

Teaching Environmental History: Politics and Environmentalism

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Lesson 1: An Overview of Environmental History

Article

Jennie Price, “Remaking American Environmentalism: On the Banks of the L. A. River,” *Environmental History* 13.3, July 2008, 536-555. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/13.3.536>

Class discussion / analytical questions

1. Price identifies four waves of environmentalism. Both the third and fourth waves are defined by the relationship between environmentalism and market-based incentives. Why do you think market-based incentives so affect environmentalism? How can market-based incentives benefit the environmental movement? How can market-based incentives hinder the environmental movement?
2. Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger argue that environmentalists, in pushing for technical policy solutions, treat the environment as a separate entity. What are the pros and cons of treating environmentalism as a special interest?
3. Nordhaus and Shellenberger argue that environmentalists should push for ambitious, integrated, progressive politics that connect the environment to other political issues. How might proactive, integrative policies benefit the environmental cause? How could a proactive, integrative policy detract from the environmental cause?
4. Price claims that environmentalism is going mainstream, citing the growing eco-friendly trend that has found its way into most every aspect of society. Are these eco-trends good for the environmental movement? If you answered yes, how so? If you answered no, why not?

Activity: Environmental history timeline

Price pinpoints five iconic moments in environmental history. Break the class into five groups, assigning each group a different moment. Inform group five that there is a typo in the text and Price calls the fifth iconic moment the sixth iconic moment. Explain that each group has three

tasks to complete.

Tasks

1. Define your group's significant moment.
2. Evaluate how well Price links the Los Angeles River to your moment in environmental history.
3. Teach the class your group's moment, critiquing Price's integration of the Los Angeles River into that history.

Activity: Create an icon for 21st century environmentalism

Break the class into small groups and ask each group to list five things that describe twenty-first-century environmentalism. After the class reaches a general consensus, ask the groups to come up with an icon that epitomizes their view of twenty-first-century environmentalism. Each group should write a short essay explaining why their icon is a good choice. This can also be made into individual projects or assignments.

Lesson 2: Conservatives and Environmentalism: A Complicated Relationship

Article

Brian Allen Drake, "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Senator Barry Goldwater and the Environmental Management State," *Environmental History* 15.4, October 2010, DOI: 10.1093/envhis/emq086.

Primary sources

- American Views toward the Environment, a public opinion chart from the American Environmental Values Survey
- Political Views and Environmental Issues, a public opinion chart from the American Environmental Values Survey

Class discussion / analytical questions

- 1) During the 1960s and 1970s, environmental management was seen as a major federal responsibility. Since 1980, the government has redefined its environmental role, shifting away from direct regulation. Should environmental regulation be one of the primary roles of the federal government? If you answered yes, why so? If you answered no, why not?
- 2) Many scholars see the conservative "conservationist ethic" epitomized by Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt as the beginning of the environmentalist movement, yet modern conservatives are rather hesitant to identify with the environmental movement. Have environmentalism's values and ideals forced the movement out of the mainstream? Explain your answer.
- 3) Perception holds that conservatives often fight against environmental regulation, while liberals tend to fight for environmental protection. What inherent political values differentiate the terms environmental regulation and environmental protection? Are these perceptions accurate? Why or why not?
- 4) Must conservatives, like Barry Goldwater, compromise their anti-statist beliefs in order to effect environmental change? Can conservatives cope with environmentalism's growing desire for government policies tied to proactive regulatory legislation? Is environmentalism becoming a movement solely for liberals? Explain your position.

Activity: Barry Goldwater's life: conservative ideals vs. environmental sympathies

Drake splits Barry Goldwater's life into six titled sections in his article. Break the class into five groups, assigning each group a different section beginning with "Desert Genesis." Inform group five that they should analyze the last two sections, "New Green Shoots" and "Sunset," because of their brevity. Explain that each group has four tasks to complete.

Tasks

- 1) Explain the significant events occurring in your section of the article.
- 2) Describe and evaluate Goldwater's actions and decisions in regards to the historical events.
- 3) Analyze how Goldwater balanced his environmental sympathies with his conservative ideals through these actions and decisions.
- 4) Teach the class your section of the article. Be sure to include your analysis of Goldwater's decisions and reactions to the historical events.

Activity: Party politics and American perceptions

Break the class into small groups or partners and have them read and discuss the public opinion chart "American Views toward the Environment."

Questions to prompt active engagement

- 1) Which questions seem to elicit the highest degree of agreement, implying the most care towards the environment? Why?
- 2) According to this chart, what is the general American attitude toward the environment? Remember to look at the chart as a whole.
- 3) Look at how the questions are worded. Do any of them seem to be inherently biased?
- 4) What are the drawbacks of using polls as a source of information? What are the benefits of using polls as a source of information or as a source for historical analysis?

After the groups have finished discussing "American Views toward the Environment," have them read and discuss "Political Views and Environmental Issues."

Questions to prompt active engagement

- 1) Overall, how would you characterize Republican views on environmental issues? How would you characterize Democratic views on environmental issues?
- 2) Compare and contrast Republican and Democratic views on environmental issues.

Which issues seem to show the greatest division? Which issues seem to show the least division? Why do you think this dichotomy exists?

- 3) Do Independents seem to agree more with Republicans or Democrats? What does this say about America as a whole?
- 4) Solely paying attention to the “All” column, how would you characterize the overall American view on environmental issues? Which questions elicit the highest degree of agreement? Why do you think this is?

Have the class discuss the apparent bipartisan support for the environment, based upon the “Total Agree” column in “American Views toward the Environment.” Compare and contrast these findings with the “All” column in “Political Views and Environmental Issues.”

Questions to prompt active engagement

- 1) If Americans overwhelmingly support the environment, and Americans agree that something must be done to fix the environment, why does the modern environmental movement face so many challenges to achieving its goals (if it does)?
- 2) What are the short-term implications for the environmental movement in an increasingly polarized society? How about the long-term implications?

Activity: Bringing environmentalism back into the mainstream

Break the class into small groups and ask each group to list three conflicts between environmentalism and conservatism. After the class has a general understanding of what hurdles stand between conservatives and the environmental movement, ask the small groups to come up with a plan for overcoming some of these hurdles. Each group should write a detailed plan as well as an explanation as to how their plan will encourage conservatives to embrace the environmental movement. This can also be made into individual projects or assignments.

Lesson 3: The Significance and Legacy of Earth Day

Article

Adam Rome, “The Genius of Earth Day,” *Environmental History* 15.2 (2010) DOI: 10.1093/envhis/emq036.

Primary sources

- Richard Nixon’s “Letter to Governors Urging Citizen Participation in Environmental Programs During Earth Week”
- Barack Obama’s “Remarks on the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day”

Class discussion / analytical questions

- 1) Rome explains that the first Earth Day was the biggest event of the 1960s, bigger than the civil rights march, the antiwar demonstrations, and woman’s liberation protests. Do you agree? Why or why not? How was the original Earth Day so much more than a one-day event?
- 2) Despite Earth Day’s importance, school texts neglect the events sparking the environmental movement. Why do you think this is?
- 3) Senator Gaylord Nelson understood the importance of engaging students with environmental ideals via teach-ins. What ways, other than improving school texts, can Earth Day, and by extension the environmental movement, be enhanced in schools? In American society? In the world? Should it be? Why or why not?
- 4) Bureaucrats and politicians ensured the original Earth Day was a success. How did their efforts help make Earth Day into such a powerful catalyst?
- 5) Rome claims that the original Earth Day was a profound source of inspiration for those involved. Many historians cite this event as the beginning of the modern environmental movement. How have Earth Day celebrations continued to motivate individuals? In what ways have past Earth Day celebrations failed to motivate individuals? What efforts should be taken to regain the original Earth Day’s inspiration in order to continue to effect positive environmental change?

Activity: Environmental visions

Politicians, teachers, students, and environmental activists have utilized Earth Day to express their environmental visions. Rome describes those of three individuals involved in the original Earth Day: Senator Gaylord Nelson, law student Denis Hayes, and environmental activist Marshall Brewer.

- 1) Break the class into three groups, assigning them Nelson, Hayes, or Brewer. Ask each group to list things that describe the environmental visions of their individual.
- 2) Then have the groups briefly describe and analyze their individual's environmental vision.
- 3) After the class has a general understanding of these three environmental visions, ask the groups to create collective environmental visions.
- 4) Have groups present and defend their environmental visions in order to create an environmental vision for the class. This can also be done for the university, the community, the nation, and even the world.

Activity: The legacy of Earth Day

Break the class into small groups and ask each group to read and discuss Nixon's "Letter to . . . Earth Week" in order to understand the overall significance of the primary source.

Questions to prompt active engagement

- What motivated President Nixon to write this letter?
- What does Nixon proclaim in this document?
- What impacts, both direct and indirect, follow Nixon's declaration?
- What is the overall significance of this primary source?

After the groups have discussed Nixon's "Letter to . . . Earth Week," have the groups read and discuss Obama's "Remarks on . . . Earth Day."

Questions to prompt active engagement

- 1) What motivated President Obama to give this speech?
- 2) How does Obama view the past 40 years in regards to American environmentalism?
- 3) According to Obama, what environmental hurdles remain?
- 4) What is the overall significance of this primary source?

After the groups have discussed Obama's "Remarks on . . . Earth Day," have the groups assess the past forty years of American environmentalism. While Nixon and Obama explain that much needs to be done in order to improve the environment, a lot has been accomplished in the past forty years. Each group should write a short speech or letter explaining the strengths (environmental hurdles overcome) and weaknesses (environmental hurdles yet to conquer) of the environmental movement in America. This can also be made into individual projects or assignments.

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 section--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.

Source: 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.

Source: 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
 - Commitment to neighborhood preservation and conservation
 - Use of historic buildings for federal offices where appropriate
 - An improved and expanded urban homesteading program
- Actions to improve the urban environment
- 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.

Source: 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.

Source: 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>.

Nixon: "Letter to Governors Urging Citizen Participation in Environmental Programs During Earth Week", April 12, 1972

Dear Governor:

Recently I proclaimed the week of April 17-23 as national "Earth Week," and I would like to ask your assistance in making that period an occasion for all citizens to work together on improving and restoring our environment. Surely there could be few issues of greater moment to America.

As I observed in that proclamation, "The environmental awakening marks a new maturity in our attitudes toward the relationship of man to his surroundings.

...We have made a beginning in this new era of environmental enlightenment. But it is only a beginning. Every American and every citizen of the world must make a conscious and sustained effort if we are to succeed in protecting this earth which we all share."

At the Federal level, we have made a strong and irreversible commitment to this cause, setting up new agencies within the government, greatly increasing our financial support, and asking for a very large package of new laws, as set forth most recently in my message to Congress of February 8, 1972. I am most anxious that we now secure passage of these 24 pieces of legislation, for we must have the proper tools if we are to succeed in this task.

As you are aware, there is also a special need to enlist our young people in this effort. Their involvement will not only serve to renew our environment but should also be an important step in developing an informed and concerned citizenry. Last October I established the Environmental Merit Awards Program so that secondary school children could fulfill their deeply felt commitments; already, more than 2,500 high schools representing all 50 States have registered in this program.

During this coming Earth Week, I hope you will impress upon the citizens of your State how important it is that they seek a better understanding of environmental needs and opportunities on a continuing basis. Certainly we will achieve the quality of life that we want only if we make each and every day a part of Earth Week.

With best personal regards, Sincerely,

RICHARD NIXON

Source: Richard Nixon: "Letter to Governors Urging Citizen Participation in Environmental Programs During Earth Week,," April 12, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3371>.

Obama's "Remarks on the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day"

April 22, 2010

Hello, everybody! How are you? Now, this is a good-looking crowd. [Laughter] Thank you so much, everybody, for coming.

Today we celebrate 40 years of Earth Day. Now, obviously, Earth has been around longer than that. [Laughter] But we have been celebrating Earth Day for 40 years, which was a bright moment in our Nation's history and a milestone in the ongoing fight to protect our environment.

Many of you know the history. In 1970, a Senator from Wisconsin named Gaylord Nelson hired a young graduate student named Denis Hayes, who is with us today. Where's Denis? There he is. He still looks like a young graduate student. [Laughter] And so Denis helped to coordinate the first Earth Day. And together, they raised their voices and called on every American to take action on behalf of our environment.

And in the four decades since, millions of Americans have heeded that call and joined together to protect the planet. And we've made immense progress since that day, from the landmark legislation of the 1970s, the Clean Air and the Clean Water Act, to the conservation of America's precious landscapes.

I know that many of you have played an important role at one stage or another in these victories, and their impact can be felt today and will be felt tomorrow. And as a parent, I'm grateful for the good fight that so many of you have fought, because it means that I'm going to be able to pass on to Malia and Sasha and maybe some grandchildren down the line this incredible bounty not only of the United States of America but the world as a whole.

And along the way, Earth Day has become much more than a date on the calendar. It's come to represent the simple truth that with each challenge comes the opportunity to make the world a better place.

So since taking office, we have seized that opportunity. With your help, we've made a historic investment in clean energy that will not only create the jobs of tomorrow but will also lay the foundation for long-term economic growth. We've continued to invest in innovators and entrepreneurs who want to unleash the next wave of clean energy. We've strengthened our investment in our most precious resources: the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the parks and public spaces that we enjoy.

And together, we've also renewed our commitment to passing a comprehensive energy and climate bill that will safeguard our planet and spur innovation and help us to compete in the 21st century.

So looking out into the Rose Garden today, we see a lot of people who will help us achieve these goals: the business owners who know that protecting our environment is good for business; the Members of Congress who are helping to carry us along in the House and the Senate; the members of my "green" Cabinet who are helping to shape the policies that we're fighting for; and the environmental leaders who are on the ground fighting each and every day because they understand what's at stake.

So together, you represent, what I believe, is most inspiring about Earth Day, and that is the belief that each of us individually, from different backgrounds and different walks of life, have the capacity to make an enormous difference.

I think we all understand that the task ahead is daunting, that the work ahead will not be easy and it's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take your leadership. It's going to take all of your ideas. And it will take all of us coming together in the spirit of Earth Day, not only on Earth Day but every day, to make the dream of a clean energy economy and a clean world a reality. I'm confident, though, that we can do it. And I want to thank all of you for your support, your counsel, your occasional grumbling—[laughter]—and your dedication, because without you, we couldn't accomplish everything that needs to be accomplished.

So thank you very much, everybody. Enjoy the Rose Garden. Thank you.

Source: Barack Obama: "Remarks on the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day," April 22, 2010.
Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87790>