

5.11 (cont.) KATHARINE WOOD 2016

Copy of letter written by Mr. E. P. O'Neill, President of the Retail Trade Bureau, to Governor Sprague, on February 16, 1942

My dear Governor Sprague:

Our Bureau's attention has been called, on several occasions, that a Mr. Eugene Burdick, speaking under the auspices of the Oregon Defense Council, appeared before the East Side Commercial Club urging citizens not to buy, among other things, any new clothing. He admonished his audience that "their government expected them to wear their clothes so long as they would cover the body and keep the wearer warm." He further stated that "he hoped it would very soon be fashionable to be shabbily dressed in Portland," (He himself was nattily attired in a dinner jacket with the latest accessories.)

Again, a Mrs. Thomas Sharp, speaking under the same auspices (Consumers Division) at a meeting of a very prominent women's group, urged her women listeners to cut down on the use of dry cleaning. She advised "home spotting" and pressing, stating that this was made necessary by the chlorine shortage. It is true that chlorinated solvents are not available and practically all dry cleaning is done with petroleum solvents which the cleaners inform us, there is an ample supply.

Surely, the intent of the Consumers' Division of the Oregon Defense Council is not along the lines as mentioned herein and believe that it is going to cause a lot of misconception amongst groups who actually want to help our government in this national emergency.

I simply bring this to your attention due to the numerous complaints that have come to me and the suggestion made that it can become quite serious. Perhaps it would be advisable to have on this consumers' division, as in other states, a few retail merchants, as well as officers or executives from the Retail Trade Bureau of Portland.

With kind personal regard, I am

Yours very truly,

(signed)

E. P. O'Neill,
President

February 18, 1942

Mr. E. P. O'Neill, President
Retail Trade Bureau
824 S.W. 5th Avenue
Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. O'Neill:

Your letter to Governor Sprague dated February 16th was forwarded to me for reply.

I am replying to you as one patriotic American citizen to another rather than as the Director of the Consumers Division to the President of the Retail Trade Bureau. The over all objective of the Consumers Division is to cooperate in every respect with the great national program of conservation of resources by the civilian population so as to enable the government to make an all-out war effort. Naturally the cooperation of organizations such as yours is vitally necessary to our program. That some retailers are ready and willing to give such cooperation is witnessed by the fact of the published advertisements of such concerns as Lipman, Wolfe & Company, Fahey Brockman, and Tarola Motor Company. Surely no form of business has yet been disrupted in so drastic a manner as the automobile retail business.

I shall be glad to have a personal interview with you at any time; but as I would like our stand on this matter to be a matter of record, I am now replying to the charges you make. I am also writing to the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. K. C. Conyers, suggesting that a round table meeting be arranged with leaders of leading retail concerns and representative organizations such as yours. We must clear the atmosphere once and for all and be united in an effort which is surely the objective of all Americans - to supply our armed forces with materials for adequate defense. That such an adequate supply will entail self-denial and sacrifice on the part of the civilian population brooks no denial. I quote from a government publication of February 3, 1942. The author is Mr. R. R. Guthrie, Director of the Textile Bureau of WPB.

" Wool must be allotted to the armed forces of the United States on the basis of 100 pounds per man per year - 40 pounds for new equipment, 40 pounds for annual replacement, and 20 pounds for war destruction. "

" In 1942 the United States will have
5,750,000 men in our armed forces.
350,000,000 pounds of wool will be needed.
Our domestic crop is 225,000,000 pounds -
all other wool must come to us through
hazardous sea lanes. "

I think the conclusion to be drawn is obvious.

I think we are all frequently misquoted and misunderstood, so I am going to quote from the speeches to which you refer, which are on file in this office and are delivered as written by our speakers.

Mr. Burdick -

" If you are among the fortunate ones who have a large and adequate supply of clothing and some of the household necessities and gadgets, do not replace them. It is very difficult to ask those who have been unemployed for a long period and are just now beginning to be able to purchase much needed clothing and household equipment to stop buying. Denial and sacrifice must come first from those who have long enjoyed comforts... Mend and care for your clothes and shoes as never before..."

From Mrs. Sharp's speech, I quote:

" In reading a magazine article the other day I learned that we shall have to be careful about keeping our garments clean - as chlorine, a chemical used in dry cleaning, is used in many defense activities. It does not mean that we cannot have our clothes dry-cleaned. No indeed! For this is one way of preserving them; but it does mean that we should be careful. "

This paragraph was from information taken from a bulletin of government reports and has appeared repeatedly in magazines of wide publication and on national radio releases. When objections to its use came into this office, we asked Mrs. Sharp to refrain from using it further. As to Mr. Burdick, I had a long talk with him after the speech to which you refer. It was obvious that an impression was given of which we had no intention and which would really defeat our purpose. Mr. Burdick is an extremely intelligent person and realizes as you and I do that we must buy every day in this modern world to eat, keep warm, be clothed, and transported. Mr. Burdick also realizes that there must be a radical change in our peace-time way of life if this war is to be carried to a successful conclusion. Great industries are being forced to limit manufacture of civilian supplies. Industries that must serve dual purposes; i.e. the textile industry which makes uniforms and bedding for our armed forces and enough for civilian consumption so that the

population of this country and our allies may maintain a decent standard of living - these industries will be pressed to the limits of their resources. It is obvious that we must not demand our habitual seasonal changes unless we really need garments. It is fair to ask that all outgrown or discarded garments be passed on to the charitable agencies prepared to use them.

The following is a statement from the Consumer Prices, January 15, 1942 issue, which is published by the Consumer Division, Office of Price Administration, Washington, D. C. I quote:

" America is at war.

It is the people's war, in the strictest, deepest sense. It is a war in which each of us must dig down deep to do more than his job asks of him. It is a war which every one of us must help to win by remembering and acting upon this all-important fact: every time we buy or use anything, we are putting a strain on the men and machines, the ships and materials needed to build America's military might. "

If you are a radio fan, you may have heard a program sponsored by this office broadcast over KOIN Monday evening. Our appeal was to the consumer to cooperate with the organized structure of business so that at the conclusion of this war the readjustment period will be over as quickly as possible. That this structure composed of producer, wholesaler, retailer, and consumer is interdependent is an integral part of the American economic system. It may interest you to know that quite a sizeable source of my income is from investments my husband has in two businesses engaged in both wholesale and retail trade.

I feel we are a nation fighting with our backs to the wall. All elements of personal profit must be subordinated to preservation of our way of life. The best blood of the nation cannot flow in rivers while we at home carry on business as usual and refuse to sacrifice so much as an extra Easter bonnet.

A period of inflation followed by its twin brother, depression, will profit none of us. Every means of preventing this is being adopted by the federal government - high taxes, limitation of installment buying, and the campaign to enlist every individual in a savings program invested in government savings stamps and bonds. Few persons will be able to cooperate in this program of prompt payment of taxes, monthly payment of all bills, and monthly investment in government bonds and still spend a peace-time portion of their earnings in luxuries and many of the things which we have come to regard as necessities.

We may as well be realistic. We are engaged in the most terrific struggle for national existence. Every resource of this nation must be pledged to our war effort if we are to emerge victorious.

Sincerely Yours,

Mrs. E. W. St. Pierre,
Director of Consumers Interest
Oregon State Defense Council

HSP:v
CC - Governor Sprague