The following address, "The Works Progress Administration Program for 1938", was delivered by Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator of the Works Progress Administration, before a conference of New England Mayors in the Hotel Statler, Boston, Massachusetts, at 2:30 p.m. on Friday, September 17, 1937:

I deeply appreciate the honor of being invited to address the Conference of New England Mayors and to participate in your Golden Jubilee today.

Only a few years ago, it was almost unheard of for an official of a Federal agency to address the mayors of American cities on a problem common to both. That day is past, however, and probably will not return.

We have come a long way since Federal and municipal functions were located in separate, watertight compartments with no working relationship between them. Some of the new problems which government must meet are national in scope, and thus require Federal action. At the same time, however, the traditions of local self-government, which in the New World first proved their worth on New England soil, have not been forgotten. Thus a partnership has grown up between the localities and the national government at Washington. My presence at your Conference today attests to the reality of that partnership.
The most important factor in bringing the cities in close working contact with the Federal government has been unemployment relief. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, which existed from 1933 through 1935, was a cooperative enterprise in which the localities and States worked jointly with the Federal Government to relieve the destitution growing out of the depression. Since the creation of the Works Progress Administration in 1935, the relationship between the Federal Government and the cities has been even closer and clearer.

Direct contacts exist between your cities and the WPA at Washington. We are dependent upon your help and cooperation in every aspect of our program. In the first place, local relief agencies, within the rules of eligibility set up by the WPA, certify eligible applicants for employment. The actual selection of certified workers for assignment, of course, is our responsibility.

The planning and operation of projects again bring localities to the fore. It is true that a few projects are sponsored by the WPA or other Federal agencies. The vast majority of WPA projects, however, are local projects. It has been your duty to plan and to propose worthy projects — projects that would be of real benefit to the community. It has been your further duty to sponsor these projects and to assume a large share of the responsibility and cost in carrying them out.

There can be no greater tribute to municipal officials than to say that the overwhelming majority of them have cooperated to the fullest extent in the unaccustomed task of working directly with the Federal
Government in giving useful employment to the destitute jobless.

The future success of the WPA is likewise dependent upon your efforts as well as upon ours in Washington. The WPA is a joint enterprise for the benefit of the unemployed; it can only achieve its main purposes with the active cooperation of the local sponsors and local government agencies. Before discussing the nature of the WPA program for 1938 let me make one basic fact clear. I can speak with some definiteness concerning our plans only for the first half of 1938. As you know, we have an appropriation which is to carry us through next June, and we know generally the types of projects and number of persons to be employed until then. Description of a program for the second half of 1938, however, involves crystal gazing since there are so many changing and unpredictable factors in our national economy and political life which must necessarily influence our program.

Some time before next June Congress will decide the amount of the appropriation we are to receive and will outline broadly the type of program which it desires us to prosecute. The scope of the program will no doubt be influenced greatly by the size of our unemployment and relief problems next spring, by future employment prospects, by fiscal considerations and by a dozen other vital factors. And, naturally, even our most capable economists and political scientists are unwilling to make predictions concerning these issues.

The main point I wish to emphasize is this: We can tell fairly accurately the size and nature of the program through June 1938; but it would be more speculation to talk about the WPA program after that date. I think we can assume that the nature of the Works Program will not change materially; that much the same types of projects will be continued. The size of the program, however, rests on factors which are now unknown or indefinite.
Let us take a brief glance at the accomplishments of this cooperative program before discussing the future WPA program. Because there has been a greater amount of unemployment distress in the populous urban areas, the program of the WPA has been of special importance there. You officials, who are in direct contact with the realities of unemployment in your communities are well aware of what WPA has meant to the cities. Our latest figures show that 44 percent of the total number of WPA workers have been employed in the larger cities of the Nation, in the so-called "urban counties" containing cities of 100,000 or more inhabitants. Figures for March 1937 show that almost 90 percent of the WPA workers were then employed in counties containing towns or cities with more than 2,500 population.

We have thus depended largely upon municipal officials to suggest projects on which the needy employables of the Nation could be given work at useful labor.

As you well know, these thousands of WPA municipal projects have not been foisted upon the municipalities by any bureaucrats in Washington. They have been chosen from proposals submitted by the cities themselves, on the basis of the value of the completed project to the community and its immediate usefulness in relieving unemployment. Local initiative and ingenuity are responsible for the project proposals. Local supervisors and workers are largely responsible for the management and prosecution of the projects.

Despite the cries of some professional alarmists, the cities have not surrendered their functions to Washington. The economic crisis, which cut more deeply into local revenues because of local dependence upon the property tax, plus the growing demands for governmental services, made Federal financial aid imperative in meeting relief needs.
It needs to be reiterated here that the cities have carried out their end of the job exceedingly well. If additional proof were needed, critics of the program might glance at the rising local expenditures for all relief purposes and further note the amount of contributions which the cities have made for WPA projects within their borders. Sponsors' contributions for the nation as a whole, for projects completed by March 1937, have averaged 17 percent; and on such projects as streets and sidewalks, schools and other public buildings, where cities are the chief sponsors, the local contributions often run much higher, to 20 or even 25 percent. These contributions have remained at a high level despite the increasing contributions made by localities to other forms of relief.

As a result of this Federal-local partnership, there is now scarcely a community which cannot point to highways, roads, or streets constructed with the help of WPA funds, or to public buildings repaired or improved with this Federal financial assistance. Your children are playing safely in parks and playgrounds created as WPA projects, and every citizen is benefited by the parks, swimming pools, tennis courts, and golf courses provided under that Federal program.

The health of urban dwellers is safeguarded by the numerous projects involving sewer systems and other sanitation facilities; commerce and business in your cities are aided by the construction of airports and other transportation projects.

For women on relief, projects have been set in operation whereby clothing and bedding have been processed and distributed among the needy.

"White Collar" projects have aided non-manual workers. Adult education classes and nursery schools have been established and maintained, hot lunches prepared and served to needy school children.
necessary library and clerical work performed, and art projects, theater projects, research and statistical surveys carried on.

These activities under the Works Progress Administration have not only benefited the cities through the work performed; they have kept skills and morale alive in the destitute jobless who would otherwise have sunk into complete despair. And they have lifted a tremendous relief burden that would otherwise have had to be borne by the cities alone.

Under the WFA program for the first half of 1933 it is anticipated that the same types of benefits will flow to municipalities. The size of the program, of course, will be smaller than in previous years. Present Federal funds for relief and work relief are drawn from an appropriation of a billion and a half dollars made by Congress. In line with an express provision of the Appropriation Act, it is now our duty to make these funds stretch through June 1933. We have no other choice. Congress has ordered that the billion and a half appropriation, together with such unexpended balances from previous appropriations as the President may allocate for the purpose, must be so administered as to last through the fiscal year.

Because of this fact, we are making every effort to plan our program so that most of these funds will flow directly to the man on the job. We have trimmed administrative expenses to the bone. It will be your job, more than ever before in the past, therefore, to finance a larger share of the non-labor costs of the projects. It is especially the heavy construction projects that will require your fullest financial cooperation, since this type of project bears the highest non-labor costs.

As you no doubt are well aware, the size of the WPA program has been cut considerably in the last few months and we are now employing about one and a half million persons. This figure represents the actual low
point of employment during this summer. With the coming of cold weather and consequently greater need, it is expected that the WPA employment will increase beginning in November. If past experience may be used as a guide, employment will probably exceed 1,800,000 by the coming February and March, from which point it will again recede during the spring. Thus it can be seen that we will be able to meet the seasonality of destitution to a considerable extent even though we must make the appropriation last throughout the fiscal year. As you know we have been tightening up relief requirements, and at the present time, about 97 percent of the persons employed on the program have been certified as in need of relief. Financial considerations make it impossible for us to give employment to a larger number during this fiscal year. We do not, however, anticipate that the program will be cut further unless increased business activity makes this possible.

As I have already indicated, while we have been forced to curtail the size of the WPA program, its aims and the nature of its activities will remain practically the same. The Act of 1937 establishes four general classes of projects for which State or local governments may request WPA financial assistance. At first glance this may seem to be a sharp reduction from the 10 classes of projects set forth in the 1936 Act, but the change is merely one of phrasing, to simplify accounting procedure. It does not narrow the choice of new projects for which you may ask funds.

Some of the $1,500,000,000 appropriation will be allotted, of course, for projects already applied for and given WPA approval. The 1937 Act provides that approximately $415,000,000 may be spent for projects on highways, roads, and streets. Six hundred and thirty million
dollars is available for projects, such as public buildings, parks, public utilities, rural power systems, sewerage systems, waterworks, airports and other transportation facilities, flood control and similar conservation work. Most of these undertakings, you will note, are particularly applicable to cities — for there the bulk of unemployment still exists. Furthermore, "white-collar" projects and women's projects are provided for with approximately $380,000,000 and the National Youth Administration may receive about $75,000,000. The funds available for any of these categories of projects may be further increased by adding the unexpended balances from earlier relief appropriations, or by transferring from other classes up to 15 percent of the class limitation.

According to our latest available figures for 1937, by far the largest percentage of funds (37 percent) has been allotted to the highway, road, and street projects; parks and other recreational facilities have constituted the next largest expenditure (11 percent), with public buildings (10.8 percent), white-collar (9.7 percent), sewer systems (9.3 percent), and goods projects, such as sewing and canning (8.7 percent) following in order of size of Federal expenditures. It will be for the individual communities to decide, both in terms of financial sponsorship and in terms of community needs, how far this outline will be maintained or changed during the fiscal year of 1938.

I may add that the WPA will not receive all of the billion and a half appropriated by Congress. The 1937 Act provides that the appropriation is also to be available for expenditure by the Resettlement Administration for such loans, relief, and rural rehabilitation for needy persons as the President may determine. It is too early to say how large a sum will be used for these purposes.
The employment provisions of the 1937 Act for project workers in
in the coming year are much the same as those which have been prevailing
heretofore. Workers on a WPA project will continue to put in only the
necessary number of hours to earn the stipulated "security wage" for their
region, skills, and class of work; but the rates of pay are not to be
less than the rates paid for work of a similar nature in the same locality.
Persons in actual need are to be given preference in employment, regardless
of previous relief status. The fact that a person has received either
adjusted-service bonds or payment of an adjusted-compensation certificate
is not considered in determining actual need of employment.

The general provisions in regard to disability or death com-
pensation and benefits, as contained in the Act of February 15, 1934,
remain substantially unchanged. However, the maximum monthly compensation
rate is raised to $30, exclusive of medical costs, and authorization is
given for the establishment of a special fund for the payment of such
benefits in an amount to be determined by the United States Employees'
Compensation Commission.

A few provisions of the 1937 Act, however, are different from
those previously in force. The law now specifically provides that no
relief person employed on a work project may be retained on that job if
he refuses an offer of private employment, at work he is capable of doing,
if the private employer offers equivalent wages and reasonable working
conditions. The 1937 Act further encourages WPA workers to accept private
employment, even if it be temporary, by the provision that any such worker
shall be immediately reinstated under WPA if he loses his private job
through no fault of his own and is still in need of relief. These statu-
tory provisions, of course, are in essence merely congressional ratifica-
tion of a policy we have been following since the creation of WPA.
The question of American citizenship is also taken into account under the WPA program. All the agencies cooperating in the works program are forbidden, as under the 1936 law, to employ knowingly any aliens illegally in this country, while a new restriction also forbids the employment of aliens who have not declared their intention of becoming citizens. Preference in WPA employment is given to full-fledged American citizen in need of relief, and next, to aliens who took out their "first papers" before the 1937 Act was passed.

Veterans of the World War and the Spanish War are also given employment preference on WPA, according to the law.

With these relatively minor exceptions, however, the WPA program during the coming year is not expected to differ greatly from the program which has been in effect. The types of acceptable projects and the manner of carrying them out will remain about the same. In order to insure that all projects be carried through to successful conclusion, the Act provides that no non-Federal project may be undertaken unless the sponsor signs a written agreement to finance such part of the entire cost as is not to be supplied from Federal funds.

I have already pointed out that lack of funds has caused us to contract the WPA program and made it impossible for us to do what we would like to do -- to give work to at least one employable in each destitute family. It will be your duty therefore, aided by the return of better times, rising local revenues, and the financial aid given to States by the Social Security Board for the care of various classes of unemployables, to care for such employable persons as the Federal Works Program cannot reach.

Thus the existing partnership between the Works Progress Administration and the municipalities has two angles: aid in formulating the
Federal program of work projects, and cooperation in filling the unavoidable gaps in the Federal program. We at Washington, and the destitute throughout the entire country, are counting on you for this double achievement.