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REMARKS OF E. H. MORSE, JR.  
ASSISTANT COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
AT OPENING SESSION OF  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
CONFERENCE ON FEDERAL ACTION AND  
THE PEOPLE IN OUR CITIES  
MEMPHIS, TENN., MARCH 18, 1973

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It is my privilege to try to fill Mr. Staats' shoes in welcoming you to this conference and to once again express our strong interest in this kind of activity.

The General Accounting Office has cosponsored this series of conferences with the National Institute of Public Affairs. That we have 12 of our top people attending this conference is strong evidence that we consider them an important and valuable opportunity to gain a realistic understanding of urban problems and programs. This knowledge is essential to making independent evaluations of Federal program operations, which represent a large part of our operations in the legislative branch of the Federal Government.

This conference will be similar in many ways to the 12 which have preceded it in other cities. But no two cities are alike and different people are involved in each conference. Like the human hand, the shape is the same but the fingerprints are not.

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For, five days and nights you will be deliberating with each other and with many outside knowledgeable resource persons about why cities are what they are, what they are becoming, and how the good can be extended and the bad eliminated. Each of you will come out with a better grasp of some of our nation's problems.

The study of urban problems and the impact of Federal Government efforts to alleviate them is, of course, not new. This particular conference has an added element of timeliness, however, in that only ten days ago President Nixon sent to the Congress Part 5 of the State of the Union message. This part was directly concerned with the quality of life in American cities and towns and it set forth the President's proposals for new directions in community development in this country.

What is so timely about your conference is that you can carry the many discussions to come this week in the light of the President's main theme of disenchantment with many past Federal efforts to help solve urban problems.

As many of you know, he discussed proposals which may lead to different ways of tackling urban problems and he specifically mentioned:

- Revenue sharing for community development purposes.
- Establishing a new Federal Department of Community Development.
- Providing financial assistance for planning, developing, managing and evaluating the results of local community problems.
- Studying new ways to get enough decent housing.
- Assisting in meeting urban mass transit needs.

Without my leaning in one direction or another with respect to the President's proposals, I do wish to mention that you have a great opportunity to study, while you are here in Memphis, many facets of its problems in relation to some possible changes in the overall manner in which the Federal Government will try to help out.

A conference of this kind can do many things but there is one thing it cannot do. It won't give you solutions.

Your schedule is a full one and you may not be able to adequately evaluate the meaning of everything you see or hear. As one previous participant recently said,

"We may not know what it adds up to for six months." One could draw that time span even longer or even argue that we will never know. The effects of education and experience on our attitudes and on our tendencies to act cannot be precisely measured.

You will hear words and see things that will cause you to do a lot of thinking. First, of course, you will think about all those things that people who are worried about our cities usually think about--such as urban and suburban sprawl, congested traffic, inadequate housing, pollution of various kinds, lack of money, the poor and the put-upon, crime, quality of leadership, multiplicity of governments and government programs, and so on.

Second, you will probably think about what more can be done to better mobilize and direct the resources of our various governments, our technology, our economy, our private enterprise, and above all, the energies of our people.

Third, and probably most significant, you are likely to think about yourselves--not only as government officials or as program managers or as auditors--but as private citizens living during a period of great stress and strain and concerned with improving the quality of life of everybody.

In this conference you will have an opportunity to do much for yourselves and for each other. You can be both learner and teacher. We all have different backgrounds and reservoirs of experience, and conferences like this provide great opportunities to share knowledge.

The terms "establishment" and "power structure" have some currency these days and you will very likely hear them during the coming week.

To some, the term "establishment" signifies evil; to others, it signifies where the power lies; to still others, it represents the way things get done.

What you may come to question in the next few days is whether we have the vision to understand what needs to be done in our time to improve urban conditions, whether

we really are able to get done what needs doing, and whether, therefore, we really are as powerful as we think. This is not intended to lead you to pessimistic speculation but to encourage you to take full advantage of this week away from your regular day-to-day activities and really give a major national problem some serious thought.

Thank you and our very best wishes for a most fruitful week here in Memphis.

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