

ADDRESS, RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEETING
OCEAN CITY

September 9, 1960

I am most grateful to Howard Hall for inviting me to take part in this regional meeting, because it gives me an opportunity to learn more about your successes, your problems and your plans for the future. It is always a pleasure to find a reason to come back to the Eastern Shore, where I was born and have my roots.

To the visitors here from other states, let me say that we are most happy to have you with us. We hope that you will remain with us as long as you can—and come back as soon and as often as you can—to become better acquainted with this country down here where “the pursuit of happiness” is a way of life

I have always been enthusiastic about the magnificent contributions made by REA to life in our rural areas. I am old enough to recall when most of the people living in the rural areas of Maryland, and especially here on the Eastern Shore, were without electric power. While those of us who lived in towns had electricity, my relatives and friends living on farms were unable to enjoy the comforts, the conveniences and the help that electric power now brings to all of us. I was aware that our rural friends, while wanting electricity, could not get it for the asking as those of us who were living in towns were able to do. Instead, they were required to pay for costs of the line, amounting at times to hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars. Most farmers simply could not afford to pay for the line, wire their homes and buy the appliances.

When I used to campaign in rural areas before the REA program came into being, in the late 1930's, I was greatly moved by the plight of the farmers. They wanted electricity, but it was not available; they needed electric power but could not get it.

But then came the great change. Harry Nuttle and Wilbert Merfken, in Caroline County; Howard Hall, in Worcester County; Harry Keenan, in Somerset County and Milton Malkus, in Dorchester County—farmers and leaders in their respective communities—learned about the REA program, and, in 1938, began a project over here. The same thing was done in Southern Maryland by men like George Quirk and Will Mattingly.

To their credit, the electric utilities of Western Maryland had more vision than most of the industry, serving the rural areas in their territory to the extent that no REA projects were necessary.