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Opening paragraphs: excerpts

SEP 17 1969

THE INTERSTATE COMMISSION ON THE DELAWARE RIVER BASIN 185 W. State Street
Trenton, N. J.
Its Organization and Operation

A paper to be delivered before the Philadelphia Chapter
of the Izaak Walton League of America, on
Wednesday, December 6, 1939.

by
F. A. Pitkin
Commissioner from Pennsylvania, and
Director, State Planning Board

Assuming that the official viewpoint of the Izaak Walton League of America is a composite reflection of the sentiment of its local chapters throughout the nation, I am appearing before you tonight with some hesitancy and trepidation.

The General Manager of the League, Kenneth A. Reid, who has become nationally known for his militant championship of the cause of pure streams, calls "the whole history of efforts to control pollution by local or state agencies a record of futile effort"; he insists that interstate agreements and compacts in this specialized field of conservation "probably have no equal as a legal means for putting off the day of reckoning." He sees a need for concerted federal action and control.

With none of this do we, as members of the Interstate Commission on the Delaware River Basin, agree. You must accordingly bear with me, as a voice crying in the wilderness! Having no appetite for controversy, I presume that my function here tonight might best be performed by a brief recital of the circumstances which brought the Interstate Commission on the Delaware River Basin into existence, and an even more brief summation of its activities and achievements to date. For I am sure that I state correctly the attitude of the members of the Commission which I represent

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when I say that none of us is certain that the substitution of federal control for state and interstate autonomy in the single field of stream pollution control could not succeed, or that it might not prove to be the best mode of attacking the problem. Broadly speaking, the advantages of centralization of power are many, and they are easy to see; for that reason we have felt it to be the part of good citizenship to explore the possibilities of utilizing existing agencies of state and local governments, allied together in a new approach to old problems.

The legislative bills on stream pollution control now pending before the federal Congress were stalemated during the last session, as well they may be during the forthcoming session, if the intense insistence of the Izaak Walton League and other organized sportsmen groups upon federal coercion-control features is not tempered. "Federal control" is an attractive terminology: it suggests a directness and facility of action which implies immediate correction of long-standing difficulties. But I would caution you to lend your support to such notions with full recognition of the fact that new, basic, regulatory authority by the federal government in this field would certainly lead to a transfer of all enforcement activities from the states to the federal government which would, in turn, shift responsibility from local to national shoulders and would require a numerous federal bureaucracy to deal with issues revolving solely about local conditions of water quality and land use. If that, with its extended implications, is what you want, we have no argument: we would not wish you to drift into any program which has such readjustment as its logical conclusion without suggesting that you think the program through calmly and without bias.

With those few sentences, I leave to you what might be called the controversial features of this discussion, for a description of what the states of the Delaware River Basin are doing to coordinate their efforts and activities in the field of water pollution control, and closely related subjects.

For the Interstate Commission on the Delaware River Basin represents an experiment (the only one of its kind in America) to solve regional problems of conservation through the organized efforts of four state governments. If this experiment fails, that failure will strengthen the argument of those who favor federal centralization and control of regional resources, both human and physical. If it succeeds, it may establish a pattern for other areas of the nation. These states, we feel, have a tremendous responsibility in attempting to secure success for this enterprise.

The representatives of the states making up the Commission are placing the interests of the region as a whole above the interests of their particular state; plans and recommendations to the several states are being based upon accurate factual data and upon the best advice and expert assistance that can be secured; the operations of the Commission, as a working organization, are being carefully conducted in such a way as to merit the continuing confidence of the state governments and their citizens.

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