



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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Philadelphia Speech

May 12, 1941

Address by J.C. Nichols, Chief of Supply Section, Production Division, Office of Production Management, before the National Conference on Planning (representing the American Institute of Planners, the American Society of Planning Officials, the American Planning and Civic Association, and the National Economic and Social Planning Association) at the Warwick Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 12, 1941.

(Mr. Nichols, before speaking, announced: Anything I say is my own opinion and not necessarily that of my good chief, W.H. Harrison, or any other member of the Office of Production Management.)

We are confronted today with one of the toughest jobs in American history. We stand united to defend the Western Hemisphere. If we finally, after all aid to Britain, get into war, we will all stand united on every land and on every sea wherever our forces may land us.

City planners, engineers, architects, landscape architects, municipal authorities, economists, charged as they are with the great responsibility of endeavoring to protect the health, decent housing, morals, safety, comfortable living, desire of home ownership, efficiency of our cities and towns best development of our national resources best use of land, stability of urban and rural values, and even the individual character of our cities, must and will first give consideration to the grave defense needs of the hour.

Our defense program, desperately behind in the beginning, slow in starting, is picking up enormous momentum, with an increase now of 600% in the manufacture of tanks, 300% in airplanes, 1000% in powder, 1200% in small arms ammunition, and in fact, 15,000% in some armament items. Yet as said by John D. Biggers that able and hard working head of Production in OPM, these figures must be doubled, tripled, or quadrupled.

Very recently we were only spending annually some one-fourth what Germany was spending in her armament program. (Remember Germany spent 100 millions before we even got started.) Today, we are making certain guns that will use \$125,000 worth of ammunition per hour. A bombing plane costing more than \$3,000,000 with a speed of over 400 miles an hour, cruising radius of 8000 miles, carrying 40,000 pounds of bombs, is not the end of our aircraft progress.

Literally thousands of engineers, scientists, and research experts, gathered from every university and laboratory in our land, are working feverishly day and night to improve every piece of equipment, to develop new articles, in fact, new knowledge in the whole range of our armament program. These men are straining every nerve to build

equipment to combat every new invention that may be sprung by the Axis powers, these men are the spark plugs for the spirit of the Nation. If necessary, they can turn a factory for making electric toasters into making gas masks, or a factory making automobiles into making the most intricate parts of airplanes.

Science is playing an important task in enabling the gunner to aim his shot two or three miles or more ahead of a distant plane or ship, taking into consideration the movement of the earth, velocity of the wind, the magnetic pull, the temperature, and other factors entering into the aiming of instruments and use of optical equipment, a single piece of which may have taken years to grind, and which enable the gunner to direct a hit on an unseen object twenty-five miles or more away.

Items of chemical warfare unknown a few months ago and submarine equipment mark great achievements in our military progress.

A tank weighing up to 70,000 lbs., with a speed of some 500 miles in twenty-four hours, really is a moving fort.

Battleships, destroyers, cruisers, mosquito torpedo boats are being built all around our coastline, involving the studies and skill of years by the able staff of our Navy.

An Army of 1,400,000 men is being rapidly thrown into camps with living and fighting equipment of a superior character heretofore unknown in our land, the result of twenty years of careful planning by our Army.

The food for our Army and Navy today surpasses anything in our history. At 43¢ per man per day, hot fresh food is served, whether the man be in camp, in mobilization, in a bombing plane 25,000 feet in the air, a sailor in a submarine, or the soldier in tropical or subzero area; carefully balanced diet, some 5,000 calories per day – about five pounds of food per man. The grave danger of sickness, which in the Civil War took more lives than bullets, can largely be prevented.

Yes, the food is better perhaps than 60% of our people in the United States eat every day and is building nerves, strength of endurance and fighting spirit in our forces. You may be interested in the figures on food per day for our Army alone.

1,000,000 pounds of meat

600,000 pounds of potatoes

500,000 pounds of fresh fruit

110,000 pounds of coffee

125,000 pounds of butter

700,000 quarts of milk

and so on down the line.

Contrast the splendid preservation of our food by cold storage in ships, camps, air-bases, and everywhere, with the brine salt beef, the dried fruits, and hardtack of early years.

American ingenuity is ably developing substitutes for shortages in materials; for instance, synthetic rubber, magnesium of light weight, or some half-dozen substitutes for

shirting material or for duck which is used in a multitude of items. Stronger, more comfortable shoes to stand a march of 25 miles in a single day. Soldiers in the Army use on an average 3-1/2 pairs of shoes a year, but taking the shoes coming through factories, in transit to central depots, in distribution to cantonments; in cantonment depots, and shoes in use, we must have on hand or in the making about six pairs of shoes for every man. This applies relatively to many items of clothing and camp equipment.

Contrary to general belief, cavalry horses are still important, bred from the finest stallions which have been scattered throughout the country by the Quartermaster Department for years, giving us today some 50,000 horses and mules, the finest ever known in our Army.

Surgical and hospital supplies, some 90% of which before the World War came from Germany, are one of the greatest needs and are being rapidly supplied.

Fire fighting equipment with chemicals to combat types of fires heretofore unknown, is being studied day by day; bombs with an explosive power beyond the dreams of the World War. Yes, it is a struggle for supremacy in technique, a struggle between American leadership, not only in mass production, but in individual, brilliant, scientific achievement in the development of highly specialized pieces of equipment, the result of long research and brain power. In modern communication equipment, the intricate network of millions of miles of wires and powerful radios are almost weird in their elaborate bringing together of the maneuvers of our Army and our ships at sea.

The present defense program of some \$40,000,000,000 is making great progress under our Army and Navy officials, and the able leadership of businessmen, giving their time to help our country defend its life.

With British ships being destroyed some twice as fast as they can build new ones, it is no wonder that "more and more American ships" is the cry of our Government.

American industry today is confronted with the most Herculean job ever imposed upon our country. The whole production machine must be brought into play. It is essential that there be a wide decentralization of every type of defense production. We must not remain vulnerable by over concentration of production of any one type of supplies in any one small area (already well known to Hitler).

We must be prepared to provide supplies to the Atlantic, the Gulf, or the Pacific Shores. We must so scatter our defense plants and our orders for defense goods that we will bring into activity every part of our land. We must put idle plants, large or small, to work. We must even so place plants as to use any labor idle on our farms. We must so scatter our defense activities as to not over concentrate the load on any one part of our transportation system.

We must give heed to possible placement of our defense industries to best utilize the nearby raw products; nearby unemployed; nearby vacant housing, with the least unbalancing of our national economy.

As Mr. William Knudsen, our great leader, has so well said: "We must put every man to work. We must push and push. We must do the impossible."

In all of this, you can work through the Defense Contract Service organization set up under R.L. Mehornay in every Federal Reserve Bank and its Branches – 36 offices – to give information to every section of their opportunity to do their part in our industrial defense program.

All critical and strategic materials must be conserved in anticipation of stoppage of supply from foreign sources. Many priorities and possibly price controls to prevent a spiral of inflation, regardless of impact on civilian uses, must be applied and wherever necessary, American industry and American labor must forget all interests except national defense. Now is no time for furtherance of undue profits or undue social gains. Not too late, but now – today, every man, woman and child in America must think, act, and work for their country's life; make any sacrifice – meet every call or need and respond with the same spirit that in '76 made our country free.

I have said the above to you as Planners – to make a background of our thinking. We must place defense needs first.

What can we do to soften the impact on our plans of our cities and rural areas; our living costs; our patriotism; our unity; our solidarity; our national economic structure? All this gigantic program creates a multitude of problems.

Large, new defense plants may create great problems in traffic, utilities, and overload general municipal facilities, requiring your expert advice and help.

Whole new communities of even fifty to seventy-five thousand population may be demanded over-night near defense plants. Shall these areas later become ghost towns, or may they be planned to relate to nearby cities or peacetime plants and serve a permanent use?

C.F. Palmer, that competent coordinator of Housing is battling these problems. A thirty-five mile radius is adopted from which to draw employees. Careful surveys are conducted to ascertain the number of employed in an area already housed.

Present vacant housing, including single rooms, is counted; ability of private builders to provide new housing is first calculated. Then and then only is necessary defense housing supplied from Government funds.

In my own opinion, defense-housing construction must be held to the absolute minimum. I believe, where we know the demand is temporary and private industry cannot afford to build, we should make every effort to use dormitories, or floating hotels, trailers, mobile houses, demountable houses, or the cheapest construction consistent with decent living standards; otherwise; I view with alarm the impact on other existing home values after the emergency; and the discouragement of new home building when it will be so sadly needed to give employment in our after-math. In creating these new home areas, you as Planners and engineers can give valuable advice.

Perhaps widened highways to more remote present houses can reduce the number of new homes needed. Perhaps the building of new houses somewhat removed from the plant may better fit into future needs of the community. Careful consideration of existing utilities, highways, schools, churches, shopping centers, playgrounds, etc., should influence the location of new housing and save large costs to be devoted to more insistent

defense needs. Every dollar diverted to unnecessary defense housing and new facilities weakens our financial strength for real defense.

Can the placement of defense plant structures and permanent defense housing projects fit into the pattern of the cities' future growth? In this, you can give valuable advice.

Will defense housing projects fit into a community's fire or police protection service?

At least 200,000 defense houses are needed now. Perhaps another 200,000 next year. This presents grave problems.

Perhaps in some areas, you can suggest commuter trains to large groups of unemployed or to available vacant housing to avoid headaches later on.

Shall modern, up-to-date, permanent defense houses in many communities only further create blighted residential areas of competing older houses, still good and serviceable?

Certainly today speed in most instances is too great to stop to clear slums, but let us not create more slums for the future! Let us have the courage to look the issue in the face and build to tear down later on when we know the defense housing would otherwise destroy future private building or even present home areas.

It is regrettable we cannot take more time to help the rehabilitation of many partially abandoned residential sections. Perhaps a way may be found where at least some effort may be made in that direction – saving money, saving areas declining in tax support of the city, and even the structure of the city itself.

Where defense housing will permanently remain, are we building monotonously alike our housing, destroying the personality and individuality of the home? Perhaps this cannot be avoided on account of costs.

Are we building groups of housing – a target for bombing – or are we thinking of safety by scattered development?

Certainly this is no time for an emotional approach to our task.

We must think of cold, hard facts; we must speed defense. But how can we make a terribly bad situation a little less bad? Certainly we should discourage all unnecessary public works at this time, but in some instances, urge continued acquirement of land for future public use when delay will be costly, such as the Fort-to-Fort Drive in Washington. "Too late", the saddest words in planning, must give way to speed, yet without slowing down defense, you can do a lot in helping direct the defense impact on cities – towns – rural areas.

One part of our land should not be drained of its man-power and machines to overload already over congested industrial areas, bringing enormous after emergency losses, lowering of living standards and blighting our land with ghost towns.

Here is where the comprehensive studies of the National Resources Planning Board can be a fine, constructive guide and help to direct development to the best interest

of the Nation as a whole. This Board plans and thinks nationally and only in the interest of our best use of all our resources to the greatest benefit of all our people.

We, as Planners, should help conduct surveys in our various areas as to our ability to help the defense program. We should consider creating widespread national economy and strength not only to defend America, but create a widespread national solidarity to help meet the needs of the Allies as well as to enable us to compete in future international trade. We should even consider some one-third of our population engaged in farming and endeavor to create nearby markets and nearby part time employment for them. Are we thinking of our power resources, our fuel supply, in our spread of the increasing production?

Certainly wherever possible new housing outside city limits should be placed where some kind of county zoning or power of control exists. Or if no such power is in effect, any county having the legal authority should hasten to establish restraints to direct the best orderly development of defense areas and particularly way-side developments.

I also fear the results of so many new plants and new housing on the further decentralization of our cities. We all realize the disastrous tendencies and influences of the past many years; we know the declining values of much of our highest valued central business properties and the increasing areas of close-in residential neighborhoods rapidly becoming large, blighted sections. We know we must re-centralize our cities if we are to maintain our necessary tax income to properly support our cities. Anything which can be done to place these plants without defense sacrifice in our municipal areas zoned for industry, anything we can do to hold new houses within our city limits, should be helpful in preserving the integrity of our cities and towns.

It does not always lose time in the long run to plan our cantonments, and sites for houses to save trees, to fit topography, to fit into a city or county plan and to relate them to existing traffic highways and public facilities.

I view with alarm mushroom, shoddy types of way-side developments which may impinge themselves on our highways for generations. Can we avoid just a little of this probable menace? This speedy, forced type of building is hard to digest. Shall we lose many of our parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas by unnecessary use for defense projects? Certainly you should make every fair effort to help avoid the blocking of essential future extensions of a park, parkway, traffic way or playground.

In Washington, where for fifteen years I have been a member of the Planning Commission under your illustrious Chairman, F.A. Delano, we are dangerously near losing the sacred governmental character of our city, a capital city worth fighting for. Already the defense concentration of some 3500 new employees per month in our capital is overloading our water and sanitation systems, our schools, playground facilities, and our public utilities, creating traffic congestion far beyond our street capacity, making it impossible for one to visit his capital to transact business in comfort, or enjoy its galleries, its Federal buildings, parks, and pleasures.

Our capital city cannot digest within a year a resulting increase of some 200,000 population. In the past twenty-five years, the number of Federal employees in Washington has grown from 26,000 to 156,000; from 8% of the total number of Federal

employees in the United States, to 15%. Certainly there is some reasonable economic limit to the percentage of Federal employees who should be crowded into our national capital.

I believe an effort should be made now to move out of our capital (where the Government already rents some one-fourth of its space) certain non-defense activities into cities where ample vacant office space and public utilities are ready to serve Government needs.

Let us not use money needed for defense in the erection of any unnecessary buildings in Washington. Is it not better to utilize some of the average 17-1/2 percent vacancy in office buildings as exists in one hundred American cities? Here again is where you can lend your guiding hand.

In all these matters, we can certainly help build stronger preparedness for the strenuous telling years ahead.

In closing, I know that we, all of us in this room, have a fierce, rugged love of liberty, mightier than planes, tanks, guns, all of us crave to have a part in national defense. Everyone of us, not delaying a single need of defense, will do our part at home to help direct the whole program in every possible way to the best preservation of our home life, the integrity of the city plans, our over-all production facilities, a balanced national economy, the best use of our resources – all in all – preserving our dear and cherished American way of life against which no foreign power can now or ever prevail.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN065

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to "develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better." The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911-), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.