For Release to Afternoon Papers
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The following address was delivered by Ellen S. Woodward, Assistant
Administrator of the Works Progress Administration, at a luncheon meeting
of the Women's Court and Civic Conference at the Astor Hotel, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin, at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, November 17, 1937:

I am very glad, indeed, to have the privilege of discussing the program
of the Works Progress Administration with a group of women -- noted as you
are for outstanding public service. True public service can result only
from such intelligent and open-minded study as that which characterizes
your monthly institutes. And so I feel that you -- better perhaps than
many other groups in your State -- are in position not only to appreciate
the objectives of this particular phase of our country's great social
program, but also to evaluate its accomplishments.

Never before has the need been greater for full information and
intelligent understanding concerning this and so many other important
questions directly affecting the welfare of this and future generations.

It is a challenge to women such as you to take the lead in bringing
about a more militant attitude on the part of all women toward public
affairs. We fought for suffrage. Now we should prove that we deserve
it by assuming our full responsibilities as citizens.
Changes in our social, industrial and economic life have created new problems. One of the foremost problems involves the question of how to employ able-bodied men and women constructively. This is the problem which chiefly concerns the WPA.

New social conditions call for new methods. You know that a crisis in the history of our country made it mandatory for our Federal Government to assume responsibilities that State, county and city Governments and private agencies could not longer shoulder. When faced with this crisis our Government had only one of two roads that it could follow. One road led to the Dole and the other to work relief. As WPA Administrator Harry L. Hopkins has repeatedly said - "Give a man a dole and you save his body and destroy his spirit. Give him a job and pay him an assured wage, and you save both his body and his spirit." This theory, I think you will agree with me, has its roots deeply buried within the fibre of our national life.

The Congress and the Administration, weighing public opinion, were convinced that our people did not want the dole. They were convinced that true to the traditions of the settlers and builders of this country, our workers wanted to work for their living. Both the necessary appropriation and the Works Program, therefore, grew out of the American Tradition.

Naturally a huge work program could not spring into existence over night, nor could it all be perfect. However, from the beginning intelligence was used and care was taken in the great task of
bringing together the people who needed work, and the work and services needing people. For all the communities of this country needed buildings, services and facilities that they could not afford with their reduced budgets. WPA projects are sponsored by public tax-supported bodies of states, counties or towns. They represent, therefore, what the communities need and ask for. As a general thing, the sponsor furnishes space, heat, light, equipment and most of the materials. The WPA pays the wages of the needy workers.

And now as to the achievements of the Works Progress Administration:

It has given work to the unemployed;

It has restored their confidence;

It has maintained their morale;

It has enabled them to preserve their skills;

It has paid them wages - not high wages to be sure, but living wages: And those wages, spent for the necessities of life, have flowed through the channels of trade and stimulated business all through the country - thereby keeping thousands of other workers employed.

But that - important as it is - is only part of the story.

This work has been useful. As you travel over country highways and through city streets, you see red, white and blue signs of the WPA.

What do these signs mean? They mean that WPA has done more than give work to the unemployed. It has carried out thousands of public projects all over this country - projects of tremendous permanent value - social and economic.
In considering the cost of the Federal Works program, it is pertinent to remember that in the World War, we increased our National Debt by 22 Billion Dollars. In the War on Depression, we increased it by 10 Billion Dollars. The 22 Billion were spent across the seas -- for destruction. The 10 Billion were spent at Home -- for re-construction.

Today these nations of the world which are piling up armaments for purposes of aggression and those other nations which fear acts of aggression against them are spending from 30 to 50 per cent of their national income in preparations for war. The proportion that we in the United States spend is about 11 or 12 per cent.

The President in his peace address at Chicago said, "How happy we are that the circumstances of the moment permit us to put our money into bridges and boulevards, dams and reforestation, the conservation of our soil and many other kinds of useful works rather than into huge standing armies and vast supplies of implements of war."

The WPA program today employs approximately a million and a half needy men and women.

Under the National Youth Administration as many as 440,765 students were receiving high school, college or graduate aid at one time.

So vast is the WPA program that it is easy to overlook its many accomplishments unless one is familiar with what is being done daily throughout the nation.

More than 16,000 public buildings have been constructed or repaired by WPA labor. These buildings include 8,300 schoolhouses - averaging more than two for every county in the United States.
Do you know that all the public buildings improved by WPA in Wisconsin, if grouped together, would occupy an area larger than the business section of a city of 25,000 population?

More than 26,000 miles of new highways and streets have been built by WPA labor. Over 117,000 miles of roads and streets have been repaired.

Thousands of miles of "farm-to-market" roads—built or repaired by WPA labor—have given large numbers of farmers throughout the country better access to market with the nation's food supplies.

China's historic Great Wall is matched in length by the miles of new sidewalks which WPA workers built in one year.

The WPA is operating a far-reaching program of rural sanitation and draining thousands of acres of malaria swamps.

In Wisconsin, more than 150,500 feet of sewer and over 57,000 feet of water mains have been laid in the Green Bay area alone.

Because of the parks and playgrounds built by WPA, millions of people who cannot afford to belong to country clubs can now swim and play golf, tennis, and other healthful outdoor games.

A report which we received from Wisconsin some time ago declared that if all the parks improved or being improved by WPA in that State were grouped together, they would cover nine townships.

Total wealth created for the nation, through the construction of material things alone, runs into billions of dollars.

Work of a construction nature, while it employs the largest number of people is not, as you know, however, the only activity of the WPA. As fine as this work is, there are many intangible services which are of even more lasting value. And I want to tell you about some of these.
The Division of Women's and Professional Projects, for which I have administrative responsibility, employs altogether about 425,000 needy men and women. It has a widely diversified program.

Workers in this Division are extending library services to thousands of communities which were without reading facilities; providing nursing services to needy families who cannot afford to pay for medical attention; making available a new supply of books in Braille to those handicapped through blindness; extending museum services; producing garments for destitute people on relief; training women for household service; indexing county records; uncovering obscure historical facts and engaging in scientific research of permanent value to our nation; making real property appraisals, tax delinquency surveys, and rendering other needed assistance to local governmental units through Public Administration projects; building up the bodies of physically undernourished school children; providing the advantages of the Arts to culturally starved communities; and performing many other important tasks.

One of the largest women's projects in Wisconsin and the only one of its kind in the United States is a Handicraft project sponsored by the Milwaukee State Teachers' College. I hope that all of you have been down to see this project in operation and examined the beautiful block prints; the rugs, the costumes; dolls and other items made by WPA workers for State and county institutions, WPA nursery schools, and certain of the municipal kindergartens.

The American Library Association pointed out a year and a half ago that 45,000,000 of our people - in other words, approximately one-
third of our population were without access to free public library service. Horace Mann, the father of our free public schools system, made the significant statement: "Had I the power I would scatter libraries over the whole land as the sower sows his wheatfield."

Under the WPA library extension program, approximately 2,600 free libraries have been established, where reading facilities are furnished to communities in which such service had been discontinued or had never before existed. Two thousand traveling libraries are rendering additional services by taking reading materials to approximately half a million persons in isolated rural areas.

A WPA State-wide project in Ohio has made possible a circulation of some 70,000 books and magazines to approximately 300 back country centers in the State. A WPA carrier who operates out from West Union, the county seat of Adams County, follows a route where many of the roads are little more than wagon trails. During bad weather she is forced to change from her flivver, throw her books in a sack, and mount the saddle of her pony in order to ford the creeks and thus reach the isolated one-room schoolhouses.

Twenty-nine libraries, opened up in the State of Wisconsin as a result of the WPA library program, have made available a total of over 530,000 additional books to some 217,000 new readers.

The number of volumes repaired by WPA workers for public schools and libraries throughout the country is found to be almost three times the total number of books and pamphlets in the New York Public Library.
Books in Braille are also being produced by WPA workers, some of whom themselves are blind persons taken from relief. Wisconsin projects for the transcription of books into Braille had completed 300 volumes up to January 1937. The first Braille copy of the Thordike-Century Junior Dictionary was prepared by the Milwaukee Braille Transcription project.

Another service to the blind is the "Talking Book" machine. Ten thousand of them have been produced on a project and are distributed for the free use of the 125,000 blind persons in the United States.

There are projects to index and codify local laws, assessment records, deeds and numerous other documents. For instance, in one WPA district comprising ten Milwaukee counties, discrepancies were found to exist in 25 per cent of the tax descriptions. It was found that as many as three persons were paying taxes on the same piece of property; and on the other hand, thousands of acres of taxable lands had been added to the tax rolls as a result of the survey made by WPA workers.

The Historic American Buildings Survey has been measuring and recording all important examples of the builders' art in America erected before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In each locality the buildings most in danger of destruction have been measured first. The Library of Congress is the repository for the records, preserving them for public use.

One of the houses recorded in the District of Columbia, for example, is that built by Stephen Decatur in 1819 and designed by Benjamin Latrobe, the well known architect of the period. This house has probably figured more
prominently in the affairs of the nation than any other private home in Washington. It is thought that it was of this house that Henry Adams wrote in his book "Democracy."

Public Health services throughout the country have been greatly extended by the WPA through the employment of needy nurses. At the end of the first year nurses had made over 9,000,000 visits -- where examinations or treatments were given to underprivileged families.

In a Venereal Clinic at Chicago, where there are over 3,000 registered cases, treatments average more than a thousand a day. The Clinic head (Dr. Taylor) declared, "We could not continue to accept cases if we did not have WPA help."

The success of a WPA clinic for the treatment of syphilis in a community of Southern Illinois has caused other communities in that section to seek state and Federal support of social hygiene.

One of our most outstanding nursing and public health projects was in Georgia. It was carried on so effectively that in recent months the State Department of Public Health succeeded in obtaining an appropriation for this service. All the WPA nurses have now been taken over on the State payroll.

Dr. T. F. Abercrombie, State Director of the Department of Public Health, has stated this establishment of the public health nursing division to be directly due to the inauguration of the State Nursing project operating under the Federal Works Program.

Now I want to mention our School Lunch Project: The expensive machinery of education is wasted when it operates on a mind listless from hunger. Whether the cause be poverty, ignorance or carelessness, the child is the sufferer. Hot, well-balanced, noon-day meals were served on WPA School Lunch
projects at the rate of 500,000 daily to children in 10,000 schools during the
last school season. These projects, while giving employment to thousands of
needy women, are at the same time building up the bodies - and also the minds -
of undernourished school children all over the country.

WPA sewing projects have become an integral part of the social welfare
program in thousands of communities throughout the United States. In little
less than a year, more than 60,000,000 garments and articles for household
use were made by needy women workers on the sewing projects and distributed
through project sponsors to families cared for by public relief agencies.

Despite the large production figures, however, nearly all communities
are still in need of clothing for their destitute families. During recent
months sponsors of the sewing projects have paid an increased proportion of
the cost of the projects. Here in Wisconsin - as in Illinois and many other
states - sponsors of the sewing projects are supplying not only such essentials
as space, heat, light and equipment, but are paying the entire cost of materials.

Under the Historical Records Survey literally tens of thousands of
volumes containing the original records of the social history of localities
throughout the country have been rescued from otherwise certain destruction.

In New Jersey WPA workers on this project are preparing complete inven-
tories of the records of the State, city and towns -- to be distributed to
State and local public officials, public libraries, historical societies, etc.

On the Historical Records Survey in California, workers -- searching
through the files of the old "Californian," a newspaper published in
Monterey in 1879 -- discovered that Robert Louis Stevenson worked on this
document for $2.00 a week.
One article, "The Old Pacific Capital," was included in a later volume of Stevenson's essays. Many of his later published works were written while he was at work on this paper.

Now for a word regarding the Federal Art, Music, Theatre and Writers' Projects. These -- like all other WPA programs -- were conceived as emergency measures for the relief of unemployment and for the salvaging of deteriorating skills and aptitudes. They have, however, become a cultural force of great social promise and of history making importance in the life of communities all over the country.

Since the beginning of the Federal Arts programs in August 1935, the WPA has successfully rescued thousands of American artists, musicians, players and writers from the wreckage of an economic hurricane that threatened to destroy the very roots and fruits of our Nation's culture.

These projects have given large numbers of our people their first real opportunity to appreciate the Arts. They mark the beginning of a cultural development which cannot fail to acquire momentum as time goes on. In meeting a great community need, they have made a stamp that is permanent.

Beyond its immediate objectives of providing work for the unemployed artists and giving him increased confidence and skill, the program of the Federal Art Project has aimed toward creating new markets for art, removing it from the luxury class and making it available for the enjoyment and possession of the masses of our people.

Among the creative projects, mural painting has been of paramount importance. Eight hundred murals and 17,000 easel paintings have been completed and made available to public schools, hospitals and to other tax-supported institutions.
As one example of community interest, the Legislature of Washington State has appropriated $20,000 toward the material costs and employment of non-certified artist personnel in order to permit the Federal Art project to undertake extensive mural decoration in the State Capitol at Olympia.

Here in Wisconsin, Calvin Peters, a painter of wide experience and exceptional ability has been employed by the WPA to portray Wisconsin’s early history through a series of picturesque and valuable paintings which will decorate the buildings of Stout Institute and other Wisconsin colleges.

It is estimated that prior to the WPA project, only about 10 percent of the people in the country — children as well as adults — had ever had an opportunity to see or study original works of art.

The Federal Theatre Project in hundreds of communities has brought the living theatre to audiences numbering in excess of 22,000,000 persons. It is important to remember that this Federal Theatre audience is for the greater part a new audience.

Can you imagine hundreds of thousands of people who never before had an opportunity to see living actors perform on a stage? It is hard for those of us who have always been accustomed to such advantages to appreciate the dearth of opportunity among literally millions of people of this country.

This new audience has been found in the drought land of the Dakotas, in the Corn Belt of Nebraska, in the hay valleys of New England, in the culturally isolated settlements of the Ozarks and parts of the Carolinas, on the tobacco roads of Georgia, and even in some sections of Greater New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.
The outstanding achievement of Federal Theatre was the nation-wide performance of Sinclair Lewis' play, "It Can't Happen Here." For the first time in history of the American theatre, the curtain rose simultaneously on 21 stages in 13 cities from the Atlantic to the Pacific on the same night. Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" was also a Broadway sensation. Through a unit of the Theatre project — the Living Newspaper — we have developed a new technique, whereby we are presenting in dramatic form current problems of national interest. For instance, the play "Power," the latest edition of this unit, is of great educational value in that it brings forcefully before its audience the unfavorable living conditions under which one-third of our nation lives.

It is noteworthy that nearly 95 per cent of Federal Theatre productions have been by American playwrights. You will be interested to know that many of our small theatre units go upon request into thousands of hospitals and institutions — giving crippled children, the aged and others an hour of release from their pains and sorrows in the magic of the theatre.

The audience for music has been vastly expanded through the activities of the Federal Music Project. Millions of Americans have heard the world's great music for the first time. During the 12-month period just past WPA musicians took part in well over 50,000 public programs and performances before an aggregate audience of 85,000,000 persons.

Encouraging to the American composer is the fact that more than 4,800 compositions by musicians residing right here in America have been performed in project programs.
Among the first agencies to assume responsibility as a cooperating sponsor of the Federal Music Project was the National Federation of Music Clubs, with a membership exceeding 500,000. Mrs. Vincent Hilles Ober, President of the Federation and also a member of the National Advisory Board of the Federal Music Project, declares:

"The Federal Music Project has been successful in awakening a new interest in music and we of the National Federation of Music Clubs must be ready to take our place in maintaining this awakened interest."

Since the beginning of the Federal Music Project, more than 15,600 musicians have been given training at their own skills and work that enabled them to support themselves and families.

The Federal Writers' Project, while providing employment, is also making a permanent and valuable contribution to literature and education in America.

Needy writers have been employed in every State to write and edit a series of books which will form the most comprehensive guide to the United States ever undertaken. The State guides, plus a large number of city and local guides, with pamphlets describing recreational areas and tours by land and water, will provide a graphic picture of the physical resources, industry, agriculture, and social life of the country. This series, when completed, will total more than 300 books and pamphlets. The task, besides being the first attempt to picture American life in its entirety, is the largest and most complex editorial enterprise ever carried out on this continent.

"Wisconsin Circus Lore" was one of the early volumes produced on the W. P. A. Federal Writers' Project in this State. In addition to being a product of the Federal Writers of your home state, it was bound in cloth on
the Milwaukee Handicraft Project. Therefore it has a two-fold interest for those of us connected with the W. P. A.

It is impossible to touch on all phases of the program as I should like, but I have tried to give you certain highlights.

To appreciate fully the work that is being done one must have contacts with the workers themselves. One of the happiest experiences I can have — especially after being in the program for four years — is to leave my desk, visit the projects, and see at first hand the rehabilitating effects of work upon the men and women in this program.

In considering the cost — in dollars and cents — of work relief as compared with direct relief, we must give equal consideration to the value of the preservation of morale, the utilization of human skills and talents, and the material enrichments which WPA workers add to our national wealth through their labors. "The American Nation," Administrator Harry L. Hopkins said, "cannot go forward to the heights of economic well-being on which it has a right to live unless its man-power is used."

In conclusion, I should like to urge you as women leaders — representing some 36 organizations of 20,000 women — to take stock of the benefits that have accrued under the various social programs; re-evaluate the achievements here in your own progressive State; strive to consolidate the gains; and press on to further objectives.

Women as citizens have always been leaders in Social Welfare movements. For years they have been out front fighting for social justice — reasonable hours of work, minimum wages, prevention of child labor, better housing,
and other humanitarian programs. I know that in no section of the country are such objectives more greatly appreciated than right here in Wisconsin, which was the first State to pass laws for Workmen's Compensation and Unemployment Insurance.

We have lived to see many of the principles for which we have fought translated into national law. Can we afford to lose any part of what we have gained? Can we afford to be over-confident, complacent, inert? Remember that while Congress may legislate principles into law, only the people themselves can make a law effective. Legislation must be backed by public opinion if its effects are to be felt by all the people. It is so easy to slip back unless we are constantly alert -- on guard against the reactionary forces that are continuously at work to undermine a structure so recently built as the social program which is in operation today. There are many roads that lead to social security and we should use them all.

I like to quote our President when he said, "We have set our feet upon the road of enduring progress. Shall we pause now and turn our back upon the road that lies ahead? . . . Or shall we continue on our way?"

I believe that you progressive women, and leaders like you all over the country, are unyielding in your determination not only to hold the ground that has been gained, but to push forward militantly toward the objective of a better way of life for the great masses of our people.

And so I dare to hope that throughout the length and breadth of this land women's answer to the challenge will be, "We will continue on our way."