

James Reston

The Perspective Of the President

Washington

SCENE one. The library of the White House. The President and Howard K. Smith of ABC talking before the TV cameras sitting under a portrait of General Washington.

Mr. Smith: How are you feeling these days?

The President: Well, I don't feel it is the winter of my discontent. I suppose I keep it somewhat in perspective . . . there are grave problems confronting America, at home and abroad, but I am rather confident about the solution of those problems . . .



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SCENE two (the next afternoon). The dining room of Katherine Graham's house in Georgetown. More talk of "perspective" by the mayors of America's largest cities with a group of reporters.

Mayor John Lindsay of New York: The cities of America are in a battle for survival. We have come here to urge support for a minimum of \$10 billion in general revenue sharing, funding of present programs, aid to avoid trouble in the cities this summer, and a Marshall Plan for the cities.

In New York we have a deficit this year of \$300 million and face a deficit next year of a billion. Frankly, even with help in Washington, I'm not sure we can pull out of the urban crisis in time.

Mayor Joseph Alioto of San Francisco: I'll be frank with you. The sky's falling in on us in the cities: it really is. We've had six cops killed in San Francisco since I took office. We need jobs and money for the poor and haven't money for either. Our people are trying to put a Maginot Line around the suburbs and zoning them. We can't go on like this. Even the capitalistic system's not going to survive the way we're going.

Mayor Kenneth Gibson of Newark: Wherever the cities are going, Newark's going to get there first. We have the worst infant mortality, maternity mortality, and crime rate in the country. In a city of 400,000 — 60 per cent black, 10 per cent Spanish speaking and 30 per cent white — we have 11 per cent unemployed. If we had a bubonic plague in Newark everybody would try to help, but we really have a worse plague and nobody notices.

Mayor Moon Landrieu of New Orleans: We've taxed everything that moves and everything that stands still, and if anything moves again, we tax that too. So we're inclined to get frustrated and angry. It's not that we don't have enough money to rebuild; we don't have enough to give things even a new coat of paint. The cities are going down the pipe, and if we're going to save them, we'd better do it now; three years from now will be too late.

Mayor Carl Stokes of Cleveland: In Cleveland, we're operating on \$25 million less than in 1970. We've had to lay off 1500 people, and cut the mayor's office by 40 per cent. Our community relations activities have been wiped out, and we're now spending 60 per cent of our budget on the police and fire departments.

Mayor Pete Flaherty of Pittsburgh: You can't understand how lonely a mayor feels with his problems. The people in the suburbs use our facilities but won't help pay for them. The Pittsburgh zoo costs us \$1 million a year. Three out of four people who go there come from outside the city, but when I ask the county commissioners for help, they look out the window.

Mayor Roman Gribbs of Detroit: Our unemployment is now 14 per cent. Our deficit is \$23 million, and we have to find \$43 million this year just to stay where we are; that's not counting the public service wage hikes that are coming up.

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SCENE one again:

The President: The trouble with government today in this country is this: that to the average person, he looks at government, all government, and he is fed up with it, and the reason he is fed up with it is that it costs too much, it doesn't work, and he can't do anything about it . . . we are either going to have to reform the machinery of government in the United States or it is going to break down completely.

Here endeth the lesson. But what is the lesson? All are for revenue sharing but there is not enough revenue to share. Even if the President's revenue sharing bill were passed, New York's share would add only two per cent to Mayor Lindsay's budget, which is not enough to sweep the streets.

The mayors didn't mention the coming military budget, \$75 billion requested, but the President said the war in Laos was going well. You had to put it in "perspective," he said.

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