

W.E. Dannefer to Senator Arthur Capper

In this letter to Senator Arthur Capper, W.E. Dannefer, Public Relations Director for Irrigation District Number One (Republic, Jewell, and Cloud Counties), argues that the National Youth Administration projects in Kansas are doing quite well, and is absolutely critical in helping prevent the migration of Kansans to other states. Part of the work done by the NYA in Kansas involved the irrigation of previously poor farmland. During the process, many young Kansas girls served as clerical workers and stenographers, helping collect information that was used for the various projects. According to Dannefer, the data provided by the girls was key to convincing local, state, and federal authorities of the need for an irrigation program in Kansas.

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W.E. Dannefer to Senator Arthur Capper

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Irrigation District Number One

Republic, Jewell and Cloud Counties

OUR PURPOSE:—"Control and Develop Our Water Resources."

BURR OAK, KANSAS

April 23, 1942

Honorable Senator Arthur Capper
Senate Chambers
Washington, D. C.

My dear senator:

I beg leave to call to your attention, a condition in Kansas, that no doubt has been over-looked, in the rush of war activities, yet, that is of prime importance to all sections of the state, and a program that I have been developing for many years past, and that is the continued migration from the state, its cause, effect, and cure.

Some eight years ago, I began calling to the attention of our Kansas State Officials, and our members of congress, from Kansas, that the migration from Kansas was continuing at an accelerated pace, and if something was not done to stop it, Kansas would lose a seat in congress after the next census. But, they were not interested, felt that the conditions and the extent of this migration could not be, but I felt I was on the right track, and kept hammering away and to prove my assertions, began compiling data as to this migration, showing the migration to and from the farms, of each county, the cities of the county, and from 1880 down to date. This is the first time such data was ever compiled. My report was for the decade ending in 1940, showing that the state would have a net migration loss of around 190,000, the largest of any state in the nation, and the actual returns were, 192,000, net loss by migration. When we take into consideration that births exceeded deaths in the ten year period by 110,000, we should have had that much gain in the decade.

Humanity migrates from place to place, actuated by the primal motive, to get away from intolerable conditions, and seek those areas that offer opportunities not available in their present location; What intolerable condition was it that existed in Kansas that forced these tens of thousands of people to leave, and where did they go to find those opportunities not available in Kansas?

The rapid movement away from Kansas, and a corresponding increase in new settlers in the irrigated areas, was the solution, and yet, we had water resources not developed. Markets and transportation was available to any areas to which our people were going, and the people of the irrigable areas, were using as the main justification for their projects to make room for the people from this state.

I made many trips to Topeka, to interest our various state departments in developing our water resources, to stop this migration by

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making it possible for more people to make a living in this state by such new wealth produced. I tried the State Board of Agriculture, State Division of Water Resources, State Planning Board, Legislative Research Council, the Industrial Development Commission, The State Chamber of Commerce, to take up the program and put it across, but none were interested or felt it was a proper function of their department. Finally, almost in despair, in thinking it over, I concluded that the only way to accomplish it, was to do it myself.

I was instrumental in organizing the above named Irrigation District, which, under the Kansas law, is a municipality.

I knew that would be a tremendous task, in assembling the data to justify this program in Kansas, but felt the results would justify the sacrifices it would take to accomplish these objectives. I have worked without any pay for over six years, entirely on my own initiative and paying about 80% of my own expenses; my postage bill alone runs about \$600.00 annually.

In the assembling of the data, I knew that would be an impossible task alone, as thousand of pages of supporting justification had to be gathered. This would take months of research for a good many people. I finally laid the program before the National Youth Administration, showing what had to be done, and the results that would accrue to this state when the plan was finally put into operation. They agreed to furnish the clerical and stenographic assistance, by using girls who were high school graduates and who had one year of high school typing and shorthand, giving them the actual office business training, thereby fitting them to take their place in the business life of the nation. In every instance, in a few months time these girls have been able to secure positions in private firms, or some federal agency. Of late, they have been going to some of the war plants or agencies. Nearly all of these girls were from the farms, whose parents were unable to give them the extra training necessary to fit them to be self supporting, and they walked to and from their work daily some of them as much as five miles. Thus we have been able to continually take in new girls to replace those that went out on their own.

While these girls have been able to fit themselves for better positions, to me that benefit is of minor importance, when compared to the vast beneficial results that accrue to the communities where these projects are located, the state and nation as a whole.

From the data these girls have assembled, showing the economic losses that accrue from this migration, and the justification for a program, that would anchor these people as near as possible in

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thier present location. The National Youth Administration has adopted that principle as the primary objective for the great plains states and as we have proved that Kansas has the greatest migration, here is where the remedy should be first applied.

The net result, is the Reclamation Bureau included in their budget the funds to work out construction details, for such Kansas Projects in which we established the economic justification there for and which were feasible, and have had their engineers continually in the state for the first time.

From this will come a construction program of at least thirty million dollars, conserving and storing up Kansas water, and preventing soil erosion, making it possible for these people to have in their own communities, the advantages they sought elsewhere, stabilizing conditions for a good many miles around where such projects are located, eliminating the need for relief projects and neutralizing the effect of the recurring drouths, with its attendant distress and sacrifices.

When this war ends in victory, there will be great need for a shelf of projects, on which those released from the army and war industries can find gainful employment, projects worthwhile, and here we will have just that shelf of projects, on which all construction details are all worked out ready to go. These projects will give employment during construction, create a demand for materials and supplies needed in their construction, and when done will make homes for thousands of families in the irrigated areas, and in the processing plants that always follow to process the crops produced, and yet will repay nearly all of their construction costs from the new wealth produced. These irrigation works are nothing but factories storing up flood waters thereby eliminating that loss and danger to life and property, and then using that water to grow crops, fatten livestock, and support the homes of a contented and prosperous community. It is these communities of well-kept homes, I see as the result of this program instead of the thousands of empty farm homes now tumbling down that dot the landscape, each a monument to the blasted hopes of some family that built them, and labored for years to keep and only gave up after sacrificing every resource; that is only human nature, all caused from the lack of the stabilizing influence of the program we are developing.

Now for the first time, Kansas is on the road to a stabilized agriculture, by conserving and utilizing our water resources. This is the result of years of effort, a vast amount of research and compiling of data, to prove the economic justification therefore. Without the clerical and stenographic assistance of the National Youth Administration, it is very doubtful if we would have any program under development today.

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Topeka and Kansas City, as you know, are considered one of the greatest flood hazards of the nation, in the Industrial bottoms at Kansas City is located great war production plants, and they are under constant threat of being wiped out by a major flood. Today our Kansas streams are bank full, and along the Republican many families have had to flee their homes, and it is feared the loss of livestock and damage to crops will be great, and when it is all so badly needed in the food for freedom campaign, every acre foot of water in that flood should be stored and used, for that acre foot of water will produce a lot of beef and three tons of alfalfa, and those three tons of alfalfa will produce a lot of milk, cream, eggs, beef and pork that will keep the processing plants of the Morrell Packing Company and the Kaw Valley Packing Company and those at the mouth of the Kaw at Kansas City in operation, stop these floods, and send this water down their in train loads of farm products for processing and not in a demoralizing flood that destroys their property, endangers their lives, and our farmers will buy back their manufactured goods with the cash returns received.

Your fortunes are founded on Kansas prosperity. The same adversity that caused 192,000 people to leave Kansas during the decade ending in 1940, also affected you, and that this has not yet run its course is disclosed by the tabulations completed by these NYA girls ending March 1st, 1940--and this was before any war dislocation took place--when 32,000 was the net loss for the calendar year. It is with the idea of making it possible for these 32,000 people and the other 192,000 who left in the decade preceeding 1941, to make a living in this state, is what we are striving, anchor these people in their present location.

You have on several occasions discussed this water conservation and utilization program with the writer, and we are agreed on the beneficial results, but without this help of the National Youth Administration there would be very little, if anything, underway in Kansas today, for it was through this assistance, that I was able to tabulate and prove the economic justification for this program. The results are that engineers are working out construction of every possible project in Kansas, for the first time in history. Any curtailment of National Youth Administration will be a serious blow to this movement.

It is conceded, and in that I am sure you concur, that is absolutely essential that we have a shelf of projects, that are worthwhile, on which there will be a need for labor and materials, when the war ends to take up the slack of that dislocation, and here we have the ground work of that activity, that will give employment during construction and homes on the irrigated farms when completed.

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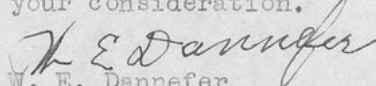
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While the boys are at the front, these girls are working for a stabilized community for them to return to, preparing for their future homes. I sincerely trust that you will lend you assistance to this goal by aggressively supporting the National Youth Administration.

Respectfully submitted for your consideration.


W. E. Dannefer
Public Relations Director

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