

Senator HARRIS. Let me say, first, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I certainly commend you for the laudable purpose embodied in the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and the general laudable result which it has had.

I think recreation is and will be of continuing importance in this country with our growing population and growing leisure time. I think this committee has done a great service to the country in helping to make recreation facilities more readily available.

I also commend you, Mr. Chairman, for the introduction of S. 1401, the general purpose of which I endorse and support.

I appreciate this opportunity, even before your own bill is considered, for us to be heard in regard to S. 2828.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act passed by the Congress in 1964 was prior to the time that I became a Member of the Senate of the United States. However, since coming to the Senate, I have vigorously fought to restrict the provisions of that act, particularly insofar as it relates to the projects administered by the Corps of Engineers.

Oklahoma has taken the lead in water resources development in the Nation. During the planning stages of many of our large reservoirs in Oklahoma, public hearings were held in which the benefits of the projects were discussed in detail with the local citizens. In accordance with the long policy of this country, dating back to the ordinance of 1787 and the statements made during those hearings, recreation was consistently cited as a benefit which would accrue to the area in which the reservoir was to be located. However, at no time during these public hearings was any mention made to the local citizens that they would have to pay a fee in order to fish or swim or go boating on one of these reservoirs. Thus, practically every reservoir in Oklahoma was supported by the local citizens with the understanding that recreational uses of the reservoir would be free to the general public.

Then, in 1964, the Congress enacted the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and thereby repudiated the longstanding policy of the U.S. Government that access to and use of the rivers and lakes of our country should forever be free.

After the enactment of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation instructed the U.S. Corps of Engineers to implement a system of collecting fees in connection with the use of these reservoirs for recreational purposes. I feel, as does my senior colleague, as he stated, that the implementation of this program represents a radical change in the policy that the people of these areas and the country were led to expect.

Furthermore, I feel that the imposition of fees or charges for the use of these reservoirs for recreational purposes represents an undue burden on those among us who are least able to pay.

Most of the reservoirs in Oklahoma are located in the eastern part of our State, which has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Commerce as one of the most underdeveloped areas of the entire country. A high percentage of the population of this area are old-age pensioners or welfare recipients on fixed incomes. Thus, for these people to pay a fee in order to take advantage of the only recreational facilities at their disposal is inconsistent with our goals to give poor people an equal opportunity to enjoy recreation and relaxation with our more fortunate citizens.