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Press Release - Muskie Suggests New Approach to Waste Treatment Financing

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

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MUSKIE SUGGESTS NEW APPROACH TO WASTE TREATMENT FINANCING

Senator Edmund S. Muskie suggested today a major shift in the governmental responsibility for construction of waste treatment plants needed throughout the country.

"Why not set up regional programs on a utility basis for which the Federal government would have responsibility for construction of waste treatment plants, perhaps paying up to 75 per cent of the cost?" the Maine Democrat asked at a public hearing of the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution.

"Charges could be imposed upon all users," Senator Muskie continued, "and those charges would build up the revenues necessary to cover the capital cost, to insure qualified personnel, and to create reserves for expansion of the system."

The Subcommittee Chairman discussed his idea briefly with Mayor Sam Massell of Atlanta and Mayor Roman Gribbs of Detroit during a question-and-answer period. Both mayors had been invited to testify concerning their cities' experience with the existing program. The Mayors agreed to submit more detailed comments on the Muskie idea after examination of the transcript.

"This (a regional utility approach) would make waste treatment plant construction primarily a Federal responsibility, not State and local," Senator Muskie said. "Federal dollars would finance it. Federally imposed user charges would make it viable, putting the program on a pay-as-you-go basis."

Under the existing program, the primary responsibility for construction of waste treatment plants rests with State and local governments. Federal grants in aid range from 30 to 55 per cent of project cost.

Authority for the existing program under the Clean Water Restoration Act of 1966 expires on June 30 of this year. The funding of construction grants for waste treatment plants has been a continuing problem during the past five years.

"What you are saying to me this morning...is that we are asking the impossible (under the existing program)" Senator Muskie said to Mayor Gribbs and Mayor Massell. "You are saying that it is not going to work because State and local government do not have the resources."

"The conclusion is that the whole structure is wrong," the Senator added, "and we are not going to get the necessary plants built this way.... We know how badly the current policy has worked over the last five or six years — should we not consider something dramatically different if we are really to do the job?"

In 1966, the Congress authorized a total of \$3.4 billion in Federal grants for construction of waste treatment plants. Of that amount, \$2.2 billion has been appropriated. For Fiscal Year 1971, the appropriation is \$1 billion.

1967-1968

Senator Muskie's omnibus water pollution control bill, S. 523, would authorize a five-year, national program totalling \$25 billion for construction of waste treatment plants. The Federal share would be \$12.5 billion at the rate of \$2.5 billion a year.

"What we have been considering up to now," Senator Muskie said to the two mayors, "is trying to make it (the construction program) work by simply pumping in more Federal dollars. Should we not convert to some other system?"

Mayor Massall replied, "Yes, I would look with interest on a proposal similar to that which you describe. It has the dramatic amplifications that are normally beyond sewage treatment because it would involve planning and land use consideration in the community."

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