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five minutes of my twenty-four hours. Then I can start on the rest of the

Philip Johnson
Speech - Woman's National Democratic Club
Washington, D.C. - April 27, 1961

Some of you are saying, how can you do that? Would it not be terribly

If I were President for a day it would have to be a very long day.

So much to do and so little time.

I have planned it down to minutes -- precious minutes -- to get my building program started. I hope you will forgive me that my plans are all for building. I am after all an architect first and President of the United States second.

My orders will be simple. Start building. And we have much building to do. Because let's admit it, at least here in these four walls, where the enemy can't hear us, we have quite an ugly environment that needs a complete overhaul. If anybody should tend to become satisfied with the looks of our towns and cities, for example, he should be made to (or sentenced to it would be better) take an auto ride on Route 1 from here to the Maine border.

Now that I brought that up, it would be a good Executive Order No. 1: Do over Route 1 and all the cities that lie on it. That would take the first

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five minutes of my twenty-four hours. Then I can start on the rest of the country.

Some of you are saying, how can you do that? Would it not be terribly expensive. But is it not more terribly expensive to leave things as they

are until our souls are wrecked by an ugliness that becomes intolerable? Are we never to get away from our terrible exhaust fumes, frustrations, deaths and disabilities? It is worth anything to breathe again.

And, let us look closer at this question of cost. Even if we have not read Lord Keynes's theory of full employment recently, the principles are still clear. We can never go bankrupt hiring our own people to work. There are five million or so unemployed. Let us employ them. And our economist knows that building absorbs the unemployed faster than any other activity. In addition, these five million would be working constructively unlike the millions in our military establishment.

"Expensive" is a relative term. What is really expensive are the various wars we have to have. Forty billions were recently upped to forty-two billions a year, which is expense, and not investment as building would be.

I am no mathematician, but my second ten minutes, down the street, I

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would say, to the Pentagon. And another two billion (per year, mind you) but also another two for building. Like a good child who is allowed ten cents for candy if it puts ten cents in the piggy bank. My architect's mouth waters -- two billion a year for building. Just think, that would mean twenty Lincoln Centers every year, or expressed better we could start one hundred Lincoln Centers to be finished in five years. That is about the equivalent of fixing over our Route 1. If it wasn't enough, early in the afternoon I would budget another billion. Mr. K. will probably see to our raising the military another billion anyway by then, the way it is going now. And just think, I would be indulging in social betterment (investment), not waste, for armies are surely waste. Incidentally, what are armies for, but to protect the culture and arts of our nation. They are necessary, but what they protect is more than necessary, it is precious. Do any of you remember how Pericles, in his famous funeral oration, expressed this? He boasted of the glories of Athens' military and naval strength. How afraid were her enemies, how grateful her friends. But then, he would add:

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And yet, we do all of this, unlike our great adversary Sparta, at the same time that we preserve our culture, our leisure, our arts.

We can boast with Pericles the first part. Certainly the world, or half of it

trembles at our throats. We are powerful indeed. But what, oh what are we

powerful for? There is some doubt in the minds of even our dearest allies

that we shall be remembered in the history books for anything more than TV,

Coca Cola and automobiles. Yet Pericles, is surely remembered not for losing

the war with Sparta, which we tend to glaze over as too painful, but for

Athenian culture, and more particularly the Parthenon, which he built and

which is still standing for a wondering new world to admire. We tend to look

down on Sparta, though she won the war, but she built no buildings.

I have figured out, no doubt erroneously, that the Parthenon cost the

Athenians about twenty billions, adjusted to their size state. So what.

Can you imagine anything more satisfying than knowing you have created an

immortal work of art. You cannot be immortal, at least not here on earth.

Your Parthenon can be. And Plato it was who said that the desire for immor-

talilty was the greatest desire of a man. If it still, is, let us build buildings.

Civilizations are remembered by buildings.

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How would we even be conscious of the great Mayan or Incan civilizations if it were not for the stupendous buildings they have left. Who even heard of the Kmers, yet Angkor Wat is still one of the wonders of the world.

We have never known what Pharoah conquered what, we know only their tombs.

To jump a bit, we tried to patronize Louis Napoleon just a bit, (he lost his only war against Prussia) but quickly remember that he built the Paris we know best and are grateful to him.

If we are a great era, if we want to be remembered and by name, we must build.

A great poet has hailed our new time as the dawn of our Augustan Age. And surely he did not mean that like Augustus we should enlarge our Empire. Surely he meant Augustus, the patron of the arts. Augustus whose boast was that he found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble.

Postlogue

Oh, yes, I forgot to add. By evening of my one day, I would irreversibly appoint a commission to carry out the great works. A commission consisting exclusively of members of the clan Kennedy.

With one proviso. A vivid new Chairman, Jackie Kennedy.