

SPEECH BY:

ROBERT MORGAN
ATTORNEY GENERAL
RURAL ELECTRIC ACTION PROGRAM
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

AUGUST 16, 1973

LET ME TELL YOU HOW DELIGHTED I AM TO BE WITH YOU THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE RURAL ELECTRIC ACTION PROGRAM (REAP). BEING ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THEREFORE VITALLY INTERESTED IN BOTH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE FOR ME TO MEET WITH A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS WHO WANT TO ADVANCE THEIR BELIEFS AND IDEAS THROUGH THE ESTABLISHED POLITICAL PROCESSES AFFORDED THEM IN THIS STATE AND NATION.

I NOTICED AS I LOOKED OVER YOUR PROGRAM THAT YOU HAVE HAD AT LEAST TWO PRESENTATIONS RELATING SPECIFICALLY TO ELECTRIC POWER AND THE CURRENT ENERGY CRISIS. WHEN OUR OFFICE HOSTED THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS GENERAL IN WILMINGTON LAST APRIL, THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF OUR MEETING WAS THIS SAME ENERGY PROBLEM AND THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH ARE SURE TO FACE US IN THE FUTURE. SO I BELIEVE THAT I HAVE A REAL APPRECIATION FOR SOME OF THE THOUGHTS AND CONCERNS THAT MUST HAVE BEEN GOING THROUGH YOUR MINDS AS YOU HAVE LISTENED TO THESE PARTICULAR TOPICS OF DISCUSSION.

BECAUSE THIS COUNTRY IS FACING A CRISIS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ITS ENERGY, THE EXTENT OF WHICH NO ONE IS REALLY SURE,

ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS YOURS HERE TODAY, ARE PRESENTED WITH A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE. FOR THE VERY PURPOSE OF ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATIONS IS TO EXPAND THE AVAILABILITY OF ELECTRIC POWER AND PROVIDE AND MAINTAIN AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF ENERGY AND ELECTRICITY TO THOSE RURAL COMMUNITIES WHICH WITHOUT YOU WOULD HAVE NONE.

YOU HAVE RENDERED A GREAT SERVICE IN THE PAST AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE IS EVEN GREATER. THUS IT IS CERTAINLY APPROPRIATE FOR YOU TO CONSIDER CAREFULLY HOW YOU CAN MOST EFFECTIVELY ESTABLISH AND USE POLITICAL INFLUENCE TO ADVANCE THE PROGRESS AND LEGITIMATE INTERESTS OF ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA.

I HASTEN TO POINT OUT, LEST ANYONE MISUNDERSTAND, THAT I, AS AN ELECTED OFFICIAL OF STATE GOVERNMENT, AND THEREFORE TO SOME DEGREE, A POLITICIAN, DO NOT CONSIDER POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT TO BE A TAINTED AND UNWORTHY CALLING. I KNOW THAT IN THIS TIME OF OUR NATION'S HISTORY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT ALL PERSONS WHO ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN POLITICS ARE SUSPECT AND THAT OUR DEMOCRATIC FORM OF GOVERNMENT HAS, AS A RESULT, BECOME UNWORKABLE.

I DISAGREE THOUGH. IT IS ALARMLINGLY CLEAR, THAT THE RECENT CRISIS IN THE CREDIBILITY OF OFFICIALS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL HAS SHAKEN THE TRUST WHICH PEOPLE HAVE PLACED IN THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES. BUT WE MUST NOT ALLOW OURSELVES TO GET "TURNED OFF" COMPLETELY WITH GOVERNMENT. WE MUST NOT

TURN OUR BACKS ON A POLITICAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS WORKED WELL AND SUSTAINED THIS COUNTRY FOR ALMOST TWO HUNDRED YEARS BECAUSE OF THE WRONGDOING OF THE FEW WHO STAND ACCUSED. WINSTON CHURCHILL PUT IT THIS WAY, "DEMOCRACY IS THE WORST FORM OF GOVERNMENT EVER INVENTED BY MAN, EXCEPT FOR ALL THE OTHERS." I THINK HE MADE HIS POINT WELL. WE DO HAVE SOMETHING WORTH PRESERVING.

QUITE FRANKLY, THE CURRENT SITUATION HAS PROVED ONE THING IF NOTHING ELSE: THE QUALITY OF OUR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IS NO BETTER OR WORSE THAN THOSE PERSONS WHO CHOOSE TO BECOME INVOLVED. IT IS AN OBJECT LESSON IN VIGILANCE AND THE SUSCEPTIBILITY OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM TO RANK ABUSE. AND WHAT OF THOSE WHO DECIDE THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS, BUT WHO ARE NEVERTHELESS FULL OF IDEALISTIC HINDSIGHT. ARISTOTLE TELLS US THAT AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES, "IT IS NOT NECESSARILY THE BEST WHO ARE CROWNED, BUT THEY WHO ENTER THE LISTS THAT WIN THE PRIZE -- IT IS THEY WHO ARE THE RIGHT AND HONORABLE." SO IT MUST ALSO BE WITH INDIVIDUALS SUCH AS YOURSELVES WHO ARE SEEKING TO ATTAIN A POLITICAL FUTURE FOR YOUR STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT IF YOU DO NOT CHOOSE TO BECOME INVOLVED, YOUR INTERESTS IN THE LEGISLATURE AND IN THE CONGRESS WILL BE IGNORED OR FORGOTTEN. FAR FROM IT. I LIVE IN A SMALL TOWN, THOUGH MY OFFICE IS IN A LARGER CITY, AND I AM AWARE OF THE TREMENDOUS CONTRIBUTION THAT LOCAL ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP

CORPORATIONS HAVE MADE TO THE PROGRESS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES.

BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT YOUR INTERESTS WILL BE BEST SERVED IF YOU ARE ABLE TO COME TO SOME AGREEMENT ON THOSE ISSUES THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT YOUR CORPORATIONS AND PRESENT THOSE VIEWS TO YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES. A CANDIDATE FOR POLITICAL OFFICE MUST HAVE A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS IF HE IS TO INTELLIGENTLY REPRESENT YOU EITHER IN THE LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. AND IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, AS MUCH AS HIS, TO SEE THAT HE IS WELL INFORMED.

I AM USUALLY VERY HESITANT TO GIVE ADVICE TO ANYONE WITHOUT PARTICULARLY BEING SOLICITED TO DO SO. I GUESS I REMEMBER TOO WELL THE STATEMENT WHICH ONE LITTLE SCHOOL GIRL SUPPOSEDLY MADE ABOUT SOCRATES. HER COMMENT WENT LIKE THIS:

"SOCRATES WAS A GREAT PHILOSOPHER WHO WENT ABOUT GIVING PEOPLE ADVICE. THEY POISONED HIM."

I'M AFRAID THAT IS OFTEN THE FATE OF THOSE WHO INDULGE THEMSELVES THIS WAY BUT I WILL PASS ON THIS ONE OBSERVATION.

AS A LEGISLATOR, I CAME INTO CONTACT WITH A LOT OF PROFESSIONAL LOBBIES AND JUST PLAIN CITIZENS WHO HAD SPECIAL INTERESTS THEY WANTED TO PROMOTE. THE MOST EFFECTIVE ONES ALWAYS WERE CHARACTERIZED BY TWO TRAITS.

THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT AND THEY SHOT STRAIGHT.

SO I URGE YOU WHEN YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN LEGISLATION OR OTHER PROPOSED GOVERNMENTAL ACTION TO DO YOUR HOMEWORK. MAKE SURE YOU KNOW EVERYTHING THERE IS TO BE KNOWN ON THE SUBJECT AND THAT THE PERSON YOU SEND TO REPRESENT YOU KNOWS HOW TO EXPLAIN YOUR POSITION CLEARLY IN THE FEWEST POSSIBLE WORDS.

AND FOR GOODNESS SALES, MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T MISREPRESENT THE SITUATION. THE PERSON TO WHOM YOU TALK MAY RELY UPON THE INFORMATION GIVEN HIM IN ORDER TO JUSTIFY A POSITION HE BELIEVES IS CORRECT. IF HE IS LATER EMBARRASSED BECAUSE OF BAD INFORMATION HE HAS RECEIVED AND RELIED UPON, YOU MAY BE SURE YOU WILL NEVER GET HIS EAR AGAIN.

IF THERE ARE VALID ARGUMENTS AGAINST YOUR POSITION, ADMIT IT. BUT AT THE SAME TIME BE WELL INFORMED ENOUGH TO SHOW THAT YOU HAVE THE STRONGER POSITION WHICH WILL SERVE THE GREATER GOOD. I GUARANTEE YOU THAT THE PERSON WITH WHOM YOU ARE DEALING WILL RESPECT YOU EVEN MORE FOR BEING CANDID AND THAT YOU WILL BE AN EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE SPOKESMAN.

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT ALL OF YOU ARE CAPABLE OF BEING GOOD SPOKESMEN, EITHER AS INDIVIDUALS OR AS A REPRESENTATIVE BODY. FOR IT IS CLEAR THAT EACH OF YOU HAS DEMONSTRATED BOTH INITIATIVE AND THOUGHTFULNESS IN THE AFFAIRS OF YOURSELVES AND YOUR NEIGHBORS BY YOUR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN

THE STATE ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION. IT IS LARGELY BY YOUR EFFORTS THAT THOSE PERSONS WHO LIVE IN THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF THIS STATE HAVE PROSPERED BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN TO IT THAT THEY HAVE SHARED THE BENEFITS OF ELECTRICAL PROGRESS.

AND IT IS THIS SORT OF PROGRESS THAT YOU MUST INSURE THE CONTINUATION OF DURING THE COMING MONTHS AND YEARS WHEN THE STATE LEGISLATURE AND THE NATIONAL CONGRESS ARE MEETING ANNUALLY AND DEBATING AND PASSING LAWS THAT MAY VITALLY AFFECT YOUR FUTURE AND THE FUTURE OF THOSE WHOM YOU REPRESENT.

AS MEMBERS OF A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, EACH OF US HAS OFFICIALLY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN THE NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND IN THE CONGRESS WHO THEORETICALLY REPRESENT OUR INTERESTS. HOWEVER, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT GROUPS SUCH AS YOURS CAN ACT AS A VOICE FOR A SPECIAL, BUT CERTAINLY LEGITIMATE INTEREST, WHICH AFFECTS THE PEOPLE YOU SERVE.

YOU OFTEN HAVE INFORMATION AT YOUR FINGER TIPS AND CAN SPEAK WITH EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING ABOUT QUESTIONS WHICH TO OTHERS ARE MERELY THEORY OR ABSTRACT PROBLEMS. CONSEQUENTLY, NO ONE INCLUDING YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES STANDS IN A BETTER POSITION TO SPEAK OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF YOUR PEOPLE THAN YOU.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO SO. FRANKLY, AS AN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE I AM PAINFULLY CONSCIOUS AT TIMES OF THE INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION UPON WHICH WE ARE FORCED TO MAKE DECISIONS ---

OFTEN VERY IMPORTANT ONES. LET US KNOW WHAT YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT IMPORTANT MATTERS IN WHICH WE ARE INVOLVED LIKE CONSUMER PROTECTION, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE REGULATION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES.

YOU CAN LET US KNOW IN THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE ABOUT YOUR VIEWS ON UTILITY COMPANIES AND THE PRICES THEY CHARGE FOR THE SERVICES THEY PERFORM. NOW BEFORE I GO FURTHER, LET ME FIRST SAY THAT I HAVE NO QUARREL WITH ANY COMPANY, UTILITY OR OTHERWISE, MAKING A FAIR RETURN AS A RESULT OF PROVIDING A GOOD SERVICE. BUT I DO TAKE ISSUE WITH REGULATED INDUSTRY THAT SEEKS TO CHARGE EXORBITANT PRICES OR DEMAND RATE HIKES WITHOUT MAINTAINING AN ACCEPTABLE QUALITY OF SERVICE.

YOU ARE NO DOUBT AWARE THAT THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA HAS GRANTED SPECIAL PRIVILEGES TO SOME INDUSTRIES, SUCH AS UTILITY COMPANIES. THE STATE HAS SAID TO THESE AND TO OTHERS THAT IN ORDER FOR THEM TO MORE EFFICIENTLY AND ECONOMICALLY OPERATE AND TO PROVIDE BETTER SERVICE FOR THE PEOPLE, THEY ARE BEING GIVEN A MONOPOLISTIC FRANCHISE -- THAT IS, WE ARE GOING TO ELIMINATE COMPETITION IN THE PARTICULAR AREAS IN WHICH THEY ARE PERMITTED TO SERVE.

AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THAT THE STATE ELIMINATES THE SELF-REGULATING INFLUENCE OF COMPETITION, THE STATE ALSO SAYS THAT THESE INDUSTRIES SHALL BE SUBJECT TO REASONABLE REGULATIONS BY THE STATE TO THE END THAT THE PUBLIC SHALL RECEIVE GOOD SERVICES AT A FAIR AND REASONABLE PRICE.

IT WAS FOR THESE REASONS THAT THE UTILITIES COMMISSION, WHICH DETERMINES THE RATES THAT CAN LAWFULLY BE CHARGED FOR SERVICES RENDERED, WAS FIRST ESTABLISHED. BUT IN ORDER FOR THE UTILITIES COMMISSION TO MAKE A FAIR DETERMINATION, IT MUST HAVE BEFORE IT INFORMATION, BOTH PRO AND CON, AS TO WHY THE EXISTING RATE SCHEDULE SHOULD BE CHANGED OR THE QUALITY OR SCOPE OF SERVICES CHANGED.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE TO PRESENT THE SIDE OF THE CONSUMING PUBLIC. BUT LIKE YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN THE LEGISLATURE, OUR CASE CAN BE NO BETTER THAN THE FACTS WE HAVE AND THE UNDERSTANDING WE CAN ACHIEVE. WHILE EACH OF YOU IS A MEMBER OF THE CONSUMING PUBLIC AND THEREFORE REPRESENTED BY US BEFORE THE UTILITIES COMMISSION, YOU ALSO HAVE SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THIS AREA OF PUBLIC SERVICE THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE CITIZENS OF THIS STATE. THUS, I URGE EACH OF YOU AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A GROUP, TO LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THE UTILITY COMPANIES THAT SERVE YOU. LET US KNOW WHETHER YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH THE PRICES THAT YOU PAY FOR THE SERVICES THAT YOU RECEIVE, OR WHETHER YOU BELIEVE THAT IMPROVEMENTS NEED TO BE MADE. I DO NOT KNOW OF A BETTER WAY IN WHICH YOU CAN BE INSTRUMENTAL IN AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES THAN THIS.

FINALLY, I BELIEVE THAT THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THIS OR ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION DEPENDS ALMOST ENTIRELY UPON THE WILLINGNESS OF ITS MEMBERS TO MAKE INDIVIDUAL SACRIFICES FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF ALL. THIS MEANS, MORE SPECIFICALLY, BECOMING MORE INFORMED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS THAT FACE ALL OF US, SUCH AS THE ENERGY CRISIS AND THE CORRESPONDING PROBLEM OF THE ENVIRONMENT. FOR IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE CONFRONT US ALL.

WE CANNOT GET AWAY FROM THE FACT THAT THIS COUNTRY, BY BECOMING HIGHLY MOBILE AND TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED, HAS MADE IT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DIVIDE US INTO RURAL VERSUS URBAN. WE ARE ALL ONE PEOPLE. THE PROBLEMS THAT THE LARGE CITIES FACE TODAY MOST LIKELY WILL THREATEN THOSE IN MORE RURAL AREAS IN THE FUTURE. LIKewise, THOSE IN THE CITY HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM YOU AND RURAL AMERICA, FOR YOU STILL ENJOY IN MOST INSTANCES AN ENVIRONMENT UNDISTURBED BY THE PROBLEMS OF MASS TRANSIT, THE EVER INCREASING RISE IN CRIME, AND THE DANGER OF AIR AND WATER POLLUTION.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT WE SHOULD CEASE TO TAKE OURSELVES SO SERIOUSLY AND BEGIN TO TAKE OUR CIVIC RESPONSIBILITIES SERIOUSLY. I BELIEVE THAT YOUR PRESENCE HERE THIS WEEK IS AN INDICATION THAT YOU WOULD AGREE WITH THAT.

DEMOCRACY AND ITS METHODS CAN ONLY WORK WHEN CITIZENS, SUCH AS YOURSELVES, TAKE THEIR POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITIES SERIOUSLY; WHEN THEY NOT ONLY CRITICIZE, BUT ALSO MAKE CONSTRUCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS; WHEN THEY FORMULATE AND PRESENT

REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES; WHEN THEY PROVIDE THE PUBLIC SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE THEM EFFECTIVELY.

COMMUNITIES WHICH HAVE CITIZENS SUCH AS ALL OF YOU, WHO ARE CONSTANTLY MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF RURAL ELECTRICIFICATION, NEED HAVE NO WORRY ABOUT THEIR POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITIES BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY. AND FOR THIS, WE ARE ALL INDEED FORTUNATE. FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE RURAL ELECTRIC ACTION PROGRAM IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT UPON INDIVIDUALS LIKE YOU WHO HAVE CHOSEN, NOT TO STAND ASIDE, BUT TO ACTIVELY ENTER THE POLITICAL ARENA. IN THIS ENDEAVOR, I MUST WISH YOU GOOD LUCK.