

Nixon's "Radio Address About the State of the Union Message on Natural Resources and the Environment."

February 14, 1973

Good afternoon:

Every year since George Washington's time, the President of the United States has sent a message to the Congress about the State of our American Union and the measures which he felt the legislative and executive branches of Government should take in partnership to improve it.

This year, I am presenting my State of the Union report not just in one speech but in several messages on individual topics to permit more careful consideration of the challenges we face. And because both the President and the Congress are servants of the people, I am inviting the people to join with us in considering these issues, by discussing them in a series of radio talks.

Today I want to talk with you about the first of these detailed messages, the one on the state of America's natural resources and environment, which I will send to the Congress later this week.

President Abraham Lincoln, whose memory we are honoring this week, observed in his State of the Union message in 1862 that "A nation may be said to consist of its territory, its people, and its laws. The territory," he said, "is the only part which is of certain durability."

In recent years, however, we have come to realize that what Lincoln called our "territory"--that is, our land, air, water, minerals, and the like--is not of "certain durability" after all. Instead, we have learned that these natural resources are fragile and finite, and that many have been seriously damaged or despoiled.

To put it another way, we realized that self-destructive tendencies were endangering the American earth during the 1960's in much the same way as conflicting political forces had endangered the body politic during the 1860's.

When we came to office in 1969, we tackled this challenge with all the power at our command. Now, in 1973, I can report that America is well on the way to winning the war against environmental degradation--well on the way to making our peace with nature.

Day by day, our air is getting cleaner. In virtually every one of our major cities, the levels of air pollution are declining.

Month by month, our water pollution problems are also being conquered, our noise and pesticide problems are yielding to new initiatives, our parklands and protected wilderness areas are increasing.

Year by year, our commitment of public funds for environmental programs continues to grow. Some people claim that we are not spending enough. But they ignore the fact that Federal spending for protection of our environment and natural resources has increased fourfold in the last 4 years. In the area of water quality alone, it has grown fifteen fold. In fact, we are now buying new facilities nearly as fast as the construction industry can build them. Spending still more money would not buy us more pollution control facilities but only more expensive ones.

In addition to what Government is doing in the battle against pollution, our private industries are assuming a steadily growing share of responsibility in this field. Last year industrial spending for pollution control jumped by 50 percent. This year it could reach as much as \$5 billion.

As befits America's world leadership role, we are also moving vigorously with other nations to preserve the global environment. The United States-Soviet environmental cooperation agreement which I signed in Moscow last year makes two

of the world's greatest industrial powers allies against pollution. Another agreement which we concluded last year with Canada will help to clean up the Great Lakes. The ocean-dumping curbs passed by the Congress at my urging have put this country in the forefront of the international effort to protect the seas.

We can be proud of our record in this field over the past 4 years. But a record is not something to stand on, it is something to build on. Nineteen important natural resources and environmental bills which I submitted to the last Congress were not enacted. In the coming weeks, I shall once again send these urgently needed proposals to the Congress so that the unfinished environmental business of the 92d Congress can become the first environmental achievements of the 93d Congress.

Let me highlight three of the other major subjects which we will be addressing in 1973: wise land use, energy, and a healthy, expanding farm economy.

Land in America is no longer a resource we can take for granted. We no longer live with an open frontier. Just as we must conserve and protect our air and our water, so we must conserve and protect the land--and plan for its wise and balanced use. Some progress is being made--but antiquated land-use laws, overlapping jurisdictions, and outdated institutions are still permitting haphazard development which can spoil both the utility and the beauty of the land.

That is why I will urge passage again this year of legislation designed to encourage States to establish effective means of controlling land use. That is why I will reintroduce my proposals to bring coherence to Federal mining and mineral leasing laws, better management of the Federal lands, and enlightened regulation of surface and underground mining.

The energy crisis was dramatized by fuel shortages this winter. We must face up to a stark fact. We are now consuming more energy than we produce in America. A year and a half ago I sent to the Congress the first Presidential message ever devoted to the energy question. I shall soon submit a new and far more comprehensive energy message containing wide-ranging initiatives to insure necessary supplies of energy at acceptable economic and environmental costs. In the meantime, to help meet immediate needs, I have temporarily suspended import quotas on home heating oil east of the Rocky Mountains.

Energy policy will continue to be a matter of the highest priority, as shown by my budget proposal to increase funding for energy research and development even in a tight budget year.

One of the most precious natural resources since our earliest days has been American agriculture. Our farmers have kept us the best fed, best clothed nation in the history of mankind, while enabling us to export farm products at a level that will reach an all-time annual record of \$ 10 billion this year. Net farm income last year also reached a record high--over \$19 billion, an increase of 30 percent over 4 years.

This Administration has responded to the farmer's desire for less Federal intervention by giving him expanded opportunity in planting his acreage. The day is gone when Washington can enlarge its role on the farm at the expense of the farmer's freedom to make his own decisions. The goal of all our farm policies and programs is just the reverse. We want freer markets and expanded individual responsibility. We want to keep the farmer on his land and the Government off.

I shall recommend a number of additional initiatives to preserve and enhance our natural resources in the State of the Union report on this topic to the Congress later in the week.

These then are the basic principles which should continue to guide all our efforts in environment and natural resources policy in the future.

First, we must strike a balance so that the protection of our irreplaceable heritage becomes as important as its use. The price of economic growth need not and will not be deterioration in the quality of our lives and our surroundings.

Second, because there are no local or State boundaries to the problems of our environment, the Federal Government must play an active, positive role. We can and will set standards. We can and will exercise leadership. We are providing necessary funding support. And we will provide encouragement and incentive for others to help with the job. But Washington must not

displace State and local initiative. We shall expect the State and local governments--along with the private sector--to play the central role in this field.

Third, the costs of pollution should be more fully met in the free marketplace, not in the Federal budget. For example, the price of pollution control devices for automobiles should be borne by the owner and the user, not by the general taxpayer. People should not have to pay for pollution they do not cause.

Fourth, we must realize that each individual must take the responsibility for looking after his own home and workplace. These daily surroundings are the environment where most Americans spend most of their time. They reflect people's pride in themselves and their consideration for their communities. Your backyard is not the domain of the Federal Government.

Finally, we must remain confident that America's technological and economic ingenuity will be equal to our environmental challenges. We will not look upon these challenges as insurmountable obstacles. Instead, we shall convert the so-called crisis of the environment into an opportunity for unprecedented progress.

Now is the time to stop the handwringing and roll up our sleeves and get on with the job. Now is the time to reject the doomsday mentality which says we are destined to pollute ourselves out of existence.

The advocates of defeatism warn us of all that is wrong. I remind them and all Americans of our genius for responsive adaptability and our enormous reservoir of spirit. The destiny of our land, the air we breathe, the water we drink is not in the mystical hands of an uncontrollable agent, it is in our hands. A future which brings the balancing of our resources--preserving quality with quantity--is a future limited only by the boundaries of our will to get the job done.

Each one of us has a personal stake in the task ahead. The choice is always ours, for better or for worse. Above all, we need pride in this beautiful country of ours, belief in our own strength and resourcefulness.

One of the most memorable experiences I have had as President occurred last year during my visit to the People's Republic of China when the Chinese Army Band played "America the Beautiful." This song of tribute to our Nation was also played at my inauguration 4 years ago and again this year.

No one will sing "America the Beautiful" with greater feeling than our prisoners of war as they return home from years of Communist captivity in Indochina.

America is a beautiful country. By our commitment to conservation, restoration, and renewal, let us resolve to make America even more beautiful for the generations to come.

Thank you and good afternoon.

Richard Nixon: "Radio Address About the State of the Union Message on Natural Resources and the Environment.," February 14, 1973. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4101>.

Reagan's "Statement on United Nations World Environment Day"

June 5, 1986

Today the United Nations observes World Environment Day. The United States joins in this celebration, affirming our belief that the most important resource of any nation is its people. The successful promotion of resource conservation and wise stewardship, like the development of both human and material resources, depends on the institutional arrangements which permit the free exercise of human creativity. Americans have valued highly personal liberty and have favored institutions which permitted a wide range of individual activity largely free of social and political constraints. Yet the freedoms which we enjoy have not been secure in many other lands or at most other times throughout history.

Working over the past four centuries through the institutions of limited government, secure property, personal liberty, individual enterprise, and voluntary association, Americans turned a nearly unpopulated continent into a prosperous, peaceful, and protective home for 240 million persons. To be sure, America was blessed with vast amounts of farmland, timber, water, and minerals. Nevertheless, it took hard work, sacrifice, daring, initiative, and a willingness to risk failure by millions of free men and women to create the kind of society Americans enjoy today. Americans have been so successful at making intelligent use of their land and its resources that many people believe the effort to sustain our current standard of living long into the future will bring about the exhaustion of natural resources as well as unacceptable environmental damage.

While it is a truism that this is a finite world with physical limits to resources, it is not correct to conclude that, therefore, the Nation will eventually lose the ability and the resources necessary to sustain modern civilization. In practice this should never occur because as a given resource is used up its price rises, stimulating conservation, the search for additional supplies, and substitution of new resources for the depleted one. A superior natural resources policy is one that favors those institutions by which new resources are substituted for old ones: individual enterprise, guided by the price signals of the market, and technological advances that conserve resources and permit them to be used more efficiently. For example, in the past 5 years, America has transformed an energy crisis into energy abundance by increasing our production, by using our energy more efficiently, by conservation, and by diversifying our supplies. We have rightly placed our trust in our people; in the strength of American businesses, large and small; and in the belief that we were not running out of energy, only imagination.

One month ago today, seven leaders of the free world met in one of the largest capital cities in the world: Tokyo, Japan. That country is a free and prosperous nation of many people and few natural resources. Like its neighbors surrounding the Pacific, it is thriving dynamically through free exchange, building on its rich cultural heritage. While we were there, we adopted the Tokyo Declaration: Looking Forward to a Better Future, and we declared our obligation to pass on to future generations a healthy environment and a culture rich in both spiritual and material values. We observed that personal initiative, individual creativity, and social justice are the main sources of progress in the world. The United States pledged there, and we renew our pledge to the world today: "More than ever we have all to join our energies in the search for a safer and healthier, more civilized and prosperous, free and peaceful world." In so doing, all the nations of the world can join us in facing the future with confidence.

Ronald Reagan: "Statement on United Nations World Environment Day," June 5, 1986. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=37404>.

Introduction to Carter's "The Environment Message to the Congress."

May 23, 1977

To the Congress of the United States:

This message brings together a great variety of programs. It deals not only with ways to preserve the wilderness, wildlife, and natural and historical resources which are a beautiful and valued part of America's national heritage: it deals also with the effects of pollution, toxic chemicals, and the damage caused by the demand for energy. Each of these concerns, in its own way, affects the environment; and together they underscore the importance of environmental protection in all our lives.

Americans long thought that nature could take care of itself--or that if it did not, the consequences were someone else's problem. As we know now, that assumption was wrong; none of us is a stranger to environmental problems.

Industrial workers, for example, are exposed to disproportionate risks from toxic substances in their surroundings. The urban poor, many of whom have never had the chance to canoe a river or hike a mountain trail, must nevertheless endure each day the hazardous effects of lead and other pollutants in the air.

I believe environmental protection is consistent with a sound economy. Previous pollution control laws have generated many more jobs than they have cost. And other environmental measures whose time has come--measures like energy conservation, reclamation of strip-mined lands, and rehabilitation of our cities--will produce still more new jobs, often where they are needed most. In any event, if we ignore the care of our environment, the day will eventually come when our economy suffers for that neglect.

Intelligent stewardship of the environment on behalf of all Americans is a prime responsibility of government. Congress has in the past carried out its share of this duty well--so well, in fact, that the primary need today is not for new comprehensive statutes but for sensitive administration and energetic enforcement of the ones we have. Environmental protection is no longer just a legislative job, but one that requires--and will now receive--firm and unsparing support from the Executive Branch.

In this spirit, I am presenting the following program to build upon Congress' admirable record:

Actions to control pollution and protect health

- A coordinated attack on toxic chemicals in the environment
- Effective implementation of the Toxic Substances Control Act
- Accelerated development of occupational health standards to protect workers
- Strong legislation to improve air quality
- A \$45 billion, 10-year program to build sewage facilities
- Accelerated study of economic incentives to encourage recycling

Actions to assure environmentally sound energy development

- Support for amendments to improve the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act
- Revision of the OCS leasing schedule
- More participation by states in the current OCS program
- Accelerated identification of health and environmental effects of new energy technologies
- A nationwide evaluation of the availability of water for energy development
- Support for strong national strip-mining legislation
- Reform of the federal coal leasing program

Actions to improve the urban environment

- Commitment to neighborhood preservation and conservation
- Use of historic buildings for federal offices where appropriate
- An improved and expanded urban homesteading program

Actions to protect our natural resources

- A comprehensive review of water resources policy
- Executive Orders to direct federal agencies to refrain from supporting development in floodplains and wetlands
- Support for the program regulating dredge spoil disposal in wetlands
- \$50 million over the next five years to purchase wetlands to protect waterfowl habitat
- Development of legislation to replace the anachronistic Mining Law of 1872 with one that establishes a leasing system for hard rock minerals
- A comprehensive review of the Cooperative Forestry Program
- An Executive Order-strengthening protection of public lands from the uncontrolled use of off-road vehicles

Actions to preserve our national heritage

- An accelerated five-year, \$759 million program to develop new and existing parks
- Development of legislation to establish a National Heritage Trust to protect places of cultural, historic, and ecological value
- Support for designating major additions to the Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge and Wild and Scenic River Systems in Alaska
- Four new wilderness proposals and enlargement of five others submitted by previous Administrations
- Accelerated preparation of new wilderness proposals for Alaska and the East and initiation of a vigorous new wilderness program on Bureau of Land Management lands
- Eight new Wild and Scenic Rivers and proposals to study 20 others
- Legislation to deauthorize the Cross Florida Barge Canal and to study adding the Oklawaha River to the Wild and Scenic River System
- Three new National Scenic Trails

Actions to protect wildlife

- A \$295 million five-year program to rehabilitate and improve the Wildlife Refuge System
- Improved protection for nongame wildlife
- An accelerated effort to identify habitat critical to the survival and recovery of endangered species
- An Executive Order restricting the introduction of potentially harmful foreign plants and animals into the United States

Actions which affirm our concern for the global environment

- A major interagency study to assess potential global environmental changes and their impact on the United States
- An offer to assist interested nations in dealing with population problems
- Inclusion of environmental considerations in assistance programs of the Agency for International Development
- Support for a number of international environmental agreements
- A prohibition on commercial whaling in the U.S. 200-mile fisheries zone

Actions to improve implementation of environmental laws

- An Executive Order directing the Council on Environmental Quality to issue regulations reducing paperwork in the environmental impact statement process
- Development of legislation to create one consolidated environmental grant program
- A review of environmental coordination legislation to reduce overlapping and conflicting requirements.

Jimmy Carter: "The Environment Message to the Congress.," May 23, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7561>.

Obama's "Proclamation 8364 - Earth Day, 2009"

April 22, 2009

A Proclamation

The story of the United States is inextricably tied to our vital natural resources. As we enter a new era filled with challenges and promise, we must protect our land, wildlife, water and air—the resources that have fueled our growth and prosperity as a Nation and enriched our lives. Doing this not only fulfills a sacred obligation to our children and grandchildren, but also provides an opportunity to stimulate economic growth.

To achieve these ends, no issue deserves more immediate attention than global warming. Scientists have already observed alarming shifts in the natural world, including thawing permafrost, melting glaciers, and rising sea levels.

Climate change presents a serious test for humankind, but it also provides an opportunity for great innovation and adaptation. The United States has risen to such challenges before, and Earth Day inspires us to transcend differences among nations so we may lead the world in protecting our planet from this global threat.

Americans across the country are working hard to help limit the pollutants that cause climate change and reduce their impact on the environment, but we must do more. Individuals and organizations can plant trees, use energy efficient lightbulbs, drive fuel efficient cars, hold clean-up drives, and teach young people about environmental preservation. Small changes in our daily lives can have a big impact on our environment. Individuals can walk, bike, and use public transportation; buy products with less packaging; and recycle and reuse paper, plastic, glass, and aluminum more often. American families can also save money by choosing energy efficient products, turning lights off, unplugging appliances, and cutting back on heating and air conditioning.

Government and business alike must also take serious and sustained action to protect our valuable natural inheritance. Through investments in scientific research and development, and the vigorous pursuit of alternative and renewable energy, we can create millions of green jobs that allow us to reduce greenhouse gases and excel in a competitive global economy. My Administration is committed to increasing fuel economy standards and putting more Plug-In Hybrid cars on the road, weatherizing millions of homes, and catalyzing private efforts to build a clean energy future. My Administration is also working to achieve a comprehensive energy and climate policy, one that will lessen our dependence on foreign oil, make the U.S. the global leader in clean energy technology, and prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

President Theodore Roosevelt emphasized our obligation to future Americans, saying, "of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us." Heeding President Roosevelt's call, and carrying forward his spirit of determination, we must commit ourselves to protecting our environment and ensuring the health of our planet so we may share the magnificent blessings of our Earth with our grandchildren.

We do this not only to acknowledge the environment's central role in the development of our Nation but also to recognize the strong ecological interdependence among nations. History has shown that as we sow, so too shall we reap. Let us rededicate ourselves to a world that provides bountiful harvests for us all not just today, but for many generations to come.

Now, Therefore, I, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 22, 2009, as Earth Day. I encourage all citizens to help protect our environment and contribute to a healthy, sustainable world

Barack Obama: "Proclamation 8364 - Earth Day, 2009," April 22, 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=86048>.