

REMARKS AT LAKE CONROE DEDICATION CEREMONIES

By W. E. Tinsley\*  
November 10, 1969

It is most proper and fitting that an achievement such as we observe here today be celebrated with appropriate and solemn ceremony. We stand on a spot where there will soon be constructed one of the most useful structures contrived by man: a dam for the impoundment and conservation of one of life's most essential commodities - - water. Life-sustaining water -- and it is appropriate that we call this ceremony a dedication, and that our attitude be one which approaches reverence.

The true conservationist feels a responsibility for that portion of God's creation which has been committed to his charge, a responsibility to leave it for the benefit of future generations in a condition better than that in which it came under his charge. A properly conceived and soundly constructed reservoir falls, without question, in this category. The structure to be erected on this spot will grace this stretch of the San Jacinto River with a shimmering lake which will add enrichment to the lives of hundreds of thousands of Texans for decades to come. It represents the conservationist's offering - the discharge of his obligation, and it is fitting that in this ceremony we dedicate it to that purpose.

It is fitting, also, that we pay tribute to those individuals who have made all of this possible. In the culmination of a dream of this magnitude - - and that is what we see there today: the culmination of a dream - - we honor scores of persons by whose efforts this undertaking has

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been brought to fruition. The engineer who selected the site, the visionary who foresaw the future need for the impounded water, the legislator who created the river authority, the literal horde of specialists and technicians who labored for years in solving the myriad problems of engineering, finance, economics, and yes, politics.

But special recognition and honor should be paid those public officials through whose untiring perseverance and dedication to duty this project was actually made possible. And I refer, of course, to Mayor Louie Welch and the City Council of Houston, and to President Weisinger and the members of the Board of Directors of San Jacinto River Authority. One who has not had the actual experience of consummating -- from the beginning -- an undertaking of this magnitude can never really appreciate the seemingly endless number of problems which arise and the extent of personal dedication and determination which is demanded of those involved.

I have spent a lifetime as an observer and occasionally as a limited participant in literally dozens of water resource development projects, and my admiration continues to grow for those who really make them possible. I have a special feeling for those who labored on the Lake Conroe Project because of the many complexities which it presented.

And I would like to seize this opportunity, these particular complexities which surround this individual project, to comment on a lesson which we as Texans concerned with water resource development can learn from it. That lesson is the value of cooperation.

Consider for a moment the complexities of this project. To begin with, it is a multi-purpose project: municipal supply, industrial supply, irrigation supply, and then let us not overlook the hundreds of thousands who will enjoy its recreational advantages.

The most important lesson, though, is in the joint sponsorship of the

project and the cooperation of the three separate governmental entities which participated: the City of Houston, the San Jacinto River Authority, and finally the State of Texas acting through the Texas Water Development Board. Without the joint participation, the constant effort and patient and understanding cooperation of each of these three agencies, we would not be standing here today dedicating a facility to the lasting benefit of our State.

Here is a lesson which all of Texas can gain something from. Here is an example of the basic conditions which exist rather generally in the problem area of Texas water resources development, and a classic example of cooperative effort in solving some of our problems.

Gone is the day when a Texas city of any appreciable size can supply its needs for water, as Houston once did, from underground resources. Gone, too, are the days when the farmer can depend upon the unregulated flow of the public stream as a dependable source of irrigation water for his crops, and the same is equally true of the needs of heavy industry which has brought prosperity to our State.

With each day that passes, we Texans become more and more dependent upon surface water, upon its impoundment, and upon an equitable distribution of that which is defined by law as property of the State for the benefit of all its peoples. This in itself presented a major problem in the realization of the dream of Lake Conroe, but with the spirit of cooperation - - the attitude of give and take - - which marked the negotiations between the diverse interests and the two local governmental entities, the goal has been attained.

But there is the third governmental entity whose role I also want to mention, and under whose banner I stand here today as your speaker: the Texas Water Development Board, which has extended substantial financial assistance in providing a loan for construction funds.

Nature has endowed our State with a limited number of ideal reservoir sites, and most of these have been developed.

As our need for additional reservoirs continues to grow, it becomes necessary to develop those sites which are more costly. This fact, coupled with the inflationary spiral in construction costs which has been with us since World War II and then, more recently, the serious escalation in the cost of borrowed money, well nigh renders certain badly needed water resource development projects economically infeasible. Or, it would except for one thing: financial participation by the State of Texas, acting through the Texas Water Development Board in its loan program which minimizes borrowing costs on construction funds. This has been a substantial factor in making the Lake Conroe Project possible.

And now may I call your attention to the broader implications of this State participation, this financial assistance which the Water Development Board extends to minimize borrowing costs and in turn provide water at more reasonable rates to the local consumer. The financial assistance program of the Water Development Board is not without its burden on the budget of the State of Texas and is not without its costs to the taxpayers of Texas -- all taxpayers, and that includes the butcher in San Angelo, the baker in Lubbock, and the candlestick maker in Wichita Falls.

These people, too, own a share of the water which falls within the San Jacinto River watershed; these people, too, have contributed to the development of this reservoir site; and, these people, too, will reap some of the benefits from the use of its waters. These people are Texans, and that which benefits this fabulous section of our State benefits them. And may I now, as a member of the Texas Water Development Board continuously for these 12 years since its creation, shake my hoary locks, and say "He who has ears, let him hear." We cannot afford sectionalism in water, and realize our destiny as a State.

And now, as I close, I am constrained to pay special tribute to one individual for an act of courage and foresight which may be only indirectly related to the occasion which brings us together, although it does have real

importance in the outlook for future financing of water projects in Texas.

I had the privilege to sit recently as an observer at hearings conducted by the Committee on Finance of the United States Senate on those sections of the Tax Reform Act of 1969 which threaten to deprive state and local government of its historic right to issue bonds with interest exempt from Federal income taxes. Due to the highly controversial -- indeed, emotional -- aspects of this legislation, the number of witnesses who were allowed to appear was rigidly limited: the State of Texas was allowed only one witness. That witness gave testimony in a manner which would have brought all in the hearing room to their feet in an ovation except for the decorum which is demanded of observers at such hearings. That witness, single-handedly representing the State of Texas, was the Honorable Louie Welch, Mayor of Houston, to whom every taxpayer and every public official in Texas is indebted for the manner in which he presented his case.

We are not completely out of the woods with this legislation yet, although the report of the Senate Finance Committee has been exactly what we want and favorable action on the Senate floor appears likely.

I understand that there are some who have questioned the Mayor's action in the sale of water revenue bonds bearing a record high rate of interest, bonds whose proceeds go in part to the Lake Conroe Project. Not only do I defend the Mayor's action, but I say to you that except for the manner in which he conducted himself before the Senate Finance Committee, and the characteristic energy with which he went about organizing support among the Texas delegation in Washington, it could well be that the City of Houston might yet be begging for a bidder for its water revenue bonds at the maximum voted rate of  $6\frac{1}{2}\%$ , and the only bid might otherwise be of 7% bonds!

It is a distinct honor to have been asked to make these remarks on this momentous occasion, and I appreciate your courteous attention. Thank you.

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