President Johnson last week spoke about life in the White House. "And when you're trying to take a nap," said the President, "Lady Bird is in the next room with Laurance Rockefeller and 80 ladies talking about the daffodils on Pennsylvania Avenue."

In a couple of weeks, the President will not only hear, but participate in discussions led by Mr. Laurance Rockefeller at the White House. Not 80, but nearer 800 people will gather at the White House for a Conference on Natural Beauty, under Mr. Rockefeller's chairmanship. Daffodils won't be on the agenda as such, but the beautification of Pennsylvania Avenue will be discussed, and so will a lot of other things, many of which will be of great interest to you.

The White House Conference on Natural Beauty, I predict, will more nearly resemble a business convention than a garden club conclave. Your organization will be represented there; so will the national billboard people, and the national auto dismantlers, to mention only a couple of others like yourselves who might have some reason to feel that an unwarranted amount of attention is being given to your particular business activities.

I say that the model will be that of a meeting of hard-headed businessmen, rather than soft-headed beauty lovers advisedly. I think the general spirit which will prevail is that there is nothing basically inconsistent between good business and good conservation, nothing inherently­ adversary between business and government in the national effort to achieve what the President has called a concern for the quality of our environment.

The basic enunciation of the President's thinking on this subject was a year ago, at Ann Arbor. At that time, the President made two points which must be kept in mind by all of us--one was that he intended to assemble the best thought and the broadest knowledge to find answers for the central issues of our society; another was that this was not a task for the Federal Government alone, nor solely for the strained resources of State or local governments, but for all levels of government, and for business, and for private citizens.
When the President's message of February 8th of this year on Natural Beauty was delivered, it evoked a tremendous response—one which surprised many a jaded Congressman and bureaucrat. The First Lady's Committee for the Beautification of Washington has been the model for similar efforts all over the United States. People have responded to the idea, and their response has been action, action, action.

But some of this action has been disquieting. It is very easy, as you undertake a War on Ugliness, to jump to the conclusion that those who have caused ugliness have done so wilfully, evilly, or without justification—to conclude that if only they had the right attitude, they could carry on their businesses without creating ugliness.

I mentioned at the outset billboards and auto junkyards and your industry in the same breath. How many here reacted with an immediate mental reservation—that it is not fair to bracket the coal business with the junk business?

Unless you are in the auto dismantling business, it is probably very difficult to see these junkyards as anything but eyesores, to see them instead as a national resource, an important raw material in the making of steel and as an industry that performs a social function that could not be left for everyone to do privately for himself. It takes a little thought to ask yourself, as you turn in your 1963 car for a 1965 model, whether at that very time someone is finally giving up on your 1953 car, and to wonder what is happening to it? Conjure up in your mind just how many cars must be retired each year if we manufacture new ones at the rate of seven or eight million a year, and how much space that many cars would occupy if not processed by somebody.

Well, I'm not here to make the case for the auto dismantler—he will speak for himself at the President's Conference. But I am here to suggest that if genuine progress is to be made in accomplishing the President's objective of ameliorating the eyesore of junked cars, somebody must figure out the economics of the disposition of solid waste, including junk cars.

Your problems are not unlike those of the junk man to the beholder who sees only evil where ugliness is.

Your coal contains sulfur, leading to trouble in the by-products of its combustion, and to trouble in its interaction with water and air in worked-out mines.

Your accountants tell you that you must cut your cost of mining or perish, and your engineer tells you how to do so. You strip, and the wrath of the community falls around you.

Your competitor fuels may be favored because they pollute less—favored by ordinance or by the willingness of customers to pay a higher price to avoid public outcry.

Is the natural beauty drive a last straw to your overburdened backs?

It could be.
It is going to take some effort to see that it won't be.

The President intends that it shan't be.

For the President does not intend this program of natural beauty to be an imposed, directive program, but a cooperative, creative, mutual effort, to improve the quality of the environment for our people, and for the three or four hundred million we will have in this country in fifty years or so.

I think, for example, that it is very important to note that in the list of some 44 specific items in his message, much of the directed action was for the Federal Government to put its own house in order. The President believes that he cannot ask others to do for their country something the government itself won't do. It must set the example.

The Federal Government has recently inventoried its own installations to identify those that are contributing to air and water pollution. We got some bad news in those reports. The heat is on us to clean up.

All the Departments have been required to report on what they have done since February 8. For my own Department, we have found a remarkably diverse list of actions which can be taken to make ourselves better neighbors in the various communities in which we carry on our functions.

In my experience, Government policy makers who start from the premise that the private industry sector of the economy with which we must work, has itself a commitment for the public good in their own industry, do not have to scratch very deeply to find evidence of that commitment. When, a few days ago, I discussed auto junkyards and billboards with representatives of these industries I found both a sympathy for the program, and concrete evidence that these industries are anxious to get on board. But if we treat them as the enemy, we surely will find them reacting as the enemy.

There is temptation in talking about the natural beauty message to catalog the ills it is designed to remedy. Some speakers and writers seem to me to almost relish the sheer length of the list of examples to which it is possible to point and cry "alarm". Gaudy neon signs, billboards, junkyards, and abandoned areas of strip mining, and so forth and so forth.

I don't need to make such a list, because if the understanding I have of the President's message and of the public response to it are correct, the problem is one thing the American people do understand. They can recognize the difference between ugliness and beauty; they know which they want; and they are willing to do something about it.

It is on this point, I think, that President Johnson has made significant new contributions to the sense of conservation in the United States. To the traditional scope of the conservation movement in the United States, he has added a new dimension and has said that we must continue with the job of preserving certain areas of the landscape from further encroachment—to protect our countryside and preserve it from destruction.

The President's program includes several major items within these classic dimensions, one of the most important and exciting of which is a proposed
national system of wild rivers--preserving in their natural, free-flowing state a few of the great rivers that have given people such pleasures and inspiration. A dozen new national parks and recreation areas and additions to the National Wildlife Refuge System would help meet the need for added space for recreation.

The President, in turning the attention of the country toward cleaning up the messes we have already made, restoring the beauty we have trampled, making our cities and countryside beautiful again, has called for a "creative conservation".

As I have indicated, however, tremors of doubt have been felt. "Does this new emphasis on creative conservation mean a lessening of the old meanings of conservation?" "What does the new conservation mean to those of us who are accustomed to equating conservation with sustained yields of material things and wise husbandry of natural resources?"

"Does the new conservation mean the public or the Government is lining up against the people who operate junkyards and scrap metal depots, or the miners, or loggers, or coal burning utilities?"

My answer to all these question is "no". By no means have we lost any of the forward momentum of the traditional conservation programs and needs. In fact, as the new conservation gears up and broadens, there will be even greater need for the traditional tools and goals to stay abreast.

But more importantly, the new conservation emphasizes creativity. It pits the creative energies of the entire Nation in a positive way toward the solution of problems in new ways that will in no sense require the kind of taking sides that characterized the conservation movement sixty years and more ago.

Let me refer again to auto junkyards for an example of the kind of thing I am talking about.

Auto junkyards are processing all of the auto bodies being scrapped each year. The problem--albeit not a simple one--is not one of aesthetics, but of metallurgy and economics.

Perhaps it might have been somewhat closer to the spirit of an older conservation simply to abolish the junkyards or hide them somewhere where no one could see them. In some cases, screening probably can help.

But the new conservation thrust is trying to tackle the problem in another dimension--get to the heart of the economic issue really involved and solve it. That is the background for the research now under way in the Bureau of Mines to develop a means of making it economically attractive again for steel producers to use significantly larger volumes of scrap in steel production. With the help of a system now under study that would utilize the non-magnetic taconite ores, it may be possible to substantially increase the value of junked car bodies as a source of steel while at the same time making viable the largely untapped reserves of low-grade taconite ores.
In your own field I was recently impressed by what I learned of efforts now under way to develop an economically sound method of recovering commercially marketable quantities of sulfuric acid from the gases emitted at coal-burning plants.

I have noted with interest and concern the comments of many coal industry people about the effects of tightening regulations on sulfur oxides in the air. From the evidence available, it seems to me that this is a clear-cut example of a case where negative thinking will not solve the problem, either for the community at large which is demanding clean air, or for the coal industry which faces some very tough economic facts of life that both Government and the community must recognize.

Another fascinating piece of evidence of the new alliance between the coal industry and the new frontiers of conservation was described to me in a project to use coal as an adsorbent in a municipal sewage treatment plant, following which the coal so used would be burned. The new product, consisting of coal and attached organic wastes has a very high B.t.u. content--and while the coal has been "used" once, it is still "usable" again, only the second time it would have actually increased in value. This kind of technological innovation shakes up some of the old systems of what normal relationships were thought to be between end-products and by-products.

This, it seems to me, is the real thrust of the new conservation. It is not negative. It is creative. It is not against anyone. It assumes that everyone is on the same team, not on opposing teams with irreconcilable differences or different rule books.

The new conservation sees many opportunities to put the profit motive on the conservation team. It recognizes the problems of waste disposal, but looks to new ways of waste utilization. It recognizes the role of Government regulation but gives the same attention to the role of governmentally sponsored or financed research. And it puts great emphasis on the research and development work that is and must be done by industry itself.

President Johnson is not a President who is going to be satisfied with the mere statement of high-level pronouncements. He is a man who will by his own leadership give strong emphasis to translating those pronouncements into workable and meaningful programs.

Creativity and the highest order of statesmanship are going to be necessary to meet the demands upon our inelastic land and resource base--not just under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, but the entire natural resource structure on which our economy and society depends.

President Johnson has articulated a set of national goals that do not rest on simply assuring ourselves an adequate supply of the material which will be necessary to feed and clothe and shelter the population in the foreseeable future. To these necessary goals has been added a concern for the quality of the life that we and our children and grandchildren will lead and
of the quality of the environment in which they will live.

The need for creativity is acute. I pledge you your Government's efforts to meet the challenge. But we must have your help to do it.