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This Week In Congress Radio Address: Proposal for the Creation of a "Mercy Fleet",
1959 July 24

Speaker: Senator J. Allen Frear

Transcribed by: David Cardillo

[00:00]

Announcer: The Week in Congress, recorded on July 24th, 1959.

Mr. Kelly: From Washington, DC, United States Senator J. Allen Frear reports again to the people of Delaware on current congressional affairs. Ladies and gentlemen, Senator Frear.

Senator Frear: Thank you, Mr. Kelly. Washington and the nation this past week have heard of a bold and imaginative idea through which the United States might significantly and helpfully contribute to the attainment of greater international understanding and world peace. Through the efforts of several members of the House and Senate, and with the backing of one of the country's great magazines, it was been proposed that we establish a new Great White Fleet, which would have as its purpose the carrying out of mercy missions wherever and whenever necessary throughout the world. At first glance, the idea may strike many persons as a subsidy for international medical care, just as we are doing to such a large extent with economic and military assistance. To some extent, I suppose this is true in that the vessels in this proposed mercy unit would come from present ships of our fleet that are now in mothballs. But the government's participation would not be extensive beyond making the idle ships available and supplying surplus food with which many of our warehouses are now bulging. Operation of the mercy fleet could, in the wording of a resolution offered by Senator Humphrey and Senator Aiken, be undertaken by voluntary groups after its activation and perhaps later on through agreements between nations receiving necessary aid from this source. The originator of this proposal is a young naval officer who conceived it after witnessing the chaotic conditions that existed in many parts of the world at the end of the last great conflict. The idea of the mercy fleet was revitalized by this naval officer in 1957, and subsequently this week, formally presented to the American people. It has long been my feeling that the greatest value received from American dollars sent abroad is in the field of health and medicine. The second most important and helpful result stems from our distribution of food. Surely the establishment of a Great White Fleet would not be a panacea for all our international problems, but I believe it could be an interesting and persuasive beginning. As many people in Delaware who have corresponded with me are aware, I hold rather strong reservations on the wisdom of continuing our tremendous foreign aid appropriation which, since the end of World War II, totaled about seventy-

five billion dollars (\$75,000,000,000). Recent charges of these funds are not being applied properly or in the process of being investigated by Congress. This is not to say that foreign aid over the years and in its proper perspective has not been helpful, but I think we have seen clear evidences, where questionable, if not downright wasteful, application of these monies have existed. In contrast, the idea of this fleet of mercy ships, brought into being by the government, but supported privately, could demonstrate to the entire world, and especially to the underdeveloped nations, the undeniable fact that the people of the United States, as well as the government are interested and willing to assist the less fortunate in the most fundamental of all human pursuits: the preservation and care of human lives.

Mr. Kelly:

Thank you, Senator Frear. From the nation's capital, you have heard United States Senator J. Allen Frear in his regular report to the people of Delaware on current congressional affairs. Senator Frear will be heard again next week at this same time, speaking from the Senate Office Building in Washington.

[End 04:47]