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Florence P. Dwyer

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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

by CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER



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There are any number of ways to treat a Presidential message.

- (1) You can pooh-pooh it without bothering to read it.
- (2) You can skim through it hastily, just enough to release a comment on it to the newspapers.
- (3) Or you can study it minutely, examining every word and phrase for each bit of inference, intimation, or hint they may hold-- so that later the President can be held to account for every tiniest deviation from what he's previously stated.

Obviously, these are alternatives often adopted by the opposition, Republican or Democratic, depending on who's in the White House.

As tempting as any of these seem, I'm afraid they're all short-sighted.

As a case in point, consider the highly partisan comment that followed President Eisenhower's State of the Union message last week. Most of those who didn't like it complained of the lack of "specifics" in the address, the relatively few concrete proposals.

They overlooked the fact, I think, that a State of the Union address must

necessarily be somewhat generalized, since it is essentially a review of America's position in the world today and a look ahead at the direction we should take as a nation.

Thus, these critics missed some of the meatiest observations and most promising proposals we have seen in some time.

Prominent among these, for me, was the President's great emphasis on the future, on the urgent need for progress if our country is to avoid stagnation and defeat.

As he expressed it, "We can successfully sustain security and remain true to our heritage of freedom if we clearly visualize the tasks ahead and set out to perform them with vigor and resolution."

This involves, in turn, an understanding of our strengths and resources and ideals and of the needs and challenges, material and spiritual, which face us today and will multiply in the future as science propels us into the age of space.

But the big thing is to agree on what's important to us, on what values we cherish so strongly that we're willing to make some sacrifices to achieve them.

Only with such a national consensus as a foundation can we work together, as a whole people, toward goals so important that our future as a free people will depend on their realization.

This is why the President will assemble a group of people outside of Government, representing education, labor, management, the professions and other fields, who can apply their wisdom, idealism and practical common sense to the task of suggesting national objectives we can all be proud to work for.

But this is too important to leave to the experts alone. It's something each one of us should start thinking about right now. It's a responsibility each level of government-- local, county, regional, State and Federal-- must bear. And it's an obligation which private citizens, business and labor and voluntary groups most of all should share.

Let's think of it for a moment not in the more distant sense of foreign policy, war and peace, space exploration or the best way of helping new countries learn how to govern themselves successfully-- as crucial as these concerns are.

Instead, let's examine the problems as they affect us close to home.

How long, for instance, can we let our schools get more and more crowded, reducing the attention our teachers can give to individual children and limiting the amount and quality of education our children need today more than ever?

How many more automobiles, trucks and buses can our inadequate streets and highways carry without choking traffic completely?

How soon will Union County be declared an area of chronic unemployment because we are not planning well enough to provide jobs for people moving in?

With our population increasing each year by 3 million, the main burden of the increase falls in the oldest and the youngest age groups-- the people who need help most.

Are we assuring enough of the right kind of housing, training, and recreation facilities to meet these needs?

Are we letting our cities crumble into slums?

Despite the great advances of medical science, are we getting really personal and capable medical care? Or do we need more doctors, nurses and hospitals? And where do we need them? And how can we afford them?

Look around us, wherever we may be, and each of us can see the need for this kind of thoughtful stock-taking in our own daily living.

None of us-- individually and alone-- can do much about correcting these situations.

They can be overcome only by unselfish cooperation by the common acceptance of responsibility and the common determination to make our lives, our nation and our world worthy of their great potential.

It means thinking together, planning together, working together.