



*Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols*  
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**Memorandum of the Need of Balanced Agriculture  
and Industry for National Defense**

Statement prepared in July 1940, and mailed to several hundred people

The recommendations of our Advisory Commission vitally affect the success of our defense program and whole economic structure.

In order to meet immediate objectives with utmost speed, which all agree is imperative, we may weaken the whole foundation of our economy unless we at the same time, in a long range program realize the grave need of unity, good widespread morale and national solidarity. We must enlist the support of the entire nation.

Safety demands widespread location of war industries and storage of strategic materials.

In balancing agricultural and industrial economy we will protect our domestic prosperity, our farm population, food supplies, rural and urban unemployment, for defense and foreign trade.

More agreement with the principle of necessity, of balanced economy, and safe geographical distribution of industry will not build defense and security. Long range planning requires courage and constructive thinking in new plant locations and industrial expansion in order to create essential distribution of industry.

Social and political preparedness demands solemn consideration of this whole question – perhaps the survival of our form of government is involved.

We all know intimately the serious plight of the fifteen Middle Western farm belt states, between the Mississippi and the Rockies.

Here only, the census reports disclose an alarming progressive decline of population. Nebraska lost 65,000; Kansas 107,000; Oklahoma 77,000. Many cotton and tobacco areas also show this same disastrous trend.

2,500,000 unemployed in the distressed agricultural regions; our greatest industry bogged down.

25% of our population live on farms; another 25% in farm towns; and a large percentage in cities engaged in processing farm products.

For years our waning agricultural areas have had an increasing shrinkage of foreign markets, and a great disparity in price of everything they sell compared with most things they buy.

The Panama Canal, with lower freight rates, has largely marooned our Inland Empire. The proposed South American cartel might only accentuate the toll upon the American farmer.

The old phrases, "Safe as wheat in the bin," "Bread basket of the world," "Cotton is king." "Corn-fed beef from the States," have long since vanished.

Tenancy upon our farms is increasing at a perilous rate.

Farm peasantry would be a catastrophe.

No sadder picture is found than declining agricultural towns foretelling ghost communities, detrimental to national strength.

Schools, churches, libraries, store buildings, elevators, canneries, creameries, cotton gins, etc. standing unused; an enormous national loss. Can we revitalize these areas?

Mechanization of farming methods is increasing unemployment on farms. Nearby part-time employment in industrial cities should be made available.

Rural regions have the largest percentage of American-born citizens – the least danger of Fifth Column activities. Glen Martin agrees with Curtis-Wright that farm boys are already good mechanics from "fixing it themselves on the farm." These boys readily develop into A-1 mechanics, with little additional training. The territory abounds in city and state mechanical schools and colleges, developing trained mechanical experts, who should be needled into the defense program, in their native communities. We should also utilize the large number of unemployed skilled mechanics in the industrial cities throughout these areas.

A grave human problem is involved in drainage of some of the best youth in our land, as well as older men with stranded families, to far distant cities, uprooting native stock transplanting them with consequent social and economic problems; and with later costly demobilization back into rural states. Our raw materials from the Middle West are now being shipped back east to be fabricated and much of it back to us again, a huge transportation loss, and an unsound economic practice.

Rural areas enjoy our highest birth rate. Population suffers greater decline with too great congestion in large cities.

No greater force for character building exists than the hardy thrifty life of the farmer boy. The backbone of our land is the self-reliant men on the farm.

Rome fell when there was no individual ownership of land; when national unity and morals failed, France fell.

No greater force can be marshaled against the totalitarian forms of government that have seized power in Europe and Asia than a wide diffusion of contented, home owning and land-tilling citizens.

One of our vital problems is the maintaining of our institutions, from within as well as from without. We can have no national prosperity or solidarity if large sections in some two-thirds of our continent are impoverished and drained of its native people and prevented from economic and nearby utilization of its abundant natural resources and

strategic material, a reservoir of great national strength. Factory must balance Farm in order to produce economic health. Increasing nearby consuming population will help balance our economy.

If we fail to recognize a balance of agriculture and industry, it may take our nation a generation to get back to a sound national economy.

Let us take an object lesson from Hitler – when he decentralized industry into the rural sections of Germany.

A farm subsidy of some billion dollars annually plus an immense amount of relief has not solved this No. 1 problem of our nation.

Our farming states will be subject to the draft in the event of war and taxed for defense. They should share both benefits and burdens.

In many of these areas we have a large supply of low cost vacant housing units for industrial employees. Sound policy merits the use of this surplus housing to avoid some of the building of new housing.

The billions to be expended for expansion of naval bases and ships must necessarily be along our shores, further accentuating the congestion of population in cities along our coastline.

Under present plans Army and flying training camps may be largely concentrated in the extreme south, further isolating the Middle West.

There are hundreds of industrial plants suitable for conversion for defense purposes throughout these rural states lying idle or partially operated today.

Present locations of Procurement Depots place Midwestern factories at a great disadvantage in bidding f.o.b. Procurement Depots.

A saving of Government freight can be obtained by locating Procurement Depots in the Middle West.

85 percent of our industry is within a 250-mile border. Shall we repeat the catastrophe of England and France by further concentrating our industrial output in vulnerable areas? Safety we must have. We must think of four frontiers. The greatest possible geographic distribution is sound strategy. Western and Southern railroads were not subject to congestion as were the Eastern railroads during the World War.

Our interior offers a great diversity of fuel supply well removed from bombing without the need of underground storage.

Greater Kansas City, (which lies well within the Eastern half of the U. S.) is typical; supplied by eleven oil, gas, and gasoline pipelines. Nearby is found an abundant supply of coal, water, and electric power.

Twelve railroad systems radiate like spokes of a wheel, reaching every part of the nation. It has Missouri River government barge line transportation to the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Illinois, and the Gulf. National highways, and airways, coast to coast, Canada to Gulf, afford military routes.

All economists, thinking nationally, agree that our welfare is jeopardized by the danger of the further increase of unbalanced agriculture and industry by the necessary speed in rapid preparation for national defense, concentrating too many major industries in the large industrial cities. Our responsibility is, to lessen as much as we can the destructive effect upon the rural states and the weakening of our national strength in our present preparedness program.

Department of Labor reports of purchases June 18 to July 20 disclose only 3 3/4% went to 22 states lying between the Mississippi River cities and the Pacific coast cities, some 60% of the total area contains approximately 1/3 of the population of the U.S. Were the immense construction contracts included, practically all of which have gone to the coast or other areas; the above percentage would be lowered to less than 1%. This is not safe distribution or sound balance of agriculture and industry.

It is our task to assume the responsibility to determine with reason and fairness what government plants are to be built, industrial plants to be expended, and defense purchases to be made, and can logically and soundly be distributed throughout our agricultural states.

The whole problem is basic to our national economy. We had a foretaste of the ugly possibilities of agrarian revolt in 1932. Unfortunately, some rural areas think Industry desires war. I view with alarm the group state meetings being held in the West.

We must see the national necessity of unity, nation-wide economic balance and real national pooling of defense and domestic resources. We must be safe by land, sea, and air. We must be strong and safe from within.

Well-diffused balanced economic order is essential for national defense and international trade in an invulnerable Western Hemisphere.

J.C. Nichols, Director, Miscellaneous Equipment Division, Room 2746,  
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NOTE: Factual data is available in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics; Bureau of the Census; National Resources and Planning Board; Labor Dept. and Federal Reserve System.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN070

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.