Progress and Needs of Our Defense Program Today
Minneapolis, Minnesota May 16, 1941

We are confronted today with one of the toughest jobs in our history. Isolationists or not, we all stand united to defend America.

We, here, in this room may differ in our religion, in our politics, in our ancestry, but we are all Americans and we do not differ in that single purpose to keep our country free.

You do not need to think in terms of foreign combat but only in terms of our own defense to know that precious days are slipping by.

I know full well the rugged, hardy spirit of your pioneers who forged for our Nation the wonderful States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas; braved prairie fires, pestilence and disease, Indian wars, hunger, and privation to give our country this wide inland empire of which we are all so justly proud.

I also realize that this great “Northland” only needs to know the peril of the hour to put its strong shoulder to the wheels of preparedness.

Our defense program desperately behind in the beginning, slow in starting; is picking up enormous momentum, with an increase of 600% in tank manufacture; 1500% in powder; 1000% in TNT; and 300% in vitally needed airplanes; 1200% in small arms ammunition; 300% in shipyards, and 15,000% in some armament items.

Our Garand rifle production is up 360%, and shoots three times as fast as the Springfield, and is a long stretch from the old muzzle-loading musket of your forefathers.

Anti-aircraft guns with miraculous directive finders are being rushed day and night; machine guns firing 600 rounds per minute; defense plants will soon be turning out 20 million ammunition rounds per day; a 2300 pound projectile which will explode 30 miles away, controlled by time fuses of clocklike precision; a tank weighing 50 tons with intricate fire controls, really is a mobile fort, a veritable land battleship; 2000 pound bombs with explosive power beyond the dreams of the World War; surgical and hospital supplies, 90% of which formerly came from Germany, are being rapidly supplied by American firms.

We have modern war communication equipment with 36-inch search lights; radio beams, powerful radios, and millions and millions of magic wires almost weird in their elaborate bringing together of our Army and our ships at sea.

Four motored, armored bombers, 8,000 horse power, more power than on the ship “Queen Mary”; 3200 mile radius; comprising 20,000 parts, weighing 30,000 pounds, loaded with 5,000 pounds of bombs; speed 300 miles per hour, carrying eight guns,
costing $350,000, leading the world in performance in the air. These planes have every
type of engine and navigation equipment used in large ocean liners. But this is not the
end of American achievement in the air – a nine billion dollar program by ‘43, veritable
“wings of defense.” 100,000 pilots must stand ready to man our air fleet.

The Maritime Commission program calls for 1063 merchant ships costing two
billion dollars; tankers, cargo carriers, called “ugly ducklings,” will roll from 27
shipyards.

Battleships bristling with powerful 16-inch guns, destroyers, torpedo boats, mine
 sweepers, cruisers, aircraft carriers; seaplane tenders, transports – 900 in all, with 1,000
Navy auxiliary craft – costing seven billion dollars, doubling our two-ocean Navy, are
being built all around our coastline.

Tens of thousands of new freight and tank cars, under Ralph Budd, a worthy
successor in leadership to James J. Hill, will soon be coming from railroad shops
throughout the land. Yes, our “arms are growing stronger,” and it is a struggle, not only
in mass production, but a struggle in technique in individual scientific achievement.

Engineers and scientists, gathered from every university and laboratory in our
land are working feverishly to improve every piece of our military equipment; to out-
match every new invention that may be sprung by any attacking power; these men are the
spark plugs for the technical leadership of the Nation. They can turn a factory making
electric toasters into one making gas masks, or a factory making automobiles into one
making the most intricate parts of airplanes.

Science is indeed playing a vital part in enabling the gunner to aim his shot two or
three miles ahead of a distant plane or ship, taking into consideration the movement of
the earth, velocity of the wind, the magnetic pull and temperature, with the use of
complicated optical equipment, a single piece of which may have taken years to grind, all
to enable the gunner to hit an unseen object 25 miles away. Yes, it is a world’s race of
machines and materials – materials and machines.

Yet, as said by John D. Biggers, that capable, hard-working head of Production in
OPM, much of this program must be doubled, tripled, and quadrupled.

An Army of 1,400,000 men is being rapidly trained in camps, one great mixing
bowl, with superior living and fighting equipment heretofore unknown to our land.
These camps are not mere health clubs to make our boys fit. They are teaching our sons
how to fight. My own boy is a buck Private in Honolulu.

The food for our Army and Navy surpasses anything in our history. At 43¢ per
man per day in the Army and 46¢ in the Navy, hot fresh food is served, whether the man
be in camp, in mobilization, in a bombing plane 25,000 feet in the air, a sailor in a
submarine, or the soldier in tropical and subzero area; carefully balanced diet 5,000
calories per day, five pounds of food per man. The grave danger of sickness and
epidemics, which in the Civil War took more lives than bullets, can largely be prevented.

Yes, the food, prepared by carefully trained cooks and bakers, is better perhaps
than 60 percent of our people eat every day and is building nerves, strength of endurance,
fighting spirit, courage, and army morale; some four and one-half million meals per day,
1,000.00 pounds of meat, to say nothing of proverbial beans, as well as the despised onions to peel.

Contrast the splendid preservation of our food by cold storage in ships, camps, and airbases, with the brine salt beef, the dried fruits and hardtack of the Civil War.

American ingenuity is ably developing substitutes for shortages in materials. Rayon and nylon may replace silk in parachutes. Synthetic rubber is here, magnesium-aluminum alloys of light weight are replacing heavy steel; plastics for metals and glass; stronger shoes with synthetic soles to stand a march of 25 miles in a single day. Soldiers use 3-1/2 pairs of shoes a year, but counting the shoes in factories and depots, it takes six pairs of shoes for every man.

This whole present defense program of 40 billion dollars has made progress under our competent Army and Navy officials and the able leadership of business men giving their time, ten to sixteen hours a day, seven days per week to help our country defend its life. However, every last one of them realizes that we have only begun our titanic task. We must build greater defense. We are racing against time. Some 6 to 8 million men and women are being put to work and training schools from coast to coast, from Canada to the Gulf, are teaching this vast army of preparedness.

As Mr. Knudson, our great and tireless leader has said; “We must put every machine and every man to work; we must push and push; we must do the impossible.”

Remember Hitler spent 100 billion dollars before we even got started, and is adding an enormous amount of tribute gold, production facilities, war equipment and materials with every country he conquers, far more than the combined production of Great Britain and America today.

With British ships being destroyed faster than they can build new ones, it is no wonder that “more and more American ships” is the cry of our government. Remember that only one-third of our own foreign commerce has been carried in American ships.

So far prices are amazingly stable; coordination and simplification of specifications and standardization of designs are being rapidly solved. Pride of authorship and individual achievement have long since given away to the common cause of our preparedness.

In all this defense program, critical and strategic materials must be conserved and stock-piled in anticipation of stoppage of supply from foreign sources. Many priorities and price controls, regardless of impact on civilian uses, must be applied wherever necessary.

Every possible dollar of unnecessary non-defense expenditures must be conserved. Certainly this is no time for the building of non-defense public works. Plans, yes, should be continued and shelved until the “after emergency period” when large public works can soften the impact and give wide employment to men coming from closed defense industries.

When our Government is putting billions into vitally needed defense and money largely borrowed from future generations seems to come so easy, it requires real honest-to-God-restraint to curb the many unessential activities. No one should under the cloak
of “assumed defense purposes” promise some sectional project or some pet idea of his own.

In Washington where the Government is renting some one-fourth of its space, certain non-defense activities could well be scattered over the country into some of the one hundred large American cities where there is an average of some 17-1/2 per cent vacancy in office buildings. This would avoid the use of much needed Federal sums used in building unnecessary buildings in our Capital City. Washington cannot digest its rapidly growing population.

Its sacred governmental character is endangered by the probable increase of some 200,000 population. In twenty-five years, its number of Federal employees has increased from 25,000 to 167,000 – from 8% to 16% of all Federal employees. Certainly there is some sound economic limit to the percentage which should be crowded into one city, entailing enormous unnecessary costs.

In the early part of the preparedness program, the need of speed was so great that it was necessary to place the first orders in large, going factories. It was necessary to expand and build new factories, near the large, established centers in order to quickly utilize the management, the laboratories, the engineers, the nearby skilled labor, the tools, and existing facilities. No other way was safe and our great industrial organizations responded in a remarkable manner.

Shipbuilding yards and navy bases were necessarily established around our shorelines. Cantonments and air training bases were largely placed in those parts of the country to give longer days in the field and air under better climatic conditions. This has resulted in a comparatively small number of defense orders, plants, and activities being placed in the center of our country, of which Minnesota and adjoining states are such an important part.

The Government fears this further over-concentration of labor in already congested areas and also desires to avoid the dislocation of labor, the drainage of machines and labor from such an area as yours, and desires to bring into use all the facilities of this great section. Certainly spreading the load will avoid some of the headache in the post emergency period.

All authorities are fully aware of this present weakness in our defense program, every effort is now being made to distribute many new defense plants and orders throughout the country. Certainly here in the gateway of the Northwest, the center of a great railroad transportation system, the center of Federal and state highways, with a great supply of excellent labor; the Bread Basket of our country, you occupy a strategic position to help meet our Nation’s needs. You are at the headwaters of the great Mississippi River, where perhaps during this emergency alone, every dollar expended by the Government on its improvement for transportation to the Gulf and to Latin America will be repaid many times.

American industry really is confronted today with a Herculean job. The whole production machine must be brought into play. To do this, there must be wide decentralization of every type of defense production. We must not be vulnerable by over-concentration of production in any one area (already well known to Hitler).
must be prepared to provide supplies to Great Britain, to Canada, to the Atlantic, the Gulf, the Pacific shores, and Latin America.

We must so scatter our plants and our orders for defense goods that we will bring into activity every part of our land. We must put idle plants, even in our small towns, to work. We must even try to place certain new plants so as to use any idle labor among our farmers who will so nobly respond to every call. These farmer boys in your area, trained to “fix it” from their early youth, will make some of the finest mechanics in our land. They will hang on the words of their foreman; will be thrilled with spirit to serve their country. The defense products from their hands can play an important part in our staggering task ahead.

We must so diffuse our activities as to afford greater safety and prevent over-concentration on our transportation system. We must give heed to placement of our defense industries to utilize the nearby raw products; nearby unemployed men and women; nearby vacant housing, with the least unbalancing of our national economy.

In order to spread over-all production, the Defense Contract Service organization has been set up under R.L. Mehornay in every Federal Reserve Bank and its Branches – 36 offices – to give information to every section of their opportunity to do their part in our industrial program. Public-spirited businessmen are serving free as coordinators in every Branch. A staff of experienced engineers and technical advisors is set up in every office.

Your Defense Contract Service office here under Mr. H.C. Timberlake will do everything in its power to bring the manufacturers and producers of your area into contact with every defense need, get more materials in less time; spread the work and secure more bidders for the Army and Navy. Daily in the Twin Cities will come information as to needs in our program, the names of prime contractors needing the aid of subcontractors will be kept on file. Surveys prepared by your various organizations are to be used. Legal advice is available as to contracts; financial advice as to procedure for financial aid. (Perhaps there will soon be an order by which prime contractors will be required to procure a certain percent of possible production from subcontractors and sub-sub-contractors.

Efforts will be made to help subcontractors pool their resources so they can better participate in defense contracts. Both Ordinance of the Navy and Army have assigned officers to your office here to help you.

Leading technical societies are giving their services. These offices should maintain a file of everyone in your area who can qualify to bid. Blueprints and specifications and even samples of many items will all be assembled right here. But the job cannot all be done from Washington. Business leaders in this community must lend their hand. Leadership must come from your manufacturers. You should not wait for your regional office to come to you. You should analyze your existing facilities and find what part you can perform. It is not an easy matter for factories devoted to the making of peacetime supplies to quickly convert their facilities to the making of war materials. This is our job, your job, and the quicker we get the whole production machine of this immense area and other areas into action, the quicker we will build preparedness. We must find other contracts like your immense Northern Pump Company’s gun mount
contract and the International Harvester small arms munitions contract, which will spread 
“parts” business into many small factories in your area. We must have shadow plants; we 
must farm out the work all over this section, not all in Twin Cities.

Already some $43,000,000 in defense orders have been placed in Minnesota – an 
amount nearly equal to some one-half of the value of the great iron ore output of your 
State in 1939. Your iron production this year will surpass all previous records. Some 60 
prime contracts have been awarded to your State, and this should and must be greatly 
increased.

You are near the great lignite and manganese deposits of the Dakotas and 
manganese in your Cuyuna Range. You have immense areas of timber, perhaps suitable 
for making pulp for cellulose, all of vital importance in our munitions program. Your Dr. 
Lloyd H. Ryerson has presented the potentialities of these natural resources (in which I 
tried to be helpful), and research and exploitation of these resources are now being made.

American industry, management, and labor must forget all interests except 
national defense. Now is no time for furtherance of undue profits or undue social gains. 
Not too late, but now – today – everyone in America must think, act, and work for their 
country’s life; make any sacrifice – and respond with the same spirit that in ‘76 made our 
country free.

If your house were on fire, your wife and children in danger, would you argue 
about who is to put out the fire, or how many hours you work, or who may sell the 
material for rebuilding the home?

When nerve breaking dive bombers screamed over Belgium and Holland, and the 
thunder of massive tanks crushed the army of the lowlands, exploding the myth of the 
Maginot Line; when the brave, hardy Norwegians were beaten into submission; when the 
courageous Greeks, after months of valiant defense, were overpowered and slaughtered 
and when France was split and wrecked with internal disunity and disorder, there 
certainly was no time for argument about profits or hours of labor.

When fourteen European countries were overrun with destruction, it was no time 
for organizational or jurisdictional strikes, nor was it a time to argue about profits for 
industry. Everyone in labor and in industry must become aroused to the peril confronting 
our land. I personally believe the great rank and file of both labor and industry are ready 
and willing to respond.

Politics as usual, strikes as usual, living as usual, profits as (steel story) usual, 
may well become things of the past. In building a greater army of preparedness, we must 
gird our loins, forget every selfish aim, and make every minute of our lives contribute 
defense of the things we hold dear in this country of ours. Let’s have no delusions of the 
dangers confronting us. We are all in the Army now.

Our children must and shall not be born into a land dominated by madmen, by 
despots and devastating guns. We have on our hands “no part time job.” We may soon, 
very soon, be attacked by the most powerful, destructive enemy in the world’s history. 
Not today, but yesterday was the call for full time effort.
We must sense the fury of a threatening storm. Complacent confidence in our long sweet dream of invulnerability and almost unlimited resources can well be our greatest danger.

Long time deliveries on many supplies cannot now be given. We must build fighting machines faster than any aggressor can build, even if it may mean curtailment of our ordinary needs, temporary interference with standards of living, longer hours; less pay; less profits; greater taxes; greater and greater sacrifices,

Silent factories and idle mines cannot save our land. The making of a single small “part” must not be delayed a single hour. Management and labor with wide open green lights must keep the lines of production rolling on and on and on.

Industrial strife, simply because it may be less than in the World War, is a poor defense progress. Our land today may be in far more danger of destruction.

We cannot prevent an ultimate spiral of disastrous inflation by endeavoring to hold down prices by price control, and allow wage increases to be piled too high in this time of grave danger to our country. All of us must be willing if necessary to sidetrack any personal comfort for the preservation of a land worth fighting for, and the man who is not willing to do so is not worth his salt. The vital question confronting every laboring man, every farmer, every executive, is how can he help defend his country!

We are playing a desperate game of “keeps.” Superhuman effort is the need of the hour. This is no time for part time labor; part time management or part time brainpower. We must put calluses on our hands, harden our muscles, strengthen our nerves, build daring, burn midnight oil, and build a stronger America. Docile thinking and quibbling cannot knit together the strength of our nation. Late sleeping lazy, idle hours have no place in American life today. No magic wand will save America.

Unless our country is worth fighting for, we are wasting our time and money in defense effort; if it is, if the lifeblood that flows in your veins is worth your time and money, America will never fall to her knees, a slave to any foreign dictator. We have no desire to extend our domain, but we will give our lives to continue as masters of our destinies. We will fight to pass on to our children a country fit to live in.

The hardy race of this area is made of real stuff; they have the guts, the courage, and the determination to save our land. They will defend our human rights. They will not hide behind wishful thinking. They know we are today far from being an “arsenal of Democracy.”

If we want defense, we must be willing to pay for it through the nose, to give up many material things to which we are accustomed, working harder and longer, with the salty smell and taste of sweat, aching backs and tired brains.

Business as usual may be out the window. For manufacturers to do their part in the defense program without interfering with their [usual business] may be a thing of the past.

The dictators of Europe have declared by word and by print that our Government is too slow to adequately prepare. They don’t believe we have the courage to give up our
personal interests and easy way of living; or that we can unify and solidify our
democratic country.

Let us not underestimate the perils of the hour. Let us not underestimate the
power, the viciousness, the slaughtering, destructive hand today laying waste the freedom
of life in most of the world. This is no silver platter fight. Our gigantic task is far greater
today than it was yesterday.

That insidious and powerful efforts are under way today in Latin America to gain
a foothold and divide the support of our good Latin friends is well known. Our only
chance to keep out of war is to make ourselves so strong no one will dare to attack us.

The time has long since passed when anyone informed on modern warfare can
smugly lull himself into a sense of security in maintaining that our geographical isolation
makes us safe from foreign invasion or deadly widespread communistic and 5th Column
sabotage.

I know I am talking today to two-fisted men with iron in their blood, a determined
glint in their eyes, stiffened backs and grim courage in their souls.

The fact that our last war did not make the world safe for democracy is no
argument for us to now fail to defend our land.

Shall you in this north central domain continue to plant and harvest your abundant
crops for a peace-loving people? Shall you in this great state with its wonderful
University, its land of Beautiful Lakes and Butter and its fine churches and schools,
continue to build for happy family lives or shall we admit that democracy is too slow, too
cumbersome and interests too divergent so that when the final test comes, this Nation of
ours which has grown and protected its people for more than a century and a half; whose
Flag has proudly carried its vessels on every sea, and its merchandise into every port; I
say, shall this great Nation which has led in scientific achievements, and standards of life
throughout the world, shall it now fail to marshal its strength, fail to work together,
muscle, heart and brain and place its every resource at the disposal of the Government
and work, work, night and day, for the preservation of everything dear in life.

I know that we, all of us in this room, have a fierce, rugged love of liberty,
mightier than planes, tanks and guns, all of us crave to have a part in national defense.
Everyone of us will do our part at home to prepare; to develop over-all production
facilities, to maintain a balanced national economy, to utilize all our resources – all in all
preserving our dear and cherished American way of life against which no foreign power
must ever prevail.

And may my last words be – to you of this “North Star State” – where in all this
war-torn world could you turn today for a haven of peace and safety other than our own
dear America – an America worth defending and if in the end necessary, worth fighting
for – with all the time, money and lives of every last soul in our land.

Our only bottleneck is time, vital time – every tick of the clock is precious time.
There must not be and there shall not be any deadly “Blackout for America.” We shall
not do too little – we shall not be too late.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN066
Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols’ objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911- ), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols’ private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.