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Coalition to Fight for Better Housing Conditions

By ALDEN CROSS

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For the first time in the history of the state, low-income organizations have banded together to form a coalition aimed at fighting for better housing conditions on a state-wide basis.

Called the Washington Low Income Housing Coalition, the organization was established last month with an initial membership of 220, most of whom are members of low-income groups from all sections of the state. The President is the Rev. Paul J. Hackett, a Presbyterian minister from the Puyallup area.

The potential of the coalition already has been recognized by state government leaders, including Gov. Daniel Evans. The governor said, "I think the concept is great and it represents the willingness of the people to work for this (better housing) and to lobby

in an effective way to obtain legislation."

Evans said in Spokane last week he feels such a coalition will be able to bring about "progressive" housing legislation.

"There is no question about it," the governor said, "if they can effectively bring together collective forces instead of working as individuals." Mr. Hackett said Washington is the second state in the nation to form such a coalition—California was the first — "and we have already drawn a lot of national attention."

"There is an obvious need for such a movement," he said. "Nationally Washington has been recognized as one of the states with a major need for better housing for its disadvantaged citizens."

The movement, Mr. Hackett said, "is strictly voluntary at this time. About one-third of our members are what I call 'establishment' type persons such as architects, university

officials and builders and real estate men."

"Too often low income persons by themselves appear as gripers or persons wanting something for nothing," he said. "This simply is not true. The facts and figures prove that the disadvantaged have definite housing problems created by situations over which they have no control."

Mr. Hackett said the coalition is planning to work in several areas in addition to attempting to set up a lobbyist program for the next session of the legislature.

Plans are being studied to work with builders, timber-producing firms and real estate firms "to find a way of working out a system of building quality homes without the big profit margin," he said.

"We also plan to work in the area of public education," Mr. Hackett said. "And one of our biggest jobs will be to set up self-help projects across the state."

In the area of working with the disadvantaged, he said, plans are being drawn to start self-help housing projects — "I call them housing bees."

"This has been done in my area (Puyallup) and in Granger, Wash.," he said. "We get a group of 10 families together, and they help each other build their new homes. They can realize great savings through this by buying lumber or stoves, for instance, in bulk. They also paint and pound nails. All of the houses meet building code requirements."

Mr. Hackett said the "housing bee" idea "could lead to a lot of social involvement." He said the idea "has the full support of the Building Trades Union in Puyallup because they realize we are helping persons who could never afford a home under a union contract."

"It must be remembered that most low-income persons are not those on the unemployment roles," he said. "We

have many who, because of health and many other causes, have limited incomes. This would give communities a tremendous opportunity to help their fellow men by banding together and building homes. It also would open up vitally needed avenues of contact between the disadvantaged and the rest of society."

The coalition, the Rev. Mr. Hackett said "also will try to get involved in policy-making decisions on boards throughout the state. We want to have a voice in the programs that affect us."

"I guess what I want," he said, "is a miracle. We have an economic slump right now in this state. What I'd like to see is the people, the government, the businessman, putting their time and efforts into providing adequate housing for every citizen in the state. Not only would it be a great boost for the economy, but also the state of Washington could become the national leader in the housing field."