

VILLAGE VIEW

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A few weeks ago every daily newspaper I happened to see carried a front-page story covering the three-year \$30 million study President Carter ordered in 1977 to assess what humankind's future holds between now and the year 2,000. While projections aren't encouraging, the task force isn't through. Between now and Election Day, the group will report to the President its recommendations for dealing with forecasted crises.

It seems unfortunate that it was necessary to spend thirty million dollars to ascertain, officially, what's been evident to informed persons: since this century's fifth decade: overpopulation, de-forestation, desertification and environmental degradation threaten life supports on Planet Earth.

What troubles me most, however, isn't the expense incident to the study report, or even the time it took to place it before our Chief-of-State. What troubles me is what action, if any, will be taken to implement the recommendations, once completed and delivered.

In my mind's eye, I see the volumes carted into the Oval Office on a dolly, stacked up next to the desk, and the man at that desk riffling through the first few pages, perhaps only those of the recommendations; then, at the push of a button, another man appears, loads the entire heap onto his cart and carries it away to be stacked on shelves somewhere out-of-the-way. Perhaps it will eventually find a permanent home at the Smithsonian.

Wherever it ends up, it's apt to lie untouched, unread, unstudied.

If that happens, not only have we had \$30,000,000 plus syphoned from our pockets, but twenty years from now, the world will be attempting to feed, clothe and shelter TWICE as many people as we're failing to feed, clothe and shelter adequately today. Wars, pestilence and disease are the inevitable consequences.

Maybe I'm overly pessimistic; maybe the report and recommendations yet to follow will become models for future action on an international scale. Maybe. If it happens, my faith in federal bureaucracy will acquire new life, vigor and impetus.

One ray of hope lies in the successes of the Environmental Protection Agency; although far from total, and although an incredible mess still remains and is being added to daily, the EPA has, in its ten years, accomplished undreamed-of progress at a cost-factor that puts most federal projects to shame.

For instance, from 1970-78, federal environmental legislation added, on the average, slightly more than three-tenths of ONE percentage to the annual rate of increase in the consumer price index, according to EPA figures.

It estimates that with much of the required pollution control equipment now in place, the future contribution of existing environmental regulations to inflation will shrink; between now and 1986 less than two-tenths of one percentage point will be added to the annual inflation rate by this service.

Furthermore, air and water pollution controls will serve to stimulate employment during the sixteen years, 1970-86, by creating jobs for those who operate and maintain the equipment and programs. Environmental protection reduces unemployment rates by an average of one-fourth of one percent each year.

Percentage points are dull reading. What, then, are the measurable benefits? Improvements in air quality in the last

twelve months are valued at \$21 billion. Of this total, \$17 billion represents reductions in costs of mortality (deaths resulting from contaminated air and water) and morbidity (illness resulting from polluted air and water). How are these figures arrived at? None of us needs to be told how expensive illness is; we can't afford to get sick. Most who die as a result of polluted air and water a lot of time and money being sick before dying. And non-fatal sicknesses brought on by pollution are not an insignificant drain on pocketbooks of individual Americans, either.

The remaining billions of dollars saved are represented as: \$2 billion in reducing soiling and cleaning costs; anyone who's lived in an area of air pollution knows the chore and costs involved in keeping houses, furnishings, clothing, cars and skin clean.

Seven hundred million dollars has been realized in increased agricultural output, nine hundred million in prevention of corrosion and other damage to materials, and eight hundred million in increased property values. By 1985, it is forecast, as a result of the nation's water pollution control legislation, approximately twelve billion additional dollars will accrue, each year, in benefits to Americans.

Admittedly, these statistics come from a federal agency with a desire to perpetuate itself; nevertheless, we have experienced remarkable and recognizable improvements in environmental quality. How long has it been since you were forced to breathe stinking exhaust spewing from a car or truck? And on the rare occasions it happens today, how do you feel about it? What was once quite common and endured stoically is now viewed with outrage.

Atlantic salmon are returning to our great rivers, the Hudson, the Merrimac, the Connecticut. Waters once so despoiled they weren't fit to touch, that couldn't sustain life, that were so filthy ten years ago they stunk and people shunned contact with them, are now important recreation areas.

Butterflies and dragon flies flutter in our gardens; bees pollinate our flowers and vegetables, birds' eggs no longer shatter at a touch; robins, finches, orioles and quail flit through underbrush and parade to birdbaths and feeders.

There's still a long way to go. Underground water is now coming under scrutiny. Millions of tons of hazardous wastes are still being pumped into deep wells; occasionally these substances surface in drinking waters. There are plenty of Love Canals in this country; there are plenty of people living on top of them, unaware and unsuspecting.

And nobody knows how to solve the problem. What are we to do with hazardous wastes? Where can we deposit them safely? Should we start shipping the stuff to another planet? Seal it in salt mines? Force, through legislation, industries creating hazardous by-products to render them harmless before dumping them anywhere?

These questions, and those raised by the three-year \$30,000,000 study recently delivered to President Carter, along with the recommendations still to come, must be confronted if the promises of the twenty-first century are to be realized.

Ten years ago the people of these United States made ecology a household word. The groundswell of conviction washed nationwide. It was the you's and me's of the late '60s and early '70s who made possible the improvements in our environment we enjoy today.

If Spaceship Earth is to be livable in the year 2,000 and thereafter, it's up to the you's and me's to insist the \$30 million wasn't wasted and the report doesn't sit, gathering dust, in some Washington cellar... to insist its recommendations are implemented.

The difficulties are enormous. The cost of ignoring the warnings is unthinkable dreadful. Time is short and of the essence.

There still is time if we begin at once with the same determination we applied to the environmental crisis and dedicate ourselves to overcoming the difficulties. The dollar cost: huge. The price of ignoring this newly-recognized (officially) crisis: life, itself.