

831 1/2 Savage Lane  
Corpus Christi, Texas  
March 9, 1950

Hon. John E. Lyle, Jr.  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

I would like to enlist your support for a proposal which will be much talked of in the coming campaigns. The problem which faces us is to get the streets paved in crowded slum areas of our cities and towns.

Take Corpus Christi, as a city where this problem is most critical. Dozens of blocks in the congested Mexican sector here have rough, muddy streets which at times are almost impassible. The people who live there suffer the greatest inconvenience, of course, but the postmen, the police, utility employees, truckers and delivery people of every description are affected.

Paving of city streets has always been handled by real estate people in developing new residential sections, and by the city and state. The city paves and maintains the principal streets by taxation and assessment. Such residential streets as are paved by the city are the result of what you might call "unanimous petition" of the property owners, who foot the bill.

This latter method simply does not work in the poorest part of town. Even though the majority of the property owners on such a street may want and feel the need of pavement, some neighbors simply cannot spare the money.

I am firmly convinced that these streets must be paved, regardless. I think it is stupid and costly to allow these streets to remain in their present condition. It is out of the question to assess the residents of this type of section for the money; you would bog down before you got started. The money must come from city taxes, or the state or federal gasoline tax, or some such source.

I am appealing to you and Mr. Lloyd M. Bentsen to draft a bill, say, for federal aid to cities and towns for paving streets in densely populated, slum areas. I believe this bill would quickly gain support from a great majority of Congress. It would receive strong support, I am sure, from Latin-American groups, who are just now coming vocally into the political picture in many of your counties. It may be dubbed "welfare legislation" by some, but it will rally support from women's groups and any number of people who now pay the indirect cost of bad streets: getting stuck, getting car and clothes muddy, wasted time, excessive wear and tear on cars, etc.

Unimproved streets are outmoded. Powerful arguments will be brought out to prove it. South Texas has thousands of miles of hardsurface rural roads besides the network of principal highways. I know of paved roads that literally go from nowhere to nowhere. Yet in Corpus Christi there are parts of town where fifty and sixty families per city block live on unimproved streets, several blocks from any pavement.

County road maps for Nueces and San Patricio Counties show, in the blackland farming areas, a hardsurface or shell road on virtually every section line--- hundreds of miles of good roads.

Oil companies find it worthwhile to improve hundreds of miles of private "lease" roads. Counties have spent untold thousands of dollars to extend roads into oil fields and to camps and plants, etc. Paved or improved land-use roads criss-cross our counties and reach outlying farm and ranch areas and remote natural resources. Yet our human resources, crowded into shack towns apparently can wade mud for want of a few blocks of pavement.

Many of these people who live on impassible streets have cars and trucks. In their daily driving in and out of town, and in making long trips to harvest multimillion-dollar crops, they pay many dollars in gasoline taxes.

This money collected from these very needy people is then used to build a bridge, not to cross a river, mind you; an overpass so that the big fast cars can jump the railroad tracks without slowing down. It is used to dredge up uncounted thousands of tons of sand and shell on which to build a highway across the Laguna Madre to a playland for the rich and well-to-do tourist trade. A toll of two dollars per car, round trip, will serve to drastically restrict the flow of poor day laborers and cotton pickers who might wish to invade this new pleasure island.

I am trying to contrast these million-dollar superhighway projects such as magnificent Shoreline Drive, the Padre Island Causway, and the Nueces Bay Causeway, with the squalid and deplorable condition of the streets in the Mexican sector. Padre Island is for one or two Sundays in a year; Shoreline Drive, a dozen Sundays; Verbena Street is for 365 days in the year, for the people who live there.

A minimum standard of street paving could be reduced to \$300 per city block, without concrete curb and gutter or sidewalks. This is for asphalt on shell or caliche, which would provide a good hardsurface all-weather street. Adding curb and gutter would treble the cost and is not essential either. As for sidewalks, that is a matter involving private property, not a public street, and could not be gone into in any case without the consent of the owner.

I might mention Robstown, Alice, Beeville, Kingsville as some of the towns in your district I know of to be in greatest need of this sort of help. Sandy soil, when graded regularly, is sometimes good enough and should reduce the number of streets needing paving. You are probably aware, by the way, of the interesting political situation developing in Robstown under the leadership of Mr. T. G. Rosquez.

In closing, I wish to thank you for what you have been able to do toward keeping the Naval Hospital here open to veterans. And I am glad to see margarine free from its burdensome taxes and restrictions.

Yours very truly,

  
Robert N. Jones

cc: Dr. Hector M. Garcia

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