Radio Address by Col. Lawrence Westbrook, Assistant Works Progress Administrator, To Be Delivered at Boston, Tuesday, March 31, 6:15 to 6:30 p.m., Over the Yankee Network of the National Broadcasting System.

I think it is important that the people of New England, and more particularly those people in New England who live in sections devastated by the recent floods, understand clearly what may be expected from the Works Progress Administration in the way of assistance toward repairing the damage that the floods have done. The explanation that I shall give will be based upon legislation already passed by Congress and upon executive orders and letters of authority issued by the President. I shall not discuss proposed legislation, nor shall I attempt to define the powers and limitations of agencies of the Federal Government other than the Works Progress Administration.

First, I want to explain that flood work conducted by the Works Progress Administration is being financed under two separate letters of authority from the President. The first letter was dated February 29, 1936, and was signed by the President upon the basis of representations made by our engineers, to the effect that the unusually heavy snowfall and ice accumulation generally throughout the country this year might be expected to result in serious flood conditions when this snow and ice should begin to thaw. This letter gave the Works Progress Administration authority to expend a maximum of something over $18,000,000 in emergencies resulting from flood conditions. Upon receipt of this authority, the Works Progress Administration made tentative allocations from the $18,000,000 to those states in which a survey indicated serious flood conditions as being probable in the future. Under these allocations, the Works Progress Administrators of the states concerned were authorized to use the funds provided to them, at their discretion, for the protection of life and public property in any emergency caused by floods. The fact that these steps had been
taken by the President enabled the Works Progress Administrators of the flooded states to immediately and upon their own initiative utilize their complete organization at the time when their services were needed the most. It is to the everlasting credit of these State Administrators and their staffs, and particularly of the workers themselves, that they not only did not hesitate when the call came, but that they worked without thought of hours or compensation. I do not, of course, mean to single out the Works Progress Administration in this respect. All other agencies of the Government--federal, state and local--were equally prompt and effective. I doubt that there has ever been a clearer demonstration of the genius of the American people for the cooperative meeting of a public emergency than that which was witnessed in connection with the recent floods.

It does seem proper, however, to point out that the emergency was foreseen and that ample provision was made for the taking of immediate action with complete freedom from the restraints of normal Government procedure. All of the work that has been done up to this time in the flooded areas has been done under the authority of this first letter of the President's. As is well known, this type of work has been the effecting of temporary repairs, emergency health and sanitation measures and rescue work.

The second Presidential letter, dated March 21, 1936, authorizes the Works Progress Administration to allocate not to exceed $25,000,000 for repair or replacement of publicly owned structures and utilities damaged and destroyed by floods of 1936. This second letter was issued, of course, on account of the floods which we have just experienced, and it is intended that the funds authorized thereunder will be used for projects of a more permanent character than those conducted under the authorization granted in the first letter. Most of these projects will require plans and specifications and will necessarily not be susceptible of being inaugurated as rapidly as the temporary emergency projects now being carried out under the first authorization.

I do not mean to indicate, however, that projects conducted under the second, or $25,000,000, authorization will be handled in the same manner as normal Works Progress projects. It is recognized that these projects are also of an emergency character, and there will positively be no unnecessary delay in
getting them under way. As an instance of the dispatch with which such projects may be handled, I cite the fact that on last Friday the Works Progress Administrator for Connecticut submitted six projects involving a total expenditure of $300,000 in the City of Hartford to our Engineering Division in Washington, by telephone. Thirty minutes after he placed the call, he had received authority to proceed on these projects, and they are no doubt already under way if the water has gone down sufficiently in Hartford to enable work to begin. In no case should such projects, unless they involve unusually intricate problems of engineering, require more than 48 hours for action in Washington after submission by State Administrators.

It should be made clear that the allocations to states, both from the original $18,000,000 and from the $25,000,000 to which I have heretofore referred, are not definite grants of money to the states concerned. They represent tentative allocations of funds which may be revised either upward or downward on the basis of actual requirements which may be determined only after the extent of the damage to public property is fully appraised and the applicability of the Works Progress program to the repair of such damage has been determined.

The responsibility for the selection of specific projects to be undertaken in connection with the repair of flood damage will rest with local authorities. In this respect, we shall follow the same principles that have governed us in the carrying out of our normal Works Progress program. Many people do not understand that all of the projects that are financed from Works Progress funds are selected, not by Works Progress Administration officials, but by the authorities in charge of local governmental units. The responsibility of the State Works Progress officials in connection with these projects is first, that the projects selected give employment to the destitute unemployed in the community concerned, and second, that the funds provided are expended in accordance with the mandate of Congress as expressed in the act appropriating the funds.

The limiting factors governing the selection of projects are the skills or the lack of skills of the destitute unemployed in the community concerned and the number of dollars available to give these particular people work.

These limiting factors are very real, and they cannot be waived. For example, if we have in any given community 100 destitute unemployed to whom we
must give work and $100,000 is available to give this hundred people work for a year, we cannot approve a project in that community costing $100,000 which gives only 75 of these people work. Also, it is perfectly obvious that we will not find any one project on which this entire 100 people can be given work. We are therefore confronted with the problem of working out cooperatively with the local authorities the selection of a series of projects which, with the funds available, will employ the entire 100 people and which will be of maximum social and economic benefit to that community.

This selection of projects under the limitations which I have described is really a most interesting procedure. Let us take this hypothetical case of 100 destitute employable persons in a given community with a hypothetical $100,000 available to give them work for a year.

First, we would examine the occupational characteristics of the 100 people. We should probably find something like this: 4 carpenters, 2 bricklayers, 2 painters, 1 plumber, 2 plasterers, 4 truck drivers, 18 mill operatives (male), 6 mill operatives (female), 22 unskilled laborers, 3 bookkeepers, 1 barber, 4 stenographers, 2 automobile mechanics, 1 radio operator, 3 real estate agents, 2 boiler makers, 1 locomotive engineer, 1 music teacher, 1 mill wright, 1 baker, 2 welders, 1 detective, 4 janitors, 2 elevator operators, 1 shirt maker, 2 wood choppers, 3 cigar makers, 2 teachers.

With this list in his hand, the local representative of the Works Progress Administration approaches the Mayor who calls in the City Engineer and perhaps all of the members of the local "brain trust." The Mayor already has a list of projects that the City has been wanting to accomplish for a long time, and of course this list is used as the basis of discussion. Obviously, the $50,000 underpass which has so long been badly needed but which requires comparatively little unskilled labor and a maximum of material and skilled labor cannot be accomplished; that is out. Neither can the City Hall be replaced for similar reasons. Other useful and highly desirable projects are eliminated without much question. Finally, after a study of the secondary occupations of the group, it is decided that the 4 carpenters, the 2 brick layers, the 2 painters, the plumber, the 2 plasterers, 2 of the truck drivers and 8 of the unskilled laborers can be used to make an addition to the high school and effect much needed general repairs.
to all the school buildings in the city. A project to cover this work, in the amount of $20,000, is agreed upon, the City contributing $5,000 for the hire of 3 foremen not on relief and the purchase of a part of the necessary material.

The next project decided upon would be the repaving of 12 blocks on Main Street. This project would take 10 of the 18 male mill operatives, 10 of the unskilled laborers, 1 of the bookkeepers, the 2 remaining truck drivers, 2 of the janitors and both of the wood choppers. It would be approved in the amount of $27,000 with the City contributing $5,000 for materials and necessary skilled labor not available from relief.

The next project decided upon would be a sewing room designed to give employment to the 8 female mill operatives, 1 of the stenographers and the 3 cigar makers. This project would be approved in the amount of $12,000 with the City contributing $2,000 in the form of material. The product of the sewing room would, of course, be turned over to the local Community Chest for distribution to the needy unemployables.

And so the local representatives of the Works Progress and the Mayor and his advisers would go down the list, selecting projects of various kinds, until some kind of work should have been provided for every one of the 100 destitute unemployed. Something like this has occurred in every community in America where Works Progress projects are being carried out. Obviously, the Mayor and Works Progress officials, too, would have liked to have built the underpass or to have replaced the City Hall; but if they had used the money for these purposes, then all of the destitute people for whom the Works Progress Administration is obligated to provide work opportunities would not have received work and their care would have been a responsibility of the city. I think that it is entirely proper to request those who would judge our projects critically to always bear in mind the limiting factors to which I have referred. If this is done, I think that instead of criticism, great praise will be given not to the Works Progress Administration alone, but also and principally to the local officials who actually select the projects.

As might well be expected, there is no part of the United States in which greater ingenuity and resourcefulness have been displayed than here in New England. Your local authorities, together with State Works Progress Admi
tion officials who are, of course, also local people, have selected, in my opinion, a list of projects which represent the maximum value obtainable, under the circumstances, to the communities concerned. The misfortune that some communities have suffered as a result of the floods will make possible the selection of even more valuable projects, and I want to assure everyone concerned that the Works Progress Administration will render every possible assistance to local communities within the limitations of available funds and the Act under which these funds were appropriated.

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