

CHAPTER XXIV

The Governors' Conference

The National Association of the Governors

Executive Committee

Chairman: Governor GEORGE C. PEERY (Virginia)

Governor ROBERT L. COCHRAN (Nebraska)

Governor HENRY HORNER (Illinois)

Governor WILBUR L. CROSS (Connecticut)

Governor HARRY W. NICE (Maryland)

Other Officers

Secretary: Former Governor CARY A. HARDEE (Florida),
1336 New York Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Treasurer: Former Governor STANLEY C. WILSON (Vermont)

Brief History of the Conference

THE history of the Governors' Conference is the history of its annual conventions. The organization's span of life has so far extended from Roosevelt to Roosevelt, and its meetings have reflected each year the topics which were



GEORGE C. PEERY
Chairman

uppermost in the minds of American public officials. With the exception of one year, the Governors' Conference has met annually since 1908, when the governors came together in Washington at the invitation of President Roosevelt to discuss the national problem of conservation. The Conference itself was not born at the first meeting of the governors, as it was not contemplated then that the gathering should become an annual affair. On May 13, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt welcomed to the White House thirty-eight governors of states and territories, each with three advisers. In explaining his invitation, the President said: "So vital is this question

(of conservation), that for the first time in our history the chief executive officers of the states separately, and of the states together forming the nation, have met to consider it."

In addition to the governors and experts who discussed mineral, land, and water resources, several high officials and notable citizens addressed the conferees. These included William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Carnegie, Secretary of State Elihu Root, John Hays Hammond, Secretary of the Treasury George B. Cortelyou, and Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson.

There was no permanent organization formed at this time, but the conference declared: "We advise that from time to time, as in his judgment may seem wise, the President call the Governors of the states and members of Congress and others into conference." Governor Blanchard, of Louisiana, the introducer of this declaration, added an idea which precipitated the appointment of a committee on permanent organization: "I have long thought that, if the Governors of the states could themselves from time to time get together, . . . much good would come out of it. Such meetings could be had by the Governors on their own motion, and some kind of an organization . . . it might be well to initiate."

A Wilsonian Hope

In 1910 Woodrow Wilson, then Governor-Elect of New Jersey, said: "If it grows into a dignified and permanent institution, it

will be because we have found it necessary to supply some vital means of coöperation in matters which lie outside the sphere of the Federal Government, matters which the states must regulate but which they find it to their interest, and to the interest of the country as a whole, to regulate according to common principles and a very careful adaption to conditions which no one state can control—matters in regard to which they ought to act, not necessarily alike, but with a careful regard to imperative consideration of general policy which can be differently applied but cannot safely or wisely be differently conceived.

"It is odd how every process of our national development has sooner or later swung our thought back to the federal structure and action of our government. After all, the main fact about our national life whenever we come to speak of politics is that its action is dual, that the power of government has been parcelled out between a central government and nearly half a hundred states, to which is assigned almost the whole body of the ordinary business of legislation, of economic and social readjustment from age to age. We are not likely again, in considering this complex arrangement, to use the terms of the old states-rights controversies. The embers of old passions which once set a whole nation aflame still glow warm at the heart of the ashes which lie piled high upon them, the ashes of bitter conflict. It would not only be imprudent, it would be very misleading, and would give our thought about matters now to be handled an artificial and antique setting. We are speaking now of the matters of another day, a day of peace and concord and accommodation. But we are speaking of the same old subject.

"It is interesting to note, however, how different, how altogether new our specific trouble is. We are now disturbed to find, not that the interests of the states are so different and apparently so antagonistic in respect of the matters in which they are authorized to act separately and in virtual independence of each other that they wish to draw apart and are watching each other with jealous differences of purpose, but that their interests are similar, in many things almost identical; that they recognize that a wise coöperation is not only desirable but

imperative in the common interest, and for their own safety and prosperity, but they lack the means, the instrumentalities that would serve them in their new community of action. They are seeking a common policy and lack the means of common counsel. They are in the same case, but not in the same boat. They must seek the same course under different captains and with different crews. They should act together, but inevitably find coöperation more difficult than action under a common authority.

"Their variety and their autonomy are, in my opinion, worth all they cost. If our system of states had not come to us by historical necessity, I think it would have been worth while to invent it. Our people are spread abroad upon a vast continent; they live in many latitudes, under many skies, amidst hills and plains and valleys which would in another age have been the seats of many kingdoms, the homes of independent peoples; every sort of soil under their feet, every varied resource of mine and forest and watercourse, of lake and sea and mountain covert, at their hand, to multiply their undertakings and complete the tale of their unbounded variety. Uniform laws would intolerably embarrass them. Their affairs are not alike, and cannot be made so by compulsion of law."

25 Years of Conference

In the years between 1910 and 1936 the meetings of the Governors' Conference have dealt with almost every problem which perplexed those who were leaders in government in the United States during that time.

They have met twenty-seven times, in the District of Columbia and in twenty different states—from Maine to California, and from Wisconsin to Mississippi. The District of Columbia has been their host three times, and the states of Indiana, Michigan, Utah, and Virginia each have welcomed them twice. The usual length of a convention is three days, although some have lasted five days and others only two.

Annual Meeting—1935

1935: Twenty-seventh Annual Convention, Biloxi, Mississippi, June 13-15, 1935, at which Governor Conner was host to eighteen governors and two former governors.

Meeting less than three weeks after the NRA was invalidated by the Supreme Court, one of the topics of immediate interest to the governors was the NRA and its possible substitutes. Governor Paul V. McNutt, of Indiana, at the time Chairman of the Executive Committee, addressed the convention on this topic, and concluded that "for the present, at least, any other action to preserve the gains made under the NRA is the responsibility of the states. Complete acceptance of such responsibility can only be by concerted action."

Of even more vital interest was the question of federal policy in the matter of relief expenditures. As the emissary of Administrator Harry Hopkins, Mr. Aubrey Williams discussed frankly with the governors the plans of the federal government, and what the states were expected to do in cooperation with these plans. He submitted to a lively period of questioning which was one of the most interesting portions of the convention.

For vigor, the address of Governor Eugene Talmadge, of Georgia, on "Arbitrary Wage Scales" was unmatched. In the course of his discussion he delivered a strong anti-Roosevelt speech, pointing out what he considered to be the defects in the NRA, the AAA, and the TVA. Governor Olin D. Johnston, of South Carolina, led the discussion following this address with a strong rebuttal, and several governors entered the discussion of these federal policies and the position of the states in relation to their administration.

Governor Conner and his state tax commissioner described the operation of the Mississippi sales tax; Governor Guy B. Park, of Missouri, spoke on the subject of property taxation.

Governor Henry H. Blood, of Utah, who was formerly State Road Commissioner, discussed road appropriations and their connection with work relief, and Governor Frank D. Fitzgerald, of Michigan, gave the governors his ideas on the pay-as-you-go system of state financing.

It was at this convention that Miss Ethel Johnson, representing Governor H. Styles Bridges, of New Hampshire, and the Interstate Conference on Labor Compacts, described the activities of that organization and discussed the efficacy of compacts as a

means toward greater interstate cooperation.

Toward the end of the convention, two resolutions were unanimously adopted, one of which stated that the Conference "renews in patriotic non-partisanship its pledge of cooperative executive effort toward national rehabilitation." The other declared that "it is essential to our national economic security that a nation-wide program providing for minimum wages of pay, and maximum hours of employment, be maintained," and that therefore "this ideal should be encouraged and furthered throughout this nation."

In executive session the following executive committee was elected for the year 1935-1936: Governor Paul V. McNutt (Indiana), Chairman; and Governors Henry Horner (Illinois), Alfred M. Landon (Kansas), Harry W. Nice (Maryland), and David Sholtz (Florida), members.

After adjournment of the business session of the convention, the governors and their parties were the guests of Governor and Mrs. Conner on an automobile trip through several gulf coast towns, including a visit to the home of Jefferson Davis and a boat trip to Ship Island from Gulfport.

Annual Meeting—1936

1936: Twenty-eighth Annual Convention, St. Louis, Jefferson City, and Kansas City, Missouri, November 16-18, 1936. Host Governor Guy B. Park met his colleagues at the eastern border of Missouri and conducted them personally to the western border, with stops for business and pleasure at the state's two largest cities and its capital. Twelve governors, one territorial governor, two governors-elect, two lieutenant-governors, and two former governors attended this convention.

Following the address of welcome and response, the opening session, which was held at the Coronado Hotel in St. Louis, was devoted to a discussion of highway safety. Governor Harold G. Hoffman, of New Jersey, formerly New Jersey's Motor Vehicle Commissioner, addressed the governors, and a round-table discussion followed.

In the afternoon, at a session over which Governor Robert L. Cochran, of Nebraska, presided, Hon. Vincent M. Miles, member

of the Federal Social Security Board, spoke on the cooperative federal-state progress toward the realization of social security. Of importance to thirty-three of the states was the move which started at the round table, following the address, to petition the President to recommend to Congress legislation which would permit the thirty-three states, which had no unemployment compensation laws, to receive the benefits of the federal act for 1936. They could then enact the law when their next regular sessions convened. It was pointed out that thirty-three states and the territories of Alaska and Hawaii would be deprived of 1936 benefits under the federal act unless Congress extended the time limit beyond December 31 or unless each of these states was to hold special sessions in the meantime.

Coöperation

A special train took the governors to Jefferson City the following morning. In the senate chamber in Jefferson City they discussed the increasingly important question of coöperation among the states, and between the states and the federal government.

Henry W. Toll was called upon to present a report concerning the establishment of Commissions on Interstate Coöperation by seventeen states during the present biennium, and to discuss the status and projected development of the Council of State Governments. Governor Hardee stated, at the end of this session, that the next annual convention would be devoted chiefly to a discussion of the problems of organization for interstate coöperation.

As an expression of the coöperative relationship which exists between the two organizations, at the invitation of the conference—extended by Governor Hardee—

the Executive Director of the Council attended all the sessions as a member of the official party.

The Lighter Side

As guests of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, the governors toured the nation's seventh largest city in the afternoon, ending with a banquet at the Jefferson Hotel in the evening.

In Kansas City they were met by an official delegation which included members of the governor's staff of honorary colonels in uniform. Following an information luncheon given by the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the governors and their parties were conducted on a tour of the city. A banquet in Kansas City's new auditorium concluded the twenty-eighth annual convention.

Services Summary

(A more detailed description of these Services will be found on page 39)

In 1935 a new chapter in the history of the Governors' Conference began with its informal connection with the Council of State Governments. Governor Hardee, Secretary of the Conference, saw the need of a small research service for the governors, and made suitable arrangements with the Council's Central Secretariat in Chicago.

Since the fall of 1935, the Council of State Governments has been issuing a series of Governors' Bulletins, which are distributed to the governors and their secretaries through Governor Hardee's office. These memoranda have covered with brevity a variety of subjects, presenting facts about the governors and their offices never before gathered in one place. Financial arrangements have been made for the continuation of this service.