

AP News Special

# Politics of Pollution

By Lawrence L. Knutson  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a blitz of rhetoric, action and publicity, the Nixon administration has taken a giant step forward in the undeclared war to deprive Democrats of a favorite and potent issue — the deteriorating American environment.

The latest move in the President's environmental drive is a 37-point message sent to Congress Tuesday, including 23 proposals for new legislation.

Nixon's proposals have drawn immediate counterfire from congressional Democrats, many of whom were identified with the issue long before it acquired political glamor.

Members of both parties acknowledge that public concern — based on scientific cries of alarm and buttressed by personal experience — has made the question of environmental quality an issue translatable in votes.

Up to the time of Nixon's message, Democrats sounded the theme that his program involved more talk than action and lacked the muscle and money needed to reverse the tide of polluted streams, toxic air and indisposable garbage.

But many now concede privately the new competition to be identified as proenvironment will help generate the motion needed to pass and fund effective anti-pollution programs.

The possible political impact of the issue which for years was the concern mainly of a group of scientists, was forecast in a 1966 staff study of the Senate Republican Policy Committee:

"Clean air means votes. Just how many votes are involved and where they may be found is only now becoming fully appreciated."

Placing an exclamation point on that estimate, Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel said recently the political party with the best record on environment "is going to be the party that wins the most elections."

Partisan issue or not, the environment in the last several months has spawned new agencies, offices and programs to a degree not matched since President Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty.

As his first official act of the decade Nixon signed the Environmental Quality Act of 1969, legislation which for the first time made protection of air, water and land national policy.

He used the words "now or never" in declaring the time had come to stop environmental pollution.

A few days later he made his

State of the Union pledge to mount the "most comprehensive and costly program in this field ever in the nation's history."

After initial reluctance, the administration also promised to spend all of the \$800 million appropriated by Congress last year to build city waste treatment plants.

By executive order the President decreed a three year, \$359 million drive to halt pollution by federal installations.

The President's budget for fiscal 1971, although criticized by Democrats for not providing enough antipollution funds, appeared to surpass previous spending levels in the field.

Nixon journeyed to the Midwest last week at the head of a delegation of cabinet officers and pollution experts to emphasize the federal commitment to upgrading the environment.

Tuesday, in his comprehensive message to Congress, Nixon called for action on a wide front, including proposed \$10,000-a-day fines for industry failure to meet established water quality standards.

Even before this flurry of activity the White House had been hiring experts to work on environmental research, plans and messages. A Washington newspaper reported more White House specialists were concentrating on the subject than on Vietnam.

The President formed a Cabinet-level environmental panel and appointed three men to fill a Council on the Environment established by the Environmental Quality Act.

Not all the environment interest was in the White House.

The Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress reported sharply increased demand by members of Congress caused expansion of environmental services and researchers.

In the past year the Congressional Record has printed more matter on the environment than ever before.

Scores of bills have been introduced in the field, including proposals to establish a joint, House-Senate Committee on the Environment.

Aware that Nixon may be stealing their thunder, the Democrats, including some considered possible presidential aspirants in 1972, are fighting back, branding the Nixon program—particularly his 1971 budget — "a ruse," "a charade," and "just plain bull."

One of these is Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, the Democrat's 1968 vice presidential candidate, who quickly branded the Nixon program "slogan-rich and action-poor" and his 1971 environmental

budget request as a step back. And Muskie asserted that many of the President's Tuesday proposals are similar to those he made last month.

Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, who proposed a constitutional amendment to guarantee a clean environment as a right of the people, said the nation needs "more than a few million dollars here, a new commission there, or proclamations of concern . . ."

Sen. William Proxmire, also of Wisconsin, included in some dark-horse presidential lists, criticized the administration for what he said is its late discovery of the issue.

He said that since the beginning of the Nixon administration there have been far more meetings of the National Security Council and the Urban Affairs Council than the environmental group.

But Nixon administration officials deny headdressing.

"For the President, the problem was one of choosing priorities," Herb Klein said the president's communications director, said. "We couldn't get to it on any significant scale during the first year of the administration because of the need to revamp existing programs. There was not the time to develop programs and analyze techniques and scientific capabilities.

"But now we are in the second phase," he said. "Simply speaking, that is the need to build the country better in the decades ahead."

But Democrats indicate Nixon's new interest is a reflection of the population. John Heritage, environmental specialist for Sen. Nelson, says antipollution, "like motherhood, is nearly impossible to attack politically."

He said "the issue is penetrating the great and silent middle class. For the students, it's the hottest thing since Vietnam."

And Nixon administration officials, in a move some Democratic political figures said is aimed at taking over the campus movement, are planning to involve the students in volunteer groups to combat pollution.

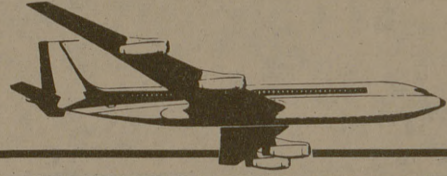
In what may be an exercise of wishful thinking, some Democrats say Nixon may be heading for a political fall by suddenly promising more than he can deliver.

The state of the air, water and land is so bad now it will take decades to show improvement, they say, and the nation won't be satisfied with words.

"The question," one congressional pollution specialist said, "is, who means what?"

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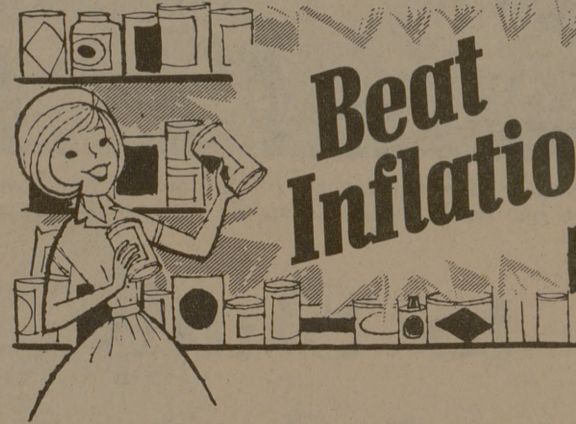
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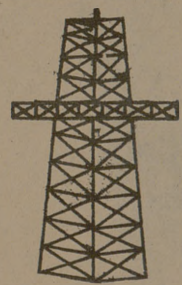
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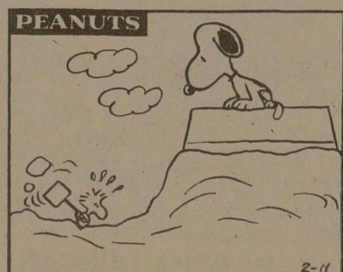
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