

WNEP-TV Editorials 1972 July-August
& WBRE-TV Editorials, 1972 July 26

WBRE-TV
Wilkes-Barre / Scranton
62 S. Franklin Street,
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18703

EDITORIAL

THOSE GOLDEN YEARS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 1972

When we say not all victims require to be made whole, the certain exceptions we have in mind include the elderly.

The Commission on Economic Opportunity of Luzerne County released a study this week which applies to the City of Wilkes-Barre only and which underscores our concern. The 15,622 persons, aged 60 and over, were affected by the flood; 31% of the flood affected persons depend on Social Security benefits. Nearly 1/3 of all families in the flood area have incomes below \$6,000.00 and an estimated 75% of the 1 and 2 member households in the flood zone are elderly people. An estimated 7,000 elderly residents presently are in need of housing and approximately 1/2 of these will not be able to return to their former homes.

The C-E-O comes to the conclusion that the plight of these victims mandates prompt construction of a minimum of 2,000 low and moderate income elderly housing in Wilkes-Barre. We conclude the report gives dimension to the number of victims for whom the new S-B-A loan program and the temporary housing program of H-U-D are of only limited assistance. No existing program makes it feasible for them to rebuild their destroyed or damaged home; restore their lost personal property nor create any semblance of those fabled "golden leisure years". These are victims for whom there should be no question of our obligation to make as nearly whole as our resources and skills permit. If we can make whole some public services -schools, colleges, hospitals, municipal buildings- we can make at least some of the people who already have paid their share into this society, whole again.

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EDITORIAL

S-B-A

FRIDAY, AUGUST 18, 1972

From the tenor of calls we receive of late, the expected is happening: the fire is shifting from H-U-D to the S-B-A and, it appears, with good reason.

One example that makes the point concerns a property owner whose home sustained deep water on the first floor during the flood and who called in a contractor to estimate cost of repairs. The contractor said it would take 10-thousand dollars to do a proper job and only very reluctantly agreed to a limit of \$85,000.00 when the owner -a man who has difficulty changing a ribbon in a typewriter- said he would do some of the rough work himself. The owner filed for an S-B-A loan of \$8500.00; the S-B-A came back with an appraisal limiting him to a \$4200.00 loan and only under protest, added another \$1900.00 for lost furnishings. To say that the owner, with a \$6100.00 limit for recovery, is discouraged is to put it mildly.

We had heard from previous disaster areas that the S-B-A loan and grant program would be something less than advertised; that would apply on the basis of replacement cost, loans would be closer to the depreciated market value; that loans are granted on as tight-fisted a basis as if the money belonged to the S-B-A employee and as if all of us are poor risks; and, perhaps most important, there is no possibility with S-B-A loans -even with LOANS- that the victim can become whole.

It appears that when the Lord talked about the meek inheriting the Earth, he'd forgotten about those who keep the books. As the victims begin realizing the cost of replacement and the stern limits of the S-B-A loans and the wide gap the two leave to becoming whole; discouragement and disillusion will set in. More and more it looks like this may be the Winter of Discontent and in which H-U-D will be the Angel of Mercey and S-B-A the villain.

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EDITORIAL

MODULAR HOUSING

MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 1972

Very few of us buy custom-made suits, custom-made shirts, hand-made underwear, socks or shoes yet, virtually all who buy a home buy custom-made houses. When one considers the economic strain on most individuals, the urgent shortage of housing for the general public and a society that rests on a mass production technology, a custom-made house for the average citizen is ridiculous. To meet the permanent housing needs of the flood ravaged area, a custom-made house is an impossibility.

It is true that the word "modular" housing has been made anathema by private builders and developers, the building and trades unions, and by public experience with shoddy building as a modular housing industry was emerging. However, because some segments of the industry have improved the product into truly quality structures that still are economically competitive, there is new respectability and new promise in modular housing. Much of the exciting, handsome and effective housing available and on the drawing boards today is modular housing. All of us remember the impact of Habitat at Expo '70 and that it only was a pilot demonstration of what can be done.

We think the flood damaged areas of the region are a great opportunity to utilize new kinds, new approaches to housing that could greatly improve the look, the value and the quality of living in the area. And we hope that no one, most of all not those responsible for planning and developing new residential areas, will be so hidebound to the past as to overlook the possibilities modular housing offers this community.

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EDITORIAL

FORGIVENESS?

TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 1972

It should not have surprised any of us whoever have wrestled with government largesse, but nonetheless many of us are shocked to learn that what the S-B-A forgives, the Internal Revenue Service does not.

After 9 weeks of silence, the issue was clarified Monday at a session called by Mr. Carlucci. If you accept the \$5,000 forgiveness feature of the S-B-A loan, that relief becomes, in the eyes of the I-R-S, income for those seeking a tax rebate. What is given with one hand is taken away with the other.

What makes the issue especially onerous is that while the S-B-A loan is figured on replacement cost, the I-R-S tax rebate is figured on a heavily depreciated value. At best, one gives up blood for every penny of returned taxes and in figuring rebate the applicant discovers that what was paid out in full as taxes will return only as token. Those who had figured that between the S-B-A loan and the I-R-S rebate he might scrape back 50% of his lost equity now discovers he'll be lucky to achieve 25% recovery. Indeed, looking at the S-B-A discount for Red Cross assistance, we ask whether the federal government reimburses the Red Cross? If it doesn't, both the Red Cross and the taxpayer are being cheated. This kind of "now you have relief and now you don't" will least affect those at the opposite ends of the economic scale, but it becomes another wearisome disillusionment, another impossibility to ever becoming whole again for those in the middle.

We've said before and say again that had we started out to make the victims whole, it would be cheaper than what we are doing, and that what we are doing is far short of what this country should and could do.



A WNEP-TV EDITORIAL

WILKES-BARRE - SCRANTON AIRPORT, AVOCA, PA. • 457-7401

A BETTER WYOMING VALLEY
AFTER THE FLOOD

Wednesday, 7/26/72

There is a lot of hopeful talk these days about the future of the City of Wilkes-Barre and surrounding areas. Businessmen talk freely about the need to build a more attractive and functional shopping mall in the downtown area. There is also discussion of a new residential complex in the Central City business district. As Roman Rubinstein put it, "This is a time of great opportunities for the residents of the area. Wilkes-Barre is on the verge of something big. It could become one of the most attractive and functional Central City business districts in the East."

Consequently, the news that the Department of Community Affairs had hired the American City Corporation to develop plans for temporary housing and new community design in the Wilkes-Barre area is music to our ears. This group helped plan the new town of Columbia, Maryland, which has attracted so much attention and favorable comment.

This is the type of announcement which should not go unnoticed. It is the first step toward the redesign and redevelopment of Wilkes-Barre which might result in the creation of a new town of enviable proportions.

As we said some weeks ago, in time, people will look on Agnes as a friend. The disaster which hurts us so much now will last in our memory, but with the proper planning and leadership, this time of trouble will give way to a new era of prosperity to be shared by the sturdy people who conquered the flood waters and built a new community second to none in the East.

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A WNEP-TV EDITORIAL

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TAKE THE FLOOD DAMAGED PROPERTIES
OFF THE TAX ROLLS

Monday, 8/14/72

The recent visit of the Gulf Port delegation to Northeastern Pennsylvania afforded us with an excellent opportunity to ask some questions about tax relief and assessment procedures for those property owners in flooded areas. Our concern, quite frankly, was for those whose properties are heavily damaged and whose pocket books are depleted. What does a flood victim do about his impending property taxes for the county, city and school district?

The law states that the tax bills must be sent to homeowners, flood victims or not, and you can be sure that these tax bills are on the way.

The Biloxi group suggested that flood properties which have been heavily damaged should be quickly taken off the tax rolls until such time as the property is repaired. We think this makes good sense. It will give the homeowner a break and it will not cost the municipalities, school districts or the county one cent since the federal government will assume all revenue from property taxes lost because of the flood.

We strongly urge the various taxing agencies to quickly remove all of the heavily damaged properties from the tax rolls. Obviously this cannot be done before the tax bills go out. But our officials should give the flood victim some assurance that it will be done as soon as possible so that the money normally spent on taxes can be invested in the repairs which will restore these properties to their pre-flood condition and value.

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A BUILDING BEE TO AID FLOOD VICTIMS

Wednesday, 8/16/72

Immediately after the destruction of Hurricane Camille in 1969, the Louisiana AFL-CIO sent hundreds of volunteer weekend workers into Plaquemines Parrish to join with the Red Cross and the Mennonites in a building bee. The Red Cross furnished the building materials and the Union workers provided free labor for the construction of some forty houses in that area.

Such an arrangement could and should be worked out for the residents of Wyoming Valley. In fact, we would like to strongly recommend and encourage the initiation of a building bee here.

Such a project would benefit those whose homes have been completely destroyed. It would also help the elderly who do not know where to turn. If properly executed, it could help to quickly restore the flood damaged neighborhoods.

Most important, however, is the reality that a building bee would revive the cooperative spirit which carried us through the flood emergency.

A building bee could help us put our communities back in order. It is a good idea which should not be overlooked by the State and local union people or by the appropriate federal agencies.

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In the case of editorials on controversial issues, WNEP-TV offers a reasonable opportunity to reply to the views expressed in this editorial to a responsible person or group representing a significant opposing viewpoint, provided request for reply time is submitted to WNEP-TV within one week of this broadcast.



A WNEP-TV EDITORIAL

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THE FEDERAL DISASTER PROGRAM WAS NO
MATCH FOR HURRICANE AGNES

Thursday, 8/17/72

The disaster agencies of both the Federal and State government were no match for Hurricane Agnes. The magnitude of the storm and the scope of its destruction were so great that the government could not respond quickly and efficiently.

This is the sad truth reaffirmed time and again by many people in and out of government who have adequate grounds to judge such matters. It should not go unnoticed.

After natural disasters, the government ususally churns out reports which generally celebrate the work done by federal agencies during and after the emergency. Some examples are the 81 page assessment of Hurricane Camille Four Months of Action and Q Day + 100: The Federal Reponse to the California Earthquake of February 1971.

In both these works, there was mention of future planning to avoid the mistakes of the past and the limitations of the law. Like so many good intentions, these never materialized. So here we are in an almost unbelievable state of confusion, controversy and conflicting interpretations.

Based on the sad experience of Hurricane Agnes, we urge the federal government to look critically at its performance in this disaster. Then it must determine whether or not one separate agency should be established which would handle all of the phases of rescue, clean up and recovery.

Such a probing study will do little to help us here, but it will do much to take the pressure off the next group of Americans who suffer as we have suffered at the hands of red tape, lack of direction and conflicting interpretations from the various layers of the federal bureaucracy.

High on the list of priorities to be studied should be the matter of temporary housing. There must be a better, more efficient way to handle this essential aspect of recovery.

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