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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
AT NEBRASKA STATE CONFERENCE ON  
NATURAL BEAUTY  
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Governor Morrison, Distinguished Friends:

The President asked me to bring you his warm wishes for a fruitful conference.

This has been a thrilling, memorable, whirlwind day, and all day long I have been paying silent tribute in my heart to the leaders and planners and people of Nebraska who are doing so much to enhance the State's great beauty.

Governor Morrison, I congratulate you, and the more I learn about your State, the more I learn how much your guiding hand has helped this State's conservation and natural beauty programs.

Certainly, this is well-known in Washington, where the man-made lakes and picnic areas along your own Interstate Highway #80 are pointed out as an example of excellence, and where Secretary Udall told me just a few days ago that Nebraska has one of the best plans for developing new parks and outdoor recreation facilities of any state in the Nation. And I appreciate, Governor, your taking your know-how to the recent state beauty conference in my native Texas.

Nebraska is truly "Big Sky" country! There is no inspiration more rewarding than standing on the prairie with the spaciousness of the heavens wrapped around you, and looking out to the farthest star. You, who live in the Great Plains of America have this window on the universe as your daily fare, and I think it gives you a special perspective and special excellence in your daily lives as well.

That is why we are here today, to talk about the special excellence that beautiful surroundings impart and talk about ways to assure that Nebraska's beauty is to be maintained and enhanced.

One of the great strategists of all time--the Emperor Napoleon, once said that "Where flowers degenerate, man cannot live." The

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demise of natural beauty is a haunting challenge in a Nation that is covering over a million acres of ground with asphalt and concrete every year, and a Nation that lost \$500 million worth of crops last year due to air pollution damage, a Nation that has an unpaid water pollution debt ranging into billions of dollars.

In its early days, America was endowed with an invigorating landscape, with wilderness that exacted bravery, with waters and hills and places of sublime quiet to refresh both body and soul.

Historians contend that it was the interaction of a freedom-loving people and a majestically rich and inspiring continent that made us--the American people--what we are. If so, then the very birth-right of America is at stake in our present determination to assure the beauty of this land is preserved.

A year ago, the President called a Conference at the White House to determine what could be done about saving and restoring America's natural beauty. The results of the Conference have exceeded any of our expectations!

Since then, over 20 state governors have held their own conferences, like this one. Regional meetings and metropolitan meetings have been held from East to West and North to South and a host of projects have been initiated. Few are the mayors who have not named a civic beautification committee--or at least have it under consideration!

Let me underscore a few of the headlines of the past year, because the battle for beauty is front page copy all across the Nation.

In New York a few weeks ago, we dedicated a new playground and open space at the Riis Plaza. It is an inviting, charming place that makes one want to be a child in blue jeans to climb and crawl and explore all the ingenious play equipment that has been developed there in the heart of Manhattan. Brick igloos, a tumbling waterfall, tree houses, rock paths through a maze of bushes all invite the child away from his cement world. Riis Plaza is not an accident, but the result of careful study of the unique potential of childhood in a metropolis, and it heralds a new sensitivity to all the delightful things that a downtown park can be. What a gratifying answer to the alternative--children playing ball on littered and dangerous streets.

In another city, Washington, we have a beautification program that is very dear to my heart.

In the short space of a year, over 400,000 flowering bulbs have been added to the parks and roadsides of the city, plus 16,000 shrubs, and 5,000 trees. Small triangles and squares once adorned only with wild onions and perhaps a drooping bench have been turned into gardens that are a delight to the eye.

We are adding shade trees that cool streets in the long, hot summers, and provide a tracery of branches against the sky in the winter. On some avenues the trees will be in a collonade three deep, so that pedestrians are insulated from the rushing noise of passing traffic.

Now that summer has come, the newly-landscaped "parklets" are a favorite spot for picnic lunches for office workers, and resting in the shade for elder citizens, and Washington's restaurants are joining the allure of outdoor living by setting up quaint sidewalk cafes, complete with striped awnings and tubs of shrubs, or flowers.

A breath of life, a breath of beauty is what every city wants. They do not come automatically off the drawing boards, but they come--happily--when lots of people care about their city and are willing to make the small investments in beauty that pay immeasurable dividends in enhancing the quality of everyone's daily life.

There is another facet of beautification in the Nation's Capital which I think has measurable significance, and which may be instructive to other urban areas, perhaps this one. And that is school-ground beautification. What a nice gift, or memorial, to give a school--some blooming trees and flowers! What a good opportunity for the science and art classes to learn about the plants, how to take care of them, how they look and grow! In Washington, where we have landscaped nine schoolyards, the janitors are our greatest fans. They have discovered that there are no more broken windows at schools with attractive landscaping--less litter--a new sense of pride.

I emphasize these projects involving children, because one of the great facts of our time is that half the population of the United States is less than 30 years old.

Modern planners must "think young" and think in new terms of environments that are conducive to youthful adventure and exercise.

New, large parks, such as are being planned on the fringes of Omaha are essential, and so are long trails for horses and bicycles, and clean waters, close to home, for that summer afternoon swim.

Ten days from now I will be meeting in Washington with a National Youth Conference for Natural Beauty and Conservation, and the young delegates there from 50 states will be mapping out their own beautification programs.

There is other good news that I want to share with you too:

Americans are a people very much on the move, and more than ever before, today's travelers want their route to be just as enticing and satisfying as their destination. Passage of the Highway Beautification Act last autumn is giving States a practical tool for landscaping their roadsides and preserving choice wayside vistas.

The Nation's major petroleum companies are joining in the quest for greater roadside beauty by seeking expert architects and good design for their service stations, and making them compatible with their neighborhoods. Flowers and shrubs will be a part of the whole new look. Shell Oil has found that its sales have increased anywhere from 10 to 25 percent in those stations where beauty was given top billing. Business goes where the environment is attractive.

I am delighted to learn that all of Nebraska's service stations will have litter barrels as part of this state's beauty crusade.

More and more we are outgrowing rank wastage of resources. It used to be that anything from garbage to cars to mine slag could be jettisoned anywhere, but today we are learning that "anywhere" is always "somewhere" special to someone.

I'm glad your state is looking ahead and asking for a review of Nebraska's waste disposal practices with an eye toward reclaiming spots of beauty and turning discarded rubbish into productive raw materials.

It is the same kind of conservation-mindedness on the part of great Nebraskans that overcame the ravages of the Dust Bowl and made Nebraska the first state west of the Mississippi River to place all its agricultural land into soil and water conservation districts.

Nebraska has a national reputation as the "Tree Planter State"--not only because that most popular of beautification institutions, Arbor Day, began in Nebraska--but a reputation earned because a whole generation of Nebraskans has made a commitment to improving its legacy to the future.



There are few spots in America more tranquil and lovely than the farmscapes of Nebraska, with buildings nestled in a grove of cooling trees, or the towns with tree-shaded streets that impart their serenity even to the chance visitor. These are riches that make life better. They assure me Nebraskans will continue their lead in the Nation's natural beauty movement.

For all Americans, that movement is advancing from the countryside to the cityscapes and roadsides--where people congregate, and where they travel.

The big day in your future is Nebraska's Centennial Year: 1967, and one of the reasons I wanted to come here today is to tell you how thrilled I am to learn about the Centennial improvement contest sponsored by the Division of Nebraska Resources and public spirited industries. Governor Morrison was kind enough to let me preview the progress report some communities have submitted, and they are rich with promise.

Great Island, I learned, is developing a gay downtown mall, and these 400 young people are building themselves a new teen center. Table Rock is placing "welcome" signs at the entrances to the city, and laying a new dustless surface on city streets as well.

Right here in Lincoln, forgotten gullies are being filled to form neighborhood parks full of activity and fun.

New parks do not come cheaply anywhere in the country, particularly in cities like Lincoln and Omaha where land values have increased by more than 50% in the last four years. But crowded cities need more than ever some open spaces. I am delighted to see this State making imaginative use of a small portion of its cigarette tax to finance today's urgent park opportunities.

One of the boldest projects anywhere in the country is the 1,000 acre riverfront park that is taking shape in Omaha. Thanks to the foresight of the Eppley Foundation and a score of civic leaders this area near the airport is blossoming into a city-sized playground.

It may well become the nucleus of a new look toward the Missouri River, which can be cleaned of its burden of pollution and reclaimed for wider and more meaningful public use.

As I flew into Nebraska this morning, I did what any good traveler does: I looked at a map.

I saw a State that since prehistoric times has been a passageway, first for nomadic Plains Indians, wandering south and north, and then for the great thrust of westward migration--thousands of feet pounding the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail, and even the flying hooves of the Pony Express.

Nebraska is still a passageway between the crowded Eastern seaboard and the vacationland of the West, but it can become more and more a place to go to as well as through if its scenic and historic features are wisely developed.

The Platte River Valley was the route of the pioneers, and today it is the route of Interstate #80, a prime corridor that can be developed for camping and swimming and a prime opportunity for telling and reliving a great historical saga.

In the northern part of the State there is another famous passageway--the trail of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, those great geographer-adventurers who spent two thrilling months in Nebraska, and whose footsteps can be followed today. (I'm told that their original campsites can still be found!)

There are other enticing and wonderful vacation spots too: the scenic Sandhills country, and the secluded peacefulness of the Niobrara River, with its springs and waterfalls, that can become any traveler's mecca.

Nebraska's "rite of passage" into the future is to protect and enhance these assets of beauty and let the rest of the world know you have them.

It is a job that cannot be done by one good governor, or one good committee (though I must add that it cannot be done without them), but it will take an extra push by every citizen who has the State's future at heart.

From what I know of Nebraskans, and from the faces I see in this room, I am certain that you will succeed--not only in having a glorious Centennial, but in making Nebraska all that it can be.