

June 5, 1963

THE MOON CAN WAIT  
by  
Leo Szilard

I am wondering whether there could be found some single domestic issue on which liberal Democrats could center their election campaign in 1964. It is probably true that the time has come when the United States could afford to end poverty and deprivation in this country, even if the current high defense expenditure were maintained indefinitely. I doubt, however, that liberal Democrats could win elections by advocating general welfare measures, which may be just and fair and may give everybody something, but which don't give anybody enough to induce him to go to the polls and vote for the candidate.

The tax cut proposed by the President will not bring out the votes and still less are people likely to switch their vote from Republic into Democrat for the sake of saving \$100 to \$200 in taxes. Measures which give a large benefit to a comparatively small group of citizens would have a stronger effect on the votes than measures which give a small benefit to a comparatively large group. In order to win an election, the issue embraced by the candidate must offer a sizeable group of voters something that they want very much - enough to go to the polls and to vote for him.

To lessen poverty and deprivation uniformly throughout our whole society, might thus not be politically feasible. What might be feasible is to single out a minority and to put an end to their poverty and deprivation at one single stroke. The question is which minority to single out in such a fashion.

As a man passes 55, he begins to worry about his retirement income and there are to-day .....families where the Head of the family is over 55, and.....single persons over 55. I wonder what response a political committee would get if it were to send out a circular letter of the following kind:

"Memorandum

"From: The MOON CAN WAIT Committee

"To: Mr. Elmer Jones

"Your name has been given us by one of your acquaintances and we understand that you

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are over 55 years of age. If you are below 65, you are presumably not yet retired, but even so, you must have begun to think about how much income you will have left when you retire.

As you may know, a bill has been introduced in Congress which would provide for a retirement allowance for each Head of a family who is over 65, and within the next five years raise his total income to somewhere between \$3 - \$4,000. The bill provides that each Head of a family over 65 shall receive a retirement allowance which amounts to 75% of the difference between his annual income (including Social Security) and \$4,000 per year. Such a provision would raise the income of Heads of families over 65, who have no other income, to \$3,000, and depending on their other income, it might raise their total income to \$4,000 a year.

The bill further provides for a single person over 65 a retirement allowance amounting to 70% of the difference between his annual income (including Social Security) and \$3,300 per year. Thus, the retirement allowance would raise the income of a single man over 65, who has no other income, to \$2,300 a year, and depending on his other income the retirement allowance might raise his total income to \$3,300.

John Woodbridge, the Democratic nominee for the Senate, is a co-sponsor of the bill. We are satisfied that he will fight for the enactment of the bill and that he will also fight for an appropriation of \$7 billion for the first year, following the enactment of the bill. This amount is only slightly short of being sufficient to permit the retirement allowances, specified above, to be paid in full. John Woodbridge will press for the appropriation to be raised year by year over a five year period so that after five years, the allowances would be paid in full.

You might well ask "Where is the money to come from, unless we are willing to mortgage the future?"

The current budget provides for \$7 billion for the exploration of space; of these \$5 billion are contained in the budget of the Space Agency and \$2 billion in the budget of the Defense Department. It is probably true that the time has come when Man may attempt

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the conquest of space, but it is also true that there is no particular urgency for doing so. Moreover, Man's conquest of space is one thing, racing the Russians to the Moon is another thing.

If we can afford to end the poverty and deprivation of our senior citizens in this country and also to engage in a race with the Russians for the Moon - and perhaps we can - our committee favors continuing the race for the Moon, but if we have to choose between the two, then we say let us drop out of the race for the Moon.

John Woodbridge is young and exuberant. He is fond of racing and he will not easily relinquish racing the Russians to the Moon. He believes that maybe we could afford the race to the Moon as well as ending the poverty and deprivation of our senior citizens without unbalancing the budget to the point where we would have inflationary price rises. If he can get the rest of Congress to go along with him and appropriate funds for both projects, well and good, but if it becomes necessary to choose between the two projects, John Woodbridge is pledged to choose the retirement allowance.

John Woodbridge is also mindful that some aspects of space exploration may have military importance. The military importance of space exploration is grossly exaggerated, and there is no reason why either we or the Russians should put bombs into orbit. John Woodbridge says, however, that we must appropriate a half-billion dollars a year for the development of rockets that may be used if necessary for shooting down any bombs that the Russians might place into orbit. We agree with John Woodbridge that whatever money is needed for defense must be appropriated. All we ask is that appropriations for defense be scrutinized as all other appropriations are scrutinized.

Our committee is concerned solely with the issue of the retirement allowance, if you are to cast your vote for John Woodbridge you would want to know where he stands on the other issues which are of interest to the people of this State. The enclosed pamphlet tells you where he stands on all these other issues.

Our motto is "The Moon can wait - the Earth comes first." If Congress finds that we can afford to race the Russians to the Moon and also end the poverty and deprivation of our

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senior citizens, by all means let us do both. But let us not spend billions on racing the Russians to the Moon if this prevents us from solving the problem of our senior citizens.

Let's stop this kind of "lunacy".

If you agree with the committee, please write on the enclosed card the <sup>name and</sup> address of ten people over 55 whom you know so that we may contact them as we have contacted you. Please place \$2 with this card in the enclosed envelope, to cover our cost of communicating with those whom you may name. We shall promptly mail them our material.

Thank you.

THE MOON CAN WAIT

by  
Leo Szilard

May 28, 1963

Dear Mr. Jones:

This is a circular letter which I am writing to 10,000 people, most of them Heads of families, who are above 55. I have an important decision to make and it is my hope that you will help me in arriving at a decision.

I am being offered the Democratic nomination for 1964 for the United States Senate. No Democratic Senator has been elected in this State for 25 years and while I am willing to run if I have a fighting chance to win, I am not willing to do so if I have no chance at all.

Because most of the voters in this State are Republican the odds are that you are a Republican also. But, perhaps after you hear what I have to say, you might be willing to consider switching your vote in 1964 and <sup>to vote</sup> ~~voting~~ for me. If this is the case, I trust that you will let me know by marking the enclosed slip and returning it to me in the enclosed envelope.

As you may know, a bill has been introduced in Congress which would provide for a retirement allowance for each Head of a family who is over 65 and raise, within the next five years, his total income to somewhere between \$3 - \$4,000. The bill provides that each Head of a family over 65 shall receive a retirement allowance which amounts to 75% of the difference between his (or her) actual annual income (including Social Security) and \$4,000 per year. Such a provision would raise the income of Heads of families over 65 who have no other income, to \$3,000, and depending on their other income, it might raise their total income to \$4,000 a year.

The bill further provides for <sup>his</sup> ~~their~~ single persons over 65 a retirement allowance amounting to 50% of the difference between <sup>his</sup> ~~their~~ actual annual income (including Social Security) and \$4,000 per year. Thus, the retirement allowance would raise the income of a single man over 65, who has no other income, to \$2,000 a year, and depending on his other income, the retirement allowance might raise his total income to \$3,000.

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In the first year after the enactment of the bill, the retirement allowances paid out would total \$7 billion which is ~~close to, but not quite,~~ <sup>only slightly short of being</sup> sufficient to permit the 75% and 50% allowances to be paid in full. This total would be raised year by year, over a five year period, until the 75% and the 50% (of the difference between the actual income and the limit of \$4,000) are reached.

You might well ask "Where is the money to come from, unless we are willing to mortgage the future?"

The current budget provides for \$7 billion for the exploration of space; of these, \$5 billion are contained in the budget of the Space Agency and \$2 billion in the budget of the Defense Department. It is probably true that the time has come when Man may attempt the conquest of space, but it is also true that there is no particular urgency for doing so. Moreover, Man's conquest of space is one thing, racing the Russians to the Moon is another thing.

If we can afford to end the poverty and deprivation of our senior citizens in this country and also to engage in a race with the Russians for the Moon, and perhaps we can, I would vote to continue the race for the Moon, but if I have to choose between the two, then I would vote for the dropping out of the race for the Moon.

This would by my choice, what would be yours? If your choice is the same as mine and if this poll shows that enough people share your view and mine on this issue, then I propose to accept the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate. ~~and I~~ <sup>propose to run on this issue</sup>

If elected, I shall vote for the bill providing the retirement allowances mentioned above, but I will also give careful consideration to how much money we can afford to spend on space exploration. <sup>While</sup> I am satisfied that the military importance of space exploration is grossly exaggerated, <sup>and</sup>

<sup>we or</sup> there is no reason why <sup>should</sup> the Russians ~~ought to~~ put bombs into orbit, nevertheless I believe that we ought to appropriate a half-billion dollars a year for the development

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of rockets that are adequate for shooting down any bombs that the Russians might place into orbit. Whatever money we need for defense must be appropriated, but the requests for funds made by the Army, the Navy and the Air Force need to be scrutinized just as carefully as all other requests for funds which are included in the <sup>proposed</sup> budget.

Even though I am soliciting your vote on the single issue of the retirement allowance, you would want to know where I stand on other issues which are of interest to the people of this State. The enclosed pamphlet tells you where I stand on all these other issues. I hope you will find time to read it and will <sup>thereafter</sup> let me know whether you would seriously consider voting for me.

If I decide to run, my slogan will be "The Moon can wait - the Earth comes first". Let us not spend billions on racing the Russians to the Moon, in preference to helping our senior citizens who live in poverty and deprivation. Let's stop this kind of "lunacy".

Yours sincerely,

THE MOON CAN WAIT  
by Leo Szilard

May 21, 1963

"The Moon can wait - the Earth comes first." I wonder whether those who believe that the time has come for the United States to put an end to poverty and deprivation in this country ought not to adopt this quote as their slogan in the next election.

It might well be true that the United States could afford to end poverty and deprivation in this country right now merely by Congress passing a law that would provide for a suitable redistribution of income. Congress is not going to pass such a law, however, and I propose to restrict myself in this memorandum to what is politically feasible. To be more precise, I propose to discuss here only a first step towards ending poverty and deprivation in this country which might command strong popular support in the 1964 election campaign if liberal Democratic Congressional candidates centered their campaign around it. Such a first step could be embodied in a bill, that would be introduced in Congress at the appropriate time, which would provide retirement allowances for heads of family who are over 65 and would raise their total income to somewhere between \$3 - \$4,000.

As a man passes 55, he begins to worry about his retirement age, and there are to-day.....families where the head of the family is over 55. There are .....families (where the head of the family is over 65) who would presently benefit by the proposed retirement allowance, and this is a comparatively small group. But measures which would bestow a large benefit on a comparatively small group have a stronger attraction for the voters than measures which give a small benefit to a comparatively large group. People are not likely to switch their vote from Republican to Democrat for the sake of saving \$1 - \$200 in taxes, they might very well do so if it means assuring themselves an adequate income in their old age.

In order to preserve the incentive to save, one would not want to set a fixed value for the income of the head of a family above 65, instead, the bill could, for instance, provide that the retirement allowance received by the head of a family over 65 should



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amount to 75 percent of the difference between his actual income (including Social Security) and \$4,000. Such a provision would guarantee a minimum income for all heads of family over 65 of \$3,000, and depending on their actual income, the retirement allowance could raise their total income to as high as \$4,000.

The bill could provide that in the first year of enactment of the bill, the retirement allowances paid out shall total only \$7 billion and that thereafter this total be raised, step by step, over a five year period to reach 75 percent of the difference between the actual income and the limit of \$4,000.

Because of a widespread aversion against deficit financing, many voters may ask themselves whether the United States could afford to appropriate \$7 billion for ending poverty and deprivation among the aged. If the question is phrased in this manner, many voters will be uncertain as to what the correct answer may be. The voter may find it easier to make up his mind if the question were put to him in a different manner.

The current budget provides \$7 billion for the exploration of space, \$5 billion of these are contained in the budget of the Space Agency and \$2 billion in the budget of the Defense Department. It is probably true that the time has come when Man may attempt the conquest of space but it is also true that there is no particular urgency for doing so. Moreover, Man's conquest of space is one thing, racing the Russians to the Moon is quite another thing. If we can afford to end the poverty and deprivation of the aged in this country and also to engage in a race with the Russians for the Moon, I might vote to continue the race for the Moon, but if I have to choose between the two, then I would vote for dropping out of the race for the Moon.

It is my intention to propose to certain members of the House of Representatives and the Senate who come up for re-election in 1964 that they poll their constituents to find out how they would respond if confronted with such a choice. If the poll shows that faced with such an alternative a large number of those who are above 55 would give the retirement allowance for the aged the preference over the race to the Moon, then they

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might decide to center their election campaign on the problem of ending deprivation and poverty in this country and to advocate providing a reasonable retirement allowance for the aged.

Even though the Townsend Plan was unsound because it set the retirement allowance too high and would have provided the funds through a sales tax, yet when the bill came to vote in the House of Representatives there were only forty Members present, the rest did not want to be on record of having voted against the bill.

If a bill providing for retirement allowance for the aged were drafted which would command the support of a respectable Citizens Committee and if liberal Democrats were informed ahead of time, before a bill is actually introduced in Congress, then they would have an opportunity to pick up the ball and run with it in the 1964 elections.

There would be no need for them to advocate deficit financing nor would there be any need for them to be opposed to the race to the Moon. All they would have to say is, that if the choice is between the race to the Moon and a retirement allowance for the underprivileged aged, then they would vote to stop the race to the Moon.

Before deciding to center their campaign on such an issue they would presumably want to put the choice squarely to their constituents and see what reaction they get. If the reaction is what I believe it would be, then we have an issue on which the liberal Democrats could center their campaign - and win.