

Clean Society Now

Protecting our natural heritage becomes the latest goal of the Great Society.

From all indications 1967 is going to be the year the Great Society takes its second firm step toward becoming the Clean Society.

Last year was the year of the clean waters programs; now, for the first time, a vigorous program for control of air pollution has been put up front in a Presidential message to Congress. And the proposals seem to have reached a Congress that may be ready to put some muscle into enforcement procedures.

Under the title, "Protecting Our Natural Heritage," President Johnson last week asked for legislation to implement a six point air quality program. Major points of the proposal dealt with establishing and enforcing emission standards for heavy contributors to air pollution, establishing regional airsheds and developing regional air quality commissions, and cutting automotive exhaust pollution.

While the message also dealt with highway safety and beauty, development of natural resources on land and beneath the sea, excavation technology and expansion of national parks and wilderness areas, its major theme was an urgent appeal to do something about air pollution.

An immediate legislative comment came from Senator Edmund S. Muskie, (D-Me.), chairman of the pollution subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works. "I was particularly pleased," he said, "with the President's strong recommendations for a comprehensive attack on air pollution. This is our most critical environmental problem and it demands immediate attention."

Senator Muskie might well have been pleased, for many of the President's proposals appeared in a speech he made on Dec. 13, 1966 to the National Conference on Air Pollution. The speech was reprinted in the Congressional Record for Jan. 30 at the request of Senator Jennings Randolph (D-W.Va.), chairman of the parent Public Works Committee.

The subcommittee, Senator Muskie announced, would begin hearings on Feb. 8. John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and Donald F. Hornig, director of the Office of Science and Technology, were among the first scheduled witnesses. During the next two weeks the subcommittee will hold hearings in Los

Angeles, Denver, St. Louis, Detroit and probably also in New York City.

The fast-moving timetable left little doubt that the Senate would move quickly to strengthen the Clean Air Act of 1963. While that pioneering act has given the nation a start on understanding the problem it faces, officials agreed it is not enough.

"... at the present level of control efforts, we will continue to lose ground steadily," observes Secretary Gardner. He blames the backsliding on the "quite lengthy procedure" officials must now go through before any enforcement action may be taken.

Under the draft legislation proposed to the Congress, the HEW Secretary would be empowered to enforce quality standards without such a wait. Foot-dragging polluters could be fined up to \$1,000 a day.

The President's proposals would add \$17.75 million to the \$64.185 million already in the fiscal year 1968 HEW budget request for air pollution. For 1967, the budget calls for expenditures of \$35.56 million.

But nowhere did the President's proposals even mention any sort of subsidy to industry which obviously will be one of the prime targets of any legislation enacted. Instead, the President spoke of Americans' "right to air that they and their children can breathe without fear."

A statement from the United States Chamber of Commerce underscored the omission: "We are disappointed that the President did not propose an incentive program to encourage industry to construct and install the expensive, but non-profitable pollution control and abatement facilities.

"The National Chamber favors an increase in the tax credits allowed for the cost of these facilities (now 7 percent) and a depreciation write-off period of five years (presently 20 years)."

Under the proposed Air Quality Act, enforcement would be largely in the hands of the HEW Secretary. He would be empowered to designate industries that are "nationally significant sources of air pollution" and develop maximum emission standards for them, no matter where an individual plant might be located.

The Secretary would also designate interstate regions needing an airshed program and establish regional air quality commissions in each. Each commis-



sion would "include two persons from each state involved and one Federal official appointed by the Secretary. . . ." Enforcement would still be initiated by the Secretary, and regional standards would have to meet at least the Federal minimum.

The Secretary of Transportation, presently Alan S. Boyd, would be authorized to provide matching grants to the states to help them establish inspection programs for auto pollution control devices being required on all 1968 model cars.

President Johnson said he would direct the HEW Secretary to begin research on health effects of lead and other fuel additives. In addition, he asked Congress to require registration of all such additives.

Finally, the President recommended a jump in support of research on the effects of various air pollutants, and on ways of getting rid of them.

Among other proposals in the lengthy message were:

- measures to encourage development of geothermal heat sources.
- a program for research on better methods of tunneling and ditch digging.
- a comprehensive study of supplies of non-fuel minerals.
- a recommendation for legislation establishing a National Water Commission.