



Rufus R. Linder
UNITED STATES SENATOR

WHAT
IS
TAKING
PLACE
BY

From the humble start of \$23,000 appropriated by Congress for light-houses in 1791, Federal expenditures for public works soared to dizzy heights during the war period, dropped for a brief period and are now at the highest peace time mark in history. In 1935, the Federal outlay for public works amounted to the staggering sum of nearly \$860,000,000. This is due, of course, to the fact that the definition of public works has been materially changed in recent years to include such things as forestry, pest control, soil conservation, housing, rural electrification and what not.

As a result, securing of Federal grants has been one of the greatest activities in recent years and under the "prime the pump" theory states, counties, cities and even isolated communities have secured projects and activities that they never could have afforded if supported by local taxpayers. This has led to a growing belief that the ability of the Federal Government to finance these projects and activities is unlimited. Too many of our citizens condemned such expenditures in many sections while in Washington to get funds for some locally-sponsored public works.

Let me hasten to say that under the economic dark clouds of the depression activities were carried on, and rightly so, that have no place in normal times. However, the time is approaching when there must be an overhauling of the expenditures on the basis of public need and public good. The whole interwoven fabric of Federal activity must be inspected for moths of waste that might in time weaken the threads of this fabric.

In other words, it is growing more difficult to have on the one hand, state rights, as we once knew them, and ever-increasing Federal grants on the other. If

our people want Federal public works or a maintenance of them at present—and public wants are sovereign—our people must be prepared to study the implications and be ready to meet the cost.

Federal grants to states now honeycomb many Federal agencies. We have grants to states for old-age assistance, unemployment compensation administration, aid to dependent children and aid to the blind. Under the Veteran's Administration we have grants for state and territorial homes for soldiers and sailors. In the Department of Agriculture we aid agricultural experiment stations, agricultural research, cooperative dairy and livestock experiments, cooperative agricultural extension work, cooperative conservation of agricultural land resources, cooperative forest fire protection, cooperative distribution of forest planting stock, forest roads and trails and highways.

In the Department of Interior we have grants for colleges for agriculture and mechanical arts, cooperative vocational education in agriculture, and in trade, home economics and industrial subjects, cooperative vocational education of teachers and vocational rehabilitation.

The Department of Labor supervises grants for material and child welfare, crippled children, child welfare and for employment service. The Treasury offers grants for public health and education of the blind. The Navy aids state marine schools and the War Department the National Guard.

We have Federal emergency relief, Federal emergency administration of public works, grants for public works projects, emergency construction of highways, and grade crossings. And we have other activities in the form of grants that are too numerous to mention.

The purpose of this article is not to discount the value of these projects and activities. But simply to cite how far we, as a people, have come in our new conception of the part the Federal Government should have in carrying on public works. Fortunately, we have a program for overhauling the vast machinery of the Federal

Government. The President is recommended that a step as not only important but necessary. Our people will be the final arbiter of public works. They are beginning to realize that we cannot have economy, reduction of the public debt and lower taxes and at the same time maintain and increase public expenditures. That is the situation today.

One of the problems, of course, is the proper allocation of cost. If we had a unit system of government the question of a proper division of the cost of public works and public functions would not

be so acute. Our Federal activities, our public functions, and responsibilities are scattered among a variety of units. When activities affecting more than one unit are undertaken by a central government or when several units joint-

ly undertake activities, the collective needs, the associated costs comes up. Should they be divided among the units affected? Shall they be met by one government? The answers to these questions must be found.

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