

THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

December 15, 1975

Dear Mr. President:

This letter transmits to you a report of the findings resulting from recent Public Forums on Domestic Policy.

During the past two and a half months, the Domestic Council, at your direction, has held a series of Public Forums across the country to explore public concerns and recommendations on domestic policy.

Taken as a whole, these Public Forums, together with hundreds of statements submitted to the Council by individuals and organizations from all across the nation, represent a profoundly moving portrait of America today -- an America whose people are troubled yet hopeful, hard-pressed yet vigorous, and, above all, faithful to the democratic process.

Consider the broad spectrum of opinion represented at these Forums: from welfare recipients to mayors and governors; from Indians, the clergy, blacks, Spanish-speaking Americans, housewives and senior citizens to industrialists, labor leaders, bank presidents, environmentalists, doctors, lawyers, state and local officials. And many more.

The common thread that ran through this diversity was an abiding faith in the process conceived by the men who founded this nation 200 years ago.

We went to the people to listen to their words -- voices raised in the belief that they would be heard and that, somehow, it would make a difference. "Almost makes one think the U. S. Government is interested in our problems," a woman from Cave Junction, Oregon, wrote regarding the Forum process.

We heard criticisms. And complaints. And frustration.

We heard distressing stories of individual tragedy and deprivation.

But we also heard stories of success, hundreds of them -- success in setting up rural health clinics in the arid southern region of Texas, success in finding jobs for the unemployed in Pittsburgh, and success in delivering hot meals to the elderly in Appalachia. Time and again, such stories of success were cited as examples for others to follow in solving similar problems. And they were cited to help the Federal government respond in ways that best serve the people.

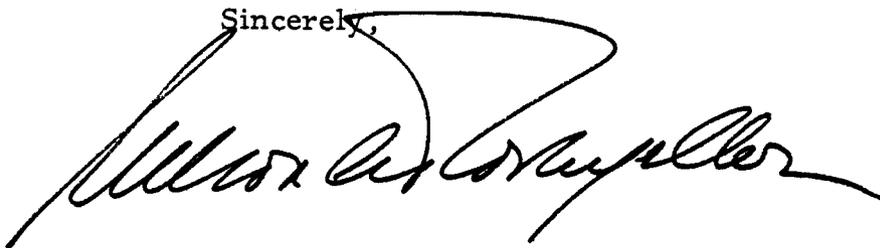
In many cases, of course, people wanted more money for their programs. But in the main, what was called for from the Federal government was leadership, understanding, clearer policies, simpler rules, and program consolidation. Very specific ideas were suggested, and they are summarized in the volume which is being transmitted with this letter.

This volume contains a summary of the submitted oral and written statements, separated by subject matter, for each of the six Forums, together with a "Summary of Findings" which sets forth the most frequently expressed concerns and recommendations. The volume is the product of a meticulous reading of over 12,000 pages of submitted written material and transcripts from more than 90 hours of public testimony. Altogether, it represents the participation of more than 6,000 individuals.

The volume represents an unbiased effort to document the views of all the participants, quoting extensively from them where such quotes distill their views or recommendations. Included in the summaries are appendices which contain Forum agendas and participant lists. All of this material is being incorporated into the Domestic Council's review process.

Mr. President, I come away from this experience buoyed by what I perceive to be a note of optimism that runs through this land today, especially among those who were touched by the Forum process. People of widely differing views and backgrounds came to these Forums and submitted constructive ideas to a process they trust -- the democratic process. The note of optimism that I hear is sounded by a free people who know that their voices are heard and that they, themselves, can make a difference in how we, as a nation, will live and grow in our country's third century.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexander Haig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the top that extends over the word "Sincerely,".

The Honorable Gerald R. Ford
The President of the United States
Washington, D. C.

REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

WHITE HOUSE PUBLIC FORUMS ON DOMESTIC POLICY SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

On July 24, 1975, President Ford directed Vice President Rockefeller and the Domestic Council to conduct a comprehensive review of Federal domestic programs and policies.

As a part of this review, he instructed the Vice President to conduct a series of hearings throughout the country in order to seek the public's recommendations and ideas which could be incorporated in the Domestic Council review of domestic policy.

Subsequently, six Public Forums on Domestic Policy were held over a ten-week period. The following cities were selected to represent a broad geographical base, including each of the fifty states and all U. S. territories:

Denver, Colorado	October 21, 1975
Tampa, Florida	October 29, 1975
Austin, Texas	November 11, 1975
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	November 18, 1975
Indianapolis, Indiana	November 25, 1975
Los Angeles, California	December 9, 1975

The Forums focused on four general areas of domestic policy: economic growth, resource development, social policy and community building. Persons with recognized experience and expertise on subjects within these general policy areas were invited to present testimony.

The witnesses, representing state and local government, labor, business, interest groups, recipients of Federal programs, and private citizens were selected from recommendations submitted to the Federal Regional Council in each area. All witnesses, observers, and the general public were invited to speak at the Forums and to submit written statements. Statements submitted in writing were given equal consideration in the domestic policy review process. Members of the Congress from each region were advised of the purpose of the Forums and invited to attend.

Each Forum was divided into two parts: a plenary morning session devoted to a discussion of the four major issue areas:

1. Economy, jobs, inflation and regulations
2. Resource development, energy and the environment
3. Social policy, health, income security, and services
4. Community building, housing, transportation and intergovernmental relations

Separate afternoon sessions were devoted to each of these issues.

The Vice President chaired the morning session with a panel consisting of Cabinet members and other Federal Administrators. Two witnesses presented five-minute testimony on one of the four issues. Approximately half of the time was reserved for comments and suggestions from the general public by means of microphones placed throughout the audience.

The four simultaneous meetings in the afternoon continued the discussion of the four major policy areas. These meetings were chaired by Cabinet members who were supported by other appropriate Federal officials. Again, witnesses presented testimony and responded to questions from the panel. Invited observers and the general public then joined in the discussion.

A summary of each Forum has been compiled and submitted to the President. Suggestions and recommendations contained in these documents have been incorporated in the Domestic Council's review process.

Of the 6,000 persons attending the six Forums, over 1,500 submitted oral or written statements. The total amount of testimony received exceeded 12,000 pages.

The public reaction to the Forums was favorable. Although many witnesses were critical of government, the overwhelming majority expressed appreciation for the opportunity to inject their opinions into the decision making process.

One overriding message came through in each of the Forums: people are concerned about the proliferation of Federal red tape which prevents the government from delivering its promised services. This problem was described succinctly by the Governor of Washington when he said, "Give us the performance you expect. Let us do the task and be measured on the results; not on how well we followed instructions. . . . In other words. . . get off our backs."

The Governor of Colorado commented on the problem by saying, "All too often we find that the Federal Government for all its sincerity is the problem."

This concern was reiterated by the National Coordinator of the Task Force on Older Women who presented a new set of ten commandments to guide domestic policy which included, "Thou shalt not program for failure: You pass fine titled laws costing billions, then tie them up with layers of bureaucracy, so that little money is used to address the problems the laws were designed to alleviate."

Among the concerns repeatedly expressed were:

- High employment and inflation, excessive government spending and lagging economy
- The lack of Congressional action on a comprehensive energy policy
- The need to achieve environmental protection along with economic growth and job opportunities
- The inequities in social programs and the bureaucratic red tape of the Federal government in administering them
- The rising cost of health care and the fact that we do not have a comprehensive health policy or system
- The excessive and ever-changing Federal regulations of business and state and local governments

In summary, people feel that Federal red tape, excessive bureaucracy, and duplication are inhibiting creativity and decision making throughout American society -- the basic element of our Nation's success.

The following digest of oral and written testimony summarizes the opinions, ideas and recommendations most frequently expressed throughout the Forums. This digest is only a synopsis and should not be considered as an all-inclusive discussion of the material reviewed through the Forums; a more comprehensive summary on each of the six Forums has also been prepared.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

In the area of economic recovery, witnesses were unanimous in defining unemployment and inflation as the areas of greatest concern.

Unemployment Must Be Alleviated By Means of Expanding Job Opportunities

Pointing to "the cancer of joblessness that is devastating the nation," witnesses called for immediate Federal action. Their recommendations included:

- Public service jobs as temporary relief.
- Tax credits for private businesses that hire and train the unemployed
- Simplified regulation of private industry
- Expansion of capital formation and investment
- Encouragement of science and technological development

Spokesmen from the public and private sectors emphasized the acute levels of unemployment in the housing and construction industries. Urging that immediate steps be taken to increase housing starts, witnesses called for the release of federal housing funds, tax incentives for capital investment, and savings incentives for consumers. Controlled home mortgage rates were also strongly advocated.

Many participants suggested that payments made through the Unemployment Insurance Program be redirected towards job-producing programs. However, in view of national haste to alleviate unemployment, local officials urged evaluation of the long-term effects of certain job-creation programs. One mayor urged against establishing jobs that do not add to productivity or increase the tax base. He emphasized that "the standard for public service employment should be the need for services."

Government Must Ease Inflation by Curtailing Federal Expenditures

Consumers indicated their willingness to curtail spending if government would do the same. In offering a list of ten commandments for Federal policy, one witness told officials, "Thou shalt not design painful social policy for everyone but thyselfes. . . If belt-tightening is in order, those in public office should lead the way."

One participant summarized the majority opinion in his recommendation for the Federal budget: "Balance it."

Regulations Which Handicap Free Enterprise Should Be Eliminated

"Regulatory over-kill" was blamed for:

- blocking productivity gains
- thwarting business expansion
- increasing unemployment
- aggravating inflation

It was noted that the burden of bureaucratic red tape resulting from excessive regulations eventually falls on the consumer. One businessman observed that "the costs and losses of time and money mandated by the mass of government guidelines are reflected in. . . every price tag printed in America."

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency were heavily criticized for excessive and conflicting regulatory requirements; the same charge was directed at the Security and Exchange Commission, Federal Trade Commission and Small Business Administration.

Participants urged that programs be guided by Federal performance standards, not by administrative requirements. As a first step toward trimming regulations, one mayor suggested a Federal-level counterpart to his latest addition to City Hall: an Office of Red Tape Cutting.

Local Government Must Be Given The Authority To Administer Federally Funded Programs

Contributors qualified their high praise for the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act by recommending that spending be determined locally. They stressed that state and local governments can better direct funds to the needs of specific groups of unemployed according to demographic factors.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Forum contributors placed great emphasis on issues relating to resource development. The opinion of the majority was clear:

The Country Lacks The Well-Defined Energy Policy Necessary for Developing Domestic Resources

The lack of clear guidelines for the use of existing supplies, conservation, and resource development was criticized.

Many testified that in the absence of national policy, present energy supplies have been unwisely allocated. An overwhelming majority of the contributors urged the deregulation of natural gas prices at the well-head in order that the cost and use of natural gas might be determined by free market conditions.

Witnesses promoted a Federal energy policy that would guide development of new resources. They underlined the need for systematic exploration of potential energy sources. Individual spokesmen elaborated on the possibilities of numerous resources: coal, oil, nuclear, solar, off-shore drilling, solid waste, bio-mass, wind, water, and geothermal. The high-risk, capital-intensive nature of energy exploration prompted many industrialists and consumers to advocate Federal incentives that would enable private industry to participate in new projects.

Federal Regulations Must Be Streamlined

The voluminous paperwork imposed by regulatory requirements was repeatedly criticized. One businessman voiced a common concern when he objected to the "chaotic confusion of conflicting, contradictory, costly, and confounding regulations."

The environmental impact statement process drew heavy criticism. Witnesses objected to the amount of time and money spent on statement preparation and to the lengthy review period that causes delays in construction. Individual spokesmen described the result of suspended projects: workers lose jobs, machinery stands idle, and inventories of unused building supplies accumulate.

Among those dissatisfied were local officials, who said:

The time lag places the surrounding communities in a position of indecision. The cities are unable to undertake construction planning, financing and construction in areas of social and economic improvements until after the fact, therefore, we are always running behind. Playing a catch-up game with the percentages of growth we are facing is a losing battle.

Industrialists and conservationists questioned the accuracy of information submitted in impact statements. Many felt that the requirement of a statement in the early states of a project discourages investigation into new energy sources. For example, individuals involved in geothermal exploration stated that accurate impact statements could be submitted only after certain technical data could be obtained by operating a geothermal project.

Some witnesses indicated that the personnel who review impact statements are unqualified. One spokesman outlined the complexities of site evaluation, saying that field personnel with traditional geological training must also be familiar with development economics, land planning, and urban studies in order to make comprehensive assessments.

Environmental Goals Should Be Balanced Against Economic Imperatives

Many participants advocated resource exploration and development as a means of creating jobs, citing the number of people needed for the energy extracting process, for building facilities, and for providing services to energy communities.

Witnesses felt that it was possible to achieve efficient industrial production and to realize environmental objectives. It was urged that contradictory policies be realigned. One power company official noted that EPA thermal pollution policies prohibit the development of man-made lakes in which to cool the recycled water used in power plant operations. Consequently, his company has been forced to construct a cooling tower. Towers cost more than lakes, he explained, and are single-purpose facilities. The spokesman summarized his point by saying, "I have yet to see anyone successfully swim, fish or water-ski in a cooling tower."

Conservation Must be Continuous

Although they favored Federal policy guidelines, local government officials reiterated the view that conservation programs are best implemented on a local level. Individual spokesmen emphasized the importance of conservation measures as the only "immediate answer" to energy shortages, and recommended that local efforts be directed at two objectives:

- Reduced consumption
- Greater efficiency in the performance of motor vehicles, household appliances and heating systems

Participants urged the development of better mass transit and rail systems in order to curtail automobile use in metropolitan areas. Many advocated mandatory fuel economy performance standards for automobiles. In the housing area, some participants called for tax credits on all types of home insulation such as siding and storm windows.

Conservation spokesmen pointed to the precarious state of the ecosystem in urging that conservation efforts "be taken seriously." Individuals discussed the problems of maintaining air and water quality, wilderness and recreational areas, and fertile agriculture land. Many called for sound forest management, coastal reclamation and flood plain projects.

Water resource development was heavily emphasized. Coastal residents in particular called for careful evaluation of the onshore effects of offshore drilling. They asked that local citizenries be included in planning, reviewing, and monitoring offshore projects.

Many witnesses focused on agriculture concerns, urging the maintenance of high fertility standards, affordable fuel costs for farm equipment, and available water supplies for irrigation. Farmers expressed the desire to participate in regulatory decisions concerning fertilizer and pesticide use.

The Role of State and Local Government Must Be Authoritative

Among additional issues which concerned participants was the impact of energy development projects on nearby communities. Local officials feared additional demands on municipal services and facilities; planners expressed the hope that future development would be wisely located and constructed. Some participants explained that energy development jeopardized their existing homes. Recognizing the fact that vast coal resources lie under her reservation, one North Dakota tribeswoman said "We are afraid if you mine our coal, where can we live?"

Numerous local officials called for federal provision of "front-end monies" to assist communities with the necessary implementation of services. Others suggested that revenue sharing funds might be used for this purpose.

One urban studies spokesman suggested that national officials might consider establishing a direct relationship between community development planning requirements and the need for energy conservation. He proposed that in order to obtain assistance under the Community Development Act, communities must submit applications which include specific proposals for energy conservation.

Improved information exchange was cited as a prerequisite to a more effective federal-state energy partnership. Witnesses pointed to the energy and conservation education programs currently being conducted in individual communities by schools and citizen organizations, and emphasized that citizens can decide energy issues wisely only if they are informed.

Federally sponsored conferences were suggested as a means to advise localities of pending energy developments and projects. In promoting this plan, one New Englander noted, "We recognize the area's dependence on imported petroleum, but we cannot truthfully assure the integrity of our coastal resources without knowing what to expect."

Without exception, witnesses asked to participate in decisions regarding resource development and the environment. One individual spoke for many when he explained that his concern for the environment was the result of living "close to the land."

SOCIAL POLICY

Welfare and health topics dominated the discussions of social policy. Reform in both areas was declared mandatory.

Welfare Policy Should Guarantee a Minimum Income For Those Who Need It

It was widely agreed that welfare reform should:

- Provide work incentives
- Establish uniform eligibility standards
- Consolidate assistance programs
- Streamline outdated regulations

Witnesses offered widely varied plans to achieve these goals. A significant number called for federalization of welfare, saying that state tax bases cannot support current payment levels. Other participants recommended that all benefits be paid in cash. The majority recognized the necessity for a federal-state partnership in providing funds.

One Governor exhibited the three-volume set of eligibility guidelines which state welfare workers must consult before authorizing benefits. Inconsistent policies were blamed for the "state to state" bargain hunting that currently occurs among welfare recipients.

There was general agreement that those able to work be encouraged to do so; welfare must not serve as a "permanent seat on the gravy train," noted one spokesman. It was strongly urged that the government sponsor job-training programs and closely monitor their results.

National Health Insurance Is Necessary

Citing escalating health care costs and inadequate service provision, the majority of contributors called for some form of national health insurance. Recommendations regarding financing and administration differed: most contributors advised a partnership between the public and private sectors that presently administer these services. This partnership would establish standards for coverage and administer financing.

Witnesses focused on inefficient hospital management as a major cause of inflated health care costs. It was noted that many hospitals could trim their budgets by eliminating surplus beds and unused support facilities. Certain individuals suggested applying a professional standards review process to all hospital operations.

Participants expressed qualified approval of the programs authorized by the National Health Planning Act. One witness explained, "If these programs are to control waste, duplication, and unnecessary services, they should not be predestined for failure by an insufficiency of funds." Many individuals expressed the hope that the Act would permit a greater local role in administration, noting that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare directly controls many areas of coverage.

Programs of preventive medicine were strongly promoted. Witnesses concerned with the health problems in inner cities called for projects that would familiarize residents with available services. It was urged that the government continue to operate clinics for the detection of sickle-cell anemia.

Social Services Must Be Consolidated

It was noted that clients must "scramble from one headquarters to another" in order to obtain various forms of social service assistance. The majority of contributors favored the consolidation of application procedures and client services produced by:

- vocational rehabilitation
- drug and alcohol abuse programs
- family services
- mental health care
- care for the aged

Discriminatory Practices Must Be Eliminated

Individual witnesses called for stringent enforcement of equal rights for minorities, the aged, and youth. The majority of those who addressed discrimination focused on sex-bias. It was noted that women have difficulty obtaining credit and loans; the homemaker receives no social security credits for her work. In urging support for the Equal Rights Amendment, one witness commented, "the problem is not to fit human needs into the status quo, but to change the status quo to fit human needs."

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Housing concerns predominated in the hearings on community building.

Comprehensive Housing Policy Must Address The Problems Of Supply, Quality, And Rehabilitation

Witnesses pointed to numerous areas where housing shortages are acute:

- The southeast, due to the rate of population growth
- Inner cities
- Indian reservations
- Underdeveloped rural areas

Numerous witnesses focused on recommendations for the southeast and southwest where shortages are pronounced. They urged that unfinished housing projects be resumed in order to provide homes and jobs.

Pointing to recent population growth, local officials asked that federal funds be allocated according to strictly current census figures.

The majority of urban spokesmen promoted rehabilitation of urban dwellings. "We have subsidized the suburbs. Now, we must re-invest in the cities," said one participant. "Recycling residences" was advised for several reasons:

- rehabilitation is less expensive in new construction
- existing neighborhoods can be prevented

-- urban deterioration that results from
suburban relocation is checked

Proponents of rehabilitation called for tax credits on housing repairs and incentives for banks to underwrite home-improvement loans.

Urban And Conservation Needs Require Improved Mass Transit Systems

Witnesses urged the extension of present metropolitan services and the construction of transportation networks in rural areas. Individual spokesmen recommended the completion of the interstate highway system, federal support for railroads, and clearer objectives in the regulation of the trucking, airline, and shipping industries. A member of the Philadelphia Bicycle Coalition requested improved bicycle access to bridges, trains, and workplaces.

Community Planning and Development Programs Must Incorporate Local Participation

The overwhelming majority of the participants praised Community Development Block Grants, but urged that Federal administration of all categorical grants be kept to a minimum. Witnesses emphasized that states are "in a position to immediately respond to local needs" in allocating funds and evaluating results.

It was urged that states be trusted to assess the needs of their communities. One witness elaborated:

Decisions all too often are made in the giant bureaucracies in Washington or in our state capitols with little or no regard for the feelings of the local communities upon which these decisions will impact. We are a people of neighborhoods, not impersonal regions.

She believed that to correct this situation, "we must begin letting ideas and priorities perk up from the bottom rather than drip down from the top."

This view was underscored with respect to the use of revenue sharing funds. It was urged that state and local governments be allowed to focus spending on local needs. Witnesses explained that funds which are federally earmarked for construction cannot be diverted to improve deficient human services. Many contributors also advocated local administration of federal funds for education.

* * * * *

In his directive to the Domestic Council, the President asked its members to "seek out the best advice possible from throughout the country to enable us to develop the means to use our domestic resources in ways that most respond to the needs of the people."

The Council, through the Forum process, has probed the central domestic issues of our time -- economic growth, resource development, social policy and community building. During this process, approaches to solving these urgent problems were discovered which do not call for vast, open-ended spending programs, more government intervention, and bigger bureaucracies.

While many Forum participants sought more funds for certain programs, what was most often called for from the Federal government was leadership, understanding, clearer policies, simpler rules, and program consolidation.

Such prescriptions need not cost the Federal taxpayer an additional penny.

The Forums revealed that solutions to the difficult problems confronting America today will require, not more and more money, but the best thinking a resourceful people can muster; it suggests the need to utilize more rational approaches, creating out of America's energy and will, a new sense of resolve that its most pressing domestic problems can be solved in fairness to all, without triggering economic distortions, and without sacrificing the privileges of a free society.