
Aid to Veterans by Local Communities

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. EMANUEL CELLER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 18, 1947

Mr. CELLER. Mr. Speaker, my attention has been called to the splendid work done in Naperville, outside of Chicago, in aid of the veteran. The example set by

Naperville should be followed in the communities throughout the length and breadth of the land.

General Eisenhower has drawn my attention to an article on this subject which I am pleased to insert in the RECORD:

VETERANS BUILD HOMES IN NAPERVILLE

Naperville is an average American town of about 6,000 except that it is suburban to Chicago, just 28 miles west. It is largely a residential community, with but one factory. About 1,150 veterans were to come back to Naperville and the surrounding area—if they all wished to come back to the home town. About 50 percent of the contractors in town are unionized, most of the plumbers and electricians. The community is zoned with the stated minimum restriction of \$5,000 in most areas. Availability of lots, reasonably priced (\$800) were, before we started, fairly limited.

During the war our USO was called the Naperville Service Organization and functioned as such. As the end of the war approached the veterans' committee began to work on plans to help GI Joe get back in step. It was this committee which chose the high-school counseling office as headquarters for the veterans' counseling and referral center. As part of the counselor's function is also to be interested in solutions, I began to work on that end too. After 20 years of service as a teacher and counselor in the local high school, it was natural that I would know and be interested in the men and the boys who went to war. During the course of the war I wrote to many of them and naturally began to discuss the process of getting home. So I have worked as counselor, gratuitously during the school year and for a small sum in the summer months. I have been busy around the clock, I assure you. I find that Fort Sheridan even recognizes us as a Veterans' Administration office, so I find. Having earned the title as a community trouble shooter for the vets, I obviously couldn't let the housing problem go unsolved. Something tangible had to be done and without delay.

Talk of State housing, county housing, apartment houses, and barracks all blew up and we faced a dismal dead end. I maintained that the same thing that won the war could lick this, too—and that was the mobilization of community effort behind the synchronized drive and energy of the veterans themselves. What could be more of an American solution than that? I was interested in tonight's paper to see Eisenhower maintaining the very same thesis. As a student and teacher in international relations and vitally interested in the peace, I maintained that peace had to begin in the human heart and that was where I was going to begin. Why more people can't see that, is more than I know.

So, one day the last of June 1946, a local Navy veteran and a machine technician, James Goetsch, and I went in to see the head of a concern producing prefabricated houses. On the way in we agreed we had to have a sales talk, and so, between the two of us, we cooked up the idea. A college veteran had already begun to build his prefabricated houses, so we had an exhibit A to begin with. Before I went in I asked the local bank cashier to visit that house that day if such was possible. When we told the business manager of the company our plans, he agreed that we definitely had something and he would cooperate 100 percent, even though we had no local dealer.

That night we had an emergency meeting of a few veterans, a few interested community leaders, including two representatives of the local bank. We got their enthusiastic support, and by phone the next day called an emergency meeting of as many veterans as could be contacted. And so, within 28 hours

of the birth of the idea, we had bank approval, a skeletal organization, and 13 veteran home builders signed up. Possibly we succeeded because of the tempo of the idea, our enthusiasm, the need, and our ignorance of the obstacles ahead. No one could have really stopped us after that Friday night meeting.

As the plan unfolded it worked in much this fashion:

1. The veteran was to first spot an available lot. Appraisal on the \$800 lot for the completed home was given at \$6,200, so we would clear on the \$5,000 zoning restrictions. However, we warned against building in areas where contrasts would be too great and opposition might be aroused. We agreed from the beginning that we would avoid concentration of houses and rowing them up. Homes were to be built according to the veterans' choice but the availability of the prefabricated houses made us concentrate on them for our cooperative project. Later on the bank refused to grant loans if, in their opinion, too many houses were being built in a given area. Remember that we have no community of prefabs, but rather prefabs within the community.

2. A lot once spotted, the veteran went to the bank with his official envelope. The lot number was sent to the title company with promise of speed up on clearance. Papers for negotiation of the loan were completed at the bank. At the beginning the veteran didn't even have to show a bank balance, but later on \$300 minimum was asked. It was estimated that the project would cost about \$5,500, including the lot so that usually the veteran borrowed \$5,000 on a 20-year mortgage, which would make a monthly payment of \$30.30. As expenses went up and unforeseen incidentals appeared, the last fellows usually borrowed \$6,000. The bank absorbed a good deal of extra banking business in officially clearing delivery of the houses, making payment therefore, etc. Much credit must be given to the loyal support and enthusiasm of Louis H. Clemens, then cashier of the Naperville National Bank, now deceased. Without his help the project would never have succeeded. He died just a week before he was to have appeared at the National American Legion Convention to tell about our project.

3. With title cleared, excavation was done by a World War II veteran who had the necessary equipment and did the job for \$50 per hole, rather than the usual \$80. The bank insisted that every house must have a full basement, which was wise.

4. Then a local Legionnaire (World War I) proved our greatest help in the foundation work on cement blocks, cost about \$500. He worked most of the time on wages, without contractor's fees.

5. Foundation ready and the first carload of five houses arrived. If you have never seen a boxcar with five houses in it, including furnaces, plumbing, etc.—you should have watched the fellows unload after their own working hours. I was present when the seal was officially broken and we were under way. Trucks were loaned by local lumber dealers, as well as storehouse facilities. It was a terrific job and we learned to have only one house delivered by a nearby dealer on the lot where it was to be erected.

6. The first five fellows built each other's houses from basement to roof. The company sent out two men to assist. The first five acted as an advisory committee for the other builders—working in crews of five as their houses arrived. The second five gave some time helping the first five in order to learn on the job. After the roof was on cooperative effort ceased, except for cooperation in getting scarcities such as tile, cement, paint etc. Some of our fellows went as far as 400 miles away for tile.

Some of the fellows found that they could not take enough time off their regular jobs

to complete the task of building five houses. One fellow wanted to save his off time for a honeymoon, etc. I got five unmarried vets who could work until college started in the fall to agree to work for 75 cents an hour (to be paid by the veteran who used him as a substitute). This crew proudly boasted by the end of the season that they could put up the outside shell of the house from basement to roof in 99 man-hours.

7. The house we used (Home-Ola) came with plumbing, wiring, and heating units. We found some conflict with local ordinances but finally most of them were waived with the understanding that there would be an inspection at the end of 5 years. Because of opposition by plumbers and electricians, there was some delay until they began to realize the power that our veteran group held in the community and then we got the action that we demanded.

8. While we had commendation from a local construction engineer and several carpenters and offers to help, actually the veterans worked their own problems out cooperatively. Many local citizens found opportunity to work along on the job in the evening hours, some helped out with the purchase of scarcities, and so forth. Work went on by artificial light, especially as the days became shorter. One night about 10 I saw a whole family, including mom, dad, two sisters, wife, and veteran, all shoveling as though their lives depended upon it. I wished for an action picture of it. It was action, cooperative action, on into the night.

9. Our delay came in waiting for electricians, plumbers, for cement for the basement floor so that the furnace could be put in, for the masons to get the chimney in, and so forth. Then when daylight hours shortened we were slowed up some. Wives helped a lot on the interior finishing. The whole family is going to love every nook and cranny of the house, because they literally saw the whole anatomy of the house and saw it come to life.

Thirty-eight different veterans—we originally estimated 40 in need—signed up for houses, but 12 found other solutions or decided to wait until spring. Some of those are living in the 10 trailers we brought in for emergency housing. Nineteen are now occupied, five soon should be, and one is still in the basement stage, held up for title clearance. Oh, they aren't completely furnished, but they don't need to be to be home. Some of the interiors are being built around the family, but that is often much better than living in crowded, strained conditions. One Sunday afternoon a veteran called me up and said: "We've been in half an hour, and we're thrilled pink. Come on over." Believe you me I wasted no time getting over, and the dividends I collected right there paid for all of the hours I had put into the project. The little girl took me upstairs and showed me where her dresses could finally hang, where her toys could be kept, and the wife showed me where she could finally put her wedding presents for the first time for use. Dreams had come true, finally. One guy said to me as he proudly showed me his home: "I dreamed all of this in a fox hole, but I never thought I would actually have it this quick." Most important, he believes in himself, and he has established himself as the head of the house.

Need I say what it meant to me at Christmas time to see the lighted Christmas trees begin to appear in each home? This was the first Christmas for the family unit to be together and begin family traditions. Any part I have had in the project is negligible. The veteran himself has done it within the framework of a cooperative project which has added but more cement to the wartime comradeship. I consider it a great privilege to have been a part of such a project.

The American simplicity of the idea is what makes it workable. What could be more American than to have the owner build

his own home with the same cooperative spirit found on the American frontier when from surrounding areas the neighbors helped with "barn raising," etc. Of course, community support must be given, but why shouldn't it be given in the same whole-hearted fashion that won the war? Why can't we push aside greed and selfishness when peace is at stake? That is the lesson we still must learn. Pray God, that it does not take another war to learn it.

It has been a constant source of amazement to me to see the publicity given the project. Newspapers from all over the country, six national magazines, and even the November 11 issue of a paper issued by the First Infantry in Korea ran publicity on it. The February issue of Woman's Home Companion has a short article on it now. Letters have come in from coast to coast. The mayor and the local Legion have been contacted many, many times—I know because they give me the job of answering the letters. One day a man came in from Massachusetts—expenses paid by the Legion—he was a contractor. He left approving of the plan. Always, over and over again, it is—"we face a desperate situation, and we wonder how you did it."

I admit and the fellows do, that without me as their coordinator and trouble shooter that perhaps the project wouldn't have held together. Surely every community has someone who thinks people are important, families are important, and therefore homes, not mere houses, are important. They won't get paid in cash, but my payment has been in something that is nonnegotiable and will last a lifetime. I honestly feel that I have contributed to my version of a lasting peace.

We haven't been unmindful that veterans from other communities may desperately need help also. In fact, there are five who have chosen to live in Naperville because they could build here and they liked us. Every community can do what we have done, I know. Eisenhower said, "Take housing to your hearts. See what you can do about it without waiting for Washington to do it." If you work with your heart it will become contagious and the cooperative spirit will again function as it should in every American community.

Just realized a cost statement isn't included, lot, \$800 average; title, \$65; foundation, \$500; excavation, \$50; house, \$3,500; chimney, \$100; incidentals, \$500; total, \$5,500 plus.

I am sorry this is so long. Obviously I could say more and more. In closing I want to say that all of the credit should be given where all of the credit belongs, to the grandest bunch of veterans in the world, my working gang here in Naperville. Branch of the service, period of service, previous training and rank were all forgotten, as the gang worked together as a team, and what a team!

ANGELINE GALE,
Veterans' Counselor.

NAPERVILLE, ILL.