

REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
AT THE DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL  
AREA OF MONTEVIDEO, MINNESOTA

FOR RELEASE AFTER 10:00 A.M.  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1967

Office of the Press Secretary  
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Mr. Mayor, Mr. Aaker, Mr. Secretary -- friends:

There are 17,000 towns across the country with less than 6,000 people -- but I am especially glad to come to this one, because Montevideo has taken action which makes it an example to the others.

I have enjoyed this morning thoroughly, and I know my traveling companions have, too -- especially Secretary Robert Weaver who deals with the problems of cities. He is so pleased to see one town where you can find a place to park!

Our group arose this morning at dawn in Washington, flew by jet across 1225 miles and eight states; boarded a bus and drove 60 miles across two states to get here. So you know we really wanted to come to Montevideo!

Your own Orville and Jane Freeman had told us that what we would see would be well worth the effort. And it certainly is!

I am beginning to see evidences of this kind of new zest as I travel. What is happening here is beginning to happen other places. You have a head start.

About 71 million Americans live in towns of 10,000 persons or less. In many of these towns, the streets are coming alive with commerce and industry, old problems are being solved in new ways and the arts are flourishing.

The Census Bureau estimates that in the past 20 years, 200 of these towns have disappeared from the map, and across the land, hundreds of others have settled into a coma. Opportunity went to the city, and the people went after it.

These ghost towns of the 60's have been created not by industries that died -- such as gold rush towns or coal mining communities, but by populations that simply moved to payrolls and excitement in the city. These towns have literally been dying on the map.

There are no tombstones for them. But if there were, the tombstone might read:

"Here lies fresh air, a place to play, friendly neighbors. It was great while it lasted."

There is no chance of that decline in Montevideo -- and I want to congratulate you for setting the pace for other towns.

There is no secret in this land that many of our cities are beset with problems that breed crime: bad housing, rats, pollution, congested traffic, streetside boredom -- perhaps the most dangerous of all.

The re-energized small towns across this country may offer one of the important answers to that rising problem. That is why I am glad that our government has joined in with localities like Montevideo for action such as we find here today.

Now the speed of modern transportation, which once drained off the small town to the city, may be the very artery which pumps life back into the small town with new industries, new residents.

Over the past few years, the fact of American life has been that the traffic was all one way: into the city.

One thing my husband has been striving for -- is to give Americans a choice. Once, they had to go to the city for jobs, amenities -- and entertainment. If these things are available in small towns, might not some of the traffic of people be reversed?

And so I salute you for making your own place on the map secure, -- and happily -- for refusing to give up, and for rolling out such a gay fiesta carpet that says for all who come this way: "Welcome to Montevideo, a good place to live."

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