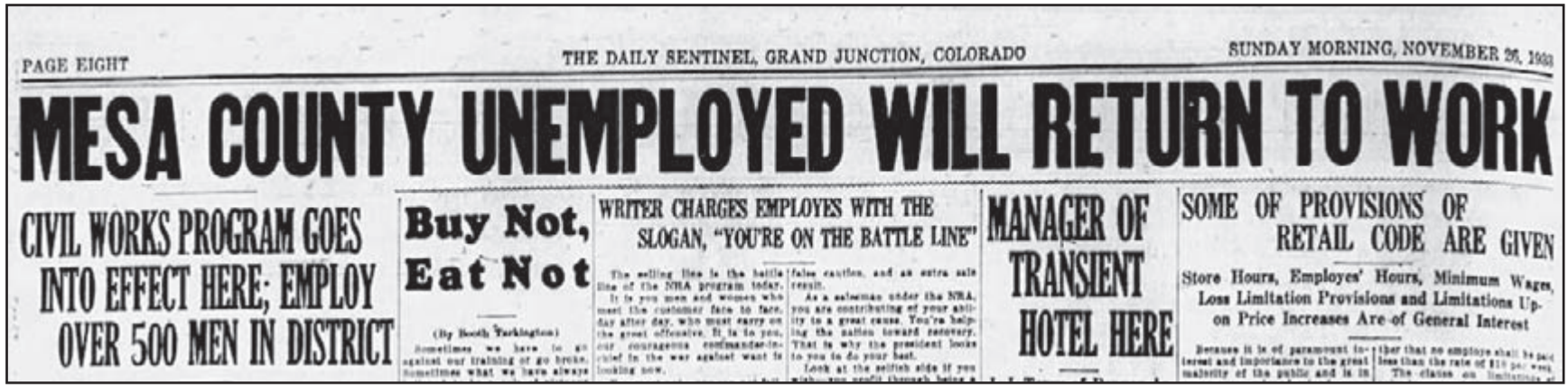


FIRST DRAFT



On Nov. 26, 1933, The Daily Sentinel reported that more than 500 jobs would soon be available to local workers through Roosevelt's Civil Works Administration.

THE NEW DEAL

Programs put people to work, but didn't end the Great Depression

At the end of November, 1933, The Daily Sentinel reported good news for local workers:

"Five hundred and sixty-five men are scheduled to be put to work here as soon as possible," the paper said. They would be employed on a variety of public works programs around the county, in schools and municipalities.

The jobs were paid through the Civil Works Administration, one program under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration. The NRA was one of the early cornerstones of Roosevelt's New Deal, aimed at alleviating the economic effects of the Great Depression and putting people back to work.

The Depression was four years old by 1933, and 1933 had been the worst year to date, with unemployment reaching nearly 25 percent. Industrial production had plummeted and banks throughout the country were failing.

Roosevelt had been elected in November 1932, and had been president for less than a year. One of his first acts, shortly after he was inaugurated in March 1933, was to declare a national banking holiday.

For an entire week, American citizens and businesses weren't allowed to conduct any banking transactions, including withdrawals and deposits.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Congress soon passed the Emergency Banking Act, which created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., and established which banks could be insured by the federal agency. By March 15, banks controlling 90 percent of the nation's money supply had reopened and deposits far exceeded withdrawals.

Although roughly 4,000 banks would remain

closed, the worst of the banking crisis was over. But the Depression remained oppressive and unemployment was still sky-high.

Attempting to deal with that problem, in early 1933 Roosevelt proposed and Congress quickly approved the Public Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Both programs aimed to give unemployed men — and in a few cases women — jobs working on public projects.

Hoover Dam on the Colorado River near Las Vegas is probably the most famous project built using PWA funds. Although construction on the dam began when Herbert Hoover was president, it was completed in 1935 using PWA money.

The CCA became famous for putting people to work on projects in national forests, parks and monuments. Most of Rimrock Drive across Colorado National Monument was constructed with manual labor from the CCC.

By mid-1933, the CCC had hired approximately 300,000 young men between the ages of 18 and 25 to work in the country's national parks and forests. But it wasn't enough, as the jobless rates remained at record levels.

So, in November of 1933, Roosevelt convinced Congress to enact the Civil Works Administration, an even more ambitious attempt to curb unemployment. The program put 2.6 million men to work in its first month, and had 4 million working at the end of its second month. Among the projects CWA workers labored on were 250,000 miles of road building, improvements to 40,000 schools, and construction of 3,700 playgrounds.

Here in Mesa County, projects approved under the CWA included repairs to the municipal water system in De Beque; stuccoing of the main building at Mesa Junior College; construction of a cobblestone wall at Grand Junction's Orchard Mesa Cemetery; and repainting of a half-dozen schools.



PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in August of 1935, one of the most enduring programs of his New Deal. Roosevelt later said it was the program of which he was most proud.

The same edition of The Daily Sentinel that listed those projects also carried a news story saying the local civil works committee, which recommended projects for the federal program, was "attempting to aid the unemployed women of the district."

Included among the jobs that might be available to women were positions as stenographers, bookkeepers, nurses, dietitians, seamstresses, laundry workers and child care workers.

In Mesa County and across the country, people were eager to believe the New Deal programs would win the economic battle. One editorial from the Sentinel set that tone:

"The inauguration of the civil works program and its speedy getting into action is, to our minds, one of the

wisest moves the administration has yet made," the paper wrote on Nov. 28, 1933. "Putting men to work and cash in their pockets is one of the most effective methods known to rout the insidious foes always operating against organized authority."

By late December, the paper was even more upbeat about the program. "Any observer can see the triple good this CWA is doing for the nation," the Sentinel said. It provided jobs, money and hope to families who needed them; created business for merchants; and helped communities initiate and complete projects "that would not and could not have otherwise been undertaken in years."

The editorial added: "Once again the United States has done what seemed the impossible — recruited an army of 4,000,000 in less than six weeks."

Unfortunately, the paper's optimism was premature. The Civil Works Program was only approved for four months, and Roosevelt chose not to extend it. He feared that it and other New Deal programs would push the nation too deeply in debt. But it was unclear what would work.

Libraries are filled with books written about the causes of the Great Depression and

what helped to alleviate it. Economists to this day argue about the factors that led to the economic collapse following the stock market crash of 1929, what kept the Depression hanging on for at least a decade, and what was most effective in rebooting the economy.

There were plenty of critics for Roosevelt's ideas, even during his day, and many of their arguments sound familiar today.

Conservatives accused the president of attempting to implement socialism in the United States, while enacting programs and taxes that would wreck the national economy. Opponents on the left argued that his programs didn't go far enough to protect working people and gave too much deference to the wealthy and large companies.

By 1935, Roosevelt worried more about the ongoing Depression than he did about increasing debt. He decided even more ambitious programs were necessary. At his insistence, Congress created the Works Progress Administration in January 1935, which aimed to employ 3.5 million workers in labor-intensive jobs.

Land's End Road was one highly visible local project funded in part with WPA money and built with CCC labor. The Sentinel touted the road as providing motorists easy access to the "paradise" atop Grand Mesa.

Also in 1935, Roosevelt persuaded Congress to approve the Social Security Act. When he signed the bill into law that August, Roosevelt said, "We have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age."

Social Security proved to be one of the most successful and enduring programs of the New Deal. Even so, the Depression lingered on. After showing signs of improving in the mid-1930s, the national economy slipped backward with another recession in 1937.

In 1938, there were plans for more massive public works projects: new public housing, slum clearance, railroad construction, and more. But those efforts stalled. It wasn't until World War II, with increased demands for exports to help European allies and expanded government spending, that the Depression was vanquished.

Sources: "Great Depression Facts," The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, www.fdrlibrary.org/great-depression-facts; "Jobs Programs," Digital History, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu; "The Great Depression," Federal Reserve History, www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/great-depression; Historic newspaper articles at www.newspapers.com.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

A poster that businesses could display in their windows showed that they supported Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration.