following an attack without
dependence on outside assistance."
(Underscored as printed)

This obligation, which rests on every individual,
individuals, to prepare to survive without outside help
for the first two weeks after attack is fulfilled under
the National Plan, with the state and local government
responsibility to assist, during the succeeding two-week
period, in meeting the survival needs of the individual.
Not until the fifth day following an attack, as
anticipated, or planned, that the federal government
would be able to render assistance either directly
or to local communities or to the individual, if
desperately he is in need of it.

For the first time since after World War II, therefore, under the threat of nuclear war, the nation is operating, surviving, as a government, a society, a state responsibility. As a nation we stand in a unique position. Our state and local communities are not prepared to meet these vital responsibilities, nor are we able to meet them adequately without a national state initiative. This is a matter of national and official concern.

State initiative, accordingly, is the fullest federal participation that is required by the nature of the problem and the measures which are required to protect the people by the steps which are needed to survive in a crisis.

There is also a national emergency state initiative. Only if the people of all fifty states fully understand the nature of the hazard and how they must act if a serious fallout protection program is to be effective, calls for a tremendous educational job. And, how imaginatively projects are being carried out, the best of national results are achieved only if individual citizens, at the local level, take the necessary day-by-day steps to protect their families, themselves, their families, and their communities.

In the past, the only way to bring about a community-wide effort which is creditable to all participants, will the public finally be alerted to the danger and truly informed so as to meet the terrible awful eventuality of a nuclear war over the whole country.

Much has been said about the apathy of the American public toward civil defense measures. It is persuaded that we are witnessing a phenomenon which is not so much apathy as it is a withdrawal from the face of the unknown. If the American people realize the essentiality of national protection and the feasibility of achieving it and they participate directly and actively in the affirmative steps to achieve it, the present apathy will be replaced by vigorous action and the confidence in a peaceful future. Then, should we ever have some measure of assurance that no matter how terrifyingly, or realistically, nuclear attack may be threatened by those who might be tempted to impose upon our reasonableness or our love of peace, our nation, could maintain its dignity and its freedom.