

upon all Americans to commit themselves anew to helping our young people avoid violence, to setting a good example, and to restoring our schools and neighborhoods as safe havens for learning and recreation.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

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Remarks at the League of Conservation Voters Dinner

October 7, 1998

Thank you very much for that wonderful welcome. Let me say, first of all, I want to thank Deb Callahan for her opening remarks and her leadership. I thank your chairman, Mike Hayden. I'd like to thank my EPA Administrator, Carol Browner, for being here and for the good job she does. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to the three Members of Congress who are here tonight, without whom I could have accomplished very little over these last 6 years. Thank you, George Miller, Norm Dicks, Maurice Hinchey. Thank you for what you have done for our country.

And I'd also like to just express my appreciation to three people here—who aren't here, who have been a real inspiration to me and a constant source of support in a lot of these fights we have taken on: first and foremost, the Vice President; second, the First Lady; and third, Secretary Babbitt. They have all, in ways none of you will ever know, as well as all those you're aware of, had countless, countless conversations with me about a lot of the issues that I will mention tonight, and some I will forget.

But in an administration, the President often gets the credit when the inspiration, the ideas, the energy, and sometimes the constructive nagging comes from other peo-

ple. Now, Carol Browner, for example, constructively nagged me—[*laughter*—to make sure we stood up for clean air.

Congressman Boehlert, is that you back there? I didn't see you. Thank you, sir. [*Applause*] I'm glad to see you. Thank you very much.

But anyway, everybody said the sky was falling, and Carol said the kids need to breathe. And so we wound up doing it her way. [*Laughter*] And we're still rocking along pretty well.

And tonight I hope you'll permit me to say a very special word of appreciation to one of your honorees who is about to leave our administration, the Chair of the CEQ, Katie McGinty. Let's give her a hand. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I just was informed I missed another Member of Congress and another friend of the environment, Congresswoman Connie Morella. Where are you, Connie? There you are. Thank very much. [*Applause*] Thank you.

We've had a lot of exceedingly complex, as well as difficult—politically difficult but also intellectually complex decisions we've had to make, working out our position on climate change, on how to deal with the northwest forest challenge, on whether we could figure out a way to save Yellowstone, on figuring out the genuine equities that lay underneath the big decision on Grand Staircase Escalante. And in all of those cases, Katie McGinty has been there, working with all the various people affected and concerned, trying to make sure we did the right thing by the environment and to make sure we did it increasingly, I believe, in the right way. And I am very, very much indebted to her. I'll miss her, and we wish her well. Thank you. [*Applause*] She's actually going to India for awhile, and I told her I expect by the time I get there, there will be no longer any nuclear issues between the United States and India. [*Laughter*] If she can solve all these other problems, deal with all this other contention, this ought to be just another drop in the bucket.

Let me begin tonight where Deb Callahan left off. I agree that our job is not simply to convince people of the importance of environmental stewardship; the harder part is to

convince people of the power they have not only to stand up for what they believe in but to change what they disagree with. We have seen that over and over and over again. For too many years, the champions of the environment have been in the clear majority in America but have been insufficiently organized across economic and regional and party lines to bring their force to bear with their friends in the Congress.

Now, we still have that task in the next 30 days, because the next 30 days will be critical to the future of the environment. Indeed, we have that task in the next few days, the last days of this congressional session before the election. And I'll have more to say about that in a moment.

One of the best illustrations of citizen power to change what is wrong is actually here under our noses. Just before America celebrated its first Earth Day, a wide-eyed, but fairly low-level congressional staffer, recently out of college, had a great democratic idea, to create an environmental scorecard for Members of Congress and empower voters to make a more informed choice. With that idea, that young woman launched the League of Conservation Voters and had enormous influence ever since. Marion Edey, thank you very much. Where are you? Stand up. Where are you? *[Applause]* Thank you.

Over the past generation when we have faced clear common threats, our citizens often have joined together in common resolve. America came together to heed Rachel Carson's warnings by banning DDT and other poisons. America cleaned up rivers so filthy they were catching on fire. America phased out lead in gasoline and the chemicals that deplete our protective ozone layer. America achieved all these things in no small measure because of the broad bipartisan citizen power mobilized by groups like the LCV.

Over the past 6 years, we have worked together to build on these accomplishments, to preserve our national treasures like Florida's Everglades, California's ancient redwoods, the spectacular red-rock canyons of Utah. Just last month, Katie McGinty was out in Yellowstone commemorating our success in protecting the park from the New World Mine.

We are doing our best to lead the way on the global environment. We made sure the Kyoto agreement was strong and realistic, and we're determined that America must do its part to reverse global warming. We're protecting the health of our families and communities. We've accelerated Superfund clean-ups, issued the toughest air quality standards ever, dramatically reduced toxic pollution, not through the heavy hand of regulation but by giving communities access to the information they deserve.

These efforts reflect not only our, yours and mine, our common commitment to protecting the environment, but to doing it in the right way, innovative, commonsense solutions that achieve the greatest protection at the least cost. That means rejecting the false choice that pits the economy against the environment.

I want to say a little more about that in a moment. But I have to tell you that the largest obstacle we face in our Congress, in our country, and in the world in getting a united, serious approach to climate change is the deeply embedded, almost psychic dependence that so many decisionmakers in our country and all over the world have to the elemental notion that economic growth is still not possible without industrial era energy use patterns. People simply don't believe it, so that when I talk to people in developing countries and when I talk to people in the still developing Congress—*[laughter]*—we have these—I say that in a—that's a compliment, as I will say more about it in a moment. *[Laughter]*

We still have the people that are literally obsessed with the notion that seriously addressing climate change is somehow a plot to wreck America's economic future and political sovereignty. I asked somebody today how much time we had spent complying—and most of you don't think I did enough on climate change, right? Is that right? Let's put it out here on the table. *[Laughter]* Most of you don't think I did enough on climate change. I proposed a series of very, I think, effective tax incentives to get people to do the right things and make them economically efficient and a major increase in research and development. And there is a committee in the House of Representatives that acts like

I'm right up there with the black helicopter crowd. [Laughter] It's true.

I asked today; we believe that we have spent 10,000 hours complying with subpoenas from a committee who believes we are subverting the future of America with these modest proposals on climate change. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in compliance costs over and above the salaries of the people involved. Why is that? Are these bad people who don't love their country? Do they really want to destroy our environment? Do they believe their grandchildren don't need to deal with this? Absolutely not. They honestly still believe that economic growth is not possible without industrial age energy use patterns. "Don't show me those solar reflectors that go on roofs now that look just like ordinary shingles. Don't bother me with those windows that let in twice as much light and keep out twice as much heat and cold. I don't want to hear about the economics of insulation or the lights that will save themselves a ton of greenhouse emissions during the life of the lamp."

So I say to you, we have still a huge intellectual battle to fight, a way of looking at the world and the future that helps to bring us together, instead of drive us apart. And one of the central ideas is the honest belief that you cannot only grow the economy and preserve the environment, you can actually grow the economy and improve the environment.

This country has the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the fastest wage growth in 20 years, the smallest percentage of the people on welfare in 29 years, the first surplus in 29 years, the highest homeownership ever. But compared to 6 years ago, the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer; there are fewer toxic waste dumps; and we have done quite a lot of other things to protect the environment. It is simply not true that you can't grow the economy and improve the environment. And vast, vast technological and conservation and alternative energy source opportunities have been completely untapped compared to their economically available potential in our country today.

So we have a lot more work to do, but I will say again, sometimes you have to win the battle of the big ideas, even if it's with

simple, small examples, before you can really move our vast country in one direction without interruption.

So I would like to make here a point I have tried to make to our fellow citizens in every forum I could, since it became obvious that we were going to have a balanced budget and a surplus. The temptation is to be diverted or just relaxed in a good economic time. That would be an error. These times are, first of all, highly dynamic. We have enormous challenges of which you are well aware, the global financial challenge, the global environmental challenge. It would be a terrible mistake for us to squander this moment of opportunity, when so much good is happening for America and we have a level of confidence about our ability to meet challenges that we have not had in decades, by being either diverted or relaxed. We need to face the challenges we have and think about how we can best use this prosperity to build the kind of future we want.

Tonight I'll give you an example of one thing we're trying to do to use this time of prosperity, adding vital new protections for our Nation's wetlands. Earlier this year, as part of our Clean Water Action Plan, I set a goal of restoring 100,000 acres of wetlands a year by 2005. Today the Army Corps of Engineers is proposing changes to ensure that we think twice before building in our most sensitive wetlands. Twenty years ago, if you'd told me I'd see this day and this initiative from that august body, I never would have believed it. And I congratulate them on it and honor them for it.

From now on, we will require a full environmental review, with full public participation, of all projects in critical wetlands areas, particularly floodplains. In a typical year, 140 Americans die in floods, and \$4 billion in property is destroyed. Just in this past week, nine people have died in floods in Missouri and Kansas. That's why FEMA Director James Lee Witt felt so strongly about strengthening protections for the floodplains. By thinking twice, we can prevent tragedy and save taxpayer dollars while protecting the environment.

And as we all know, if we are going to do this, make the most of this moment, we have to do it together. For years and years,

protecting the environment was a matter of bipartisan concern. And frankly, for a lot of people it still is. You have three good Democrats and two fine Republicans here tonight, unless I missed someone else that I wasn't given. [Laughter] But in the last Congress it seemed not to be the case. There was a direct frontal assault on the environment, a rollback of—or an attempted rollback of 30 years on hard-won gains. As the LCV ably documented, more than a third of the Members of the 104th Congress scored a zero on the environment. The group tried to force me to sign a budget with unconscionable cuts in environmental protections. Twice the Government was shut down in no small measure because of environmental controversies. But because together we decided not to give in and fought back, it came out all right.

Now a lot of the same folks are back with a different tactic, here in the waning days of the congressional session, a sneak attack. Not only are they refusing to fully fund environmental priorities: the Clean Water Action Plan to help clean up waterways too polluted for fishing and swimming, an extraordinary percentage of the waterways in America; the Land and Water Conservation Fund to protect precious lands in danger of development; the climate change technology initiative to take commonsense steps to reverse global warming—not only would they keep us from moving forward in these areas, but they're pushing once again in the opposite direction, as all of you know all too well, by loading appropriations bills up with a slew of antienvironmental riders.

Really that rider word is really well chosen because it's sort of an unrelated passenger riding along on a piece of legislation that otherwise looks pretty good. These special interest riders, among other things, would carve roads through the Alaskan wilderness, force overcutting in our national forests, cripple wildlife protections, and sell the taxpayers short.

Now, the sponsors of these riders know that the proposals could not stand on their own. They know that, therefore, they have to resort to a stealth tactic to get this done. I personally believe this unrelated rider strategy, unless it's something that has broad bi-

partisan support necessary to preserve some immediate national need, is bad for the democratic process, as well as bad for the environment. So tonight let me say, again, to you and to the Congress, I will veto any bill that will do unacceptable harm to our environment including its survival. [Applause] Thank you.

Let me say to all of you, there is hope that we can do better. This afternoon—or this morning, I guess—time flies when you're having fun—[laughter]—anyway, sometime today we had a marvelous ceremony at the White House, with over 30 Members of Congress, signing a higher education bill that had enormous Republican and Democratic support, that among other things gave us the lowest interest rates on student loans in nearly 20 years, will save \$11 billion to students with existing loans, about \$700 a student, for college students.

Perhaps even more important over the long run, this bill, with an idea inspired by Congressman Chaka Fattah from Philadelphia, provides support to set up mentoring programs for middle-school children in tough, inner-city and other poor school districts, and enables the mentors to tell the kids when they're 12 or 13, "If you stay in school and you keep learning, here is how much college aid you are going to be able to get, and I can tell you that right now." And it provides for partnerships so that universities and private donors can give more to the kids in those years and guarantee them. It was an extraordinary day.

And then this afternoon the House of Representatives rejected a parks bill that would have done a lot more harm than good—listen to this—by the bipartisan, overwhelming margin of 301 to 123. Thank you. Thank you. That is the kind of bipartisan spirit the modern environmental movement started with in 1970.

You know, I've never met anybody walking on a trail in a national park—never—that I knew when I saw them coming toward me what their party affiliation was, except on the rare occasions when I actually knew them. [Laughter] When you go into one of our wilderness areas, nobody asks you to declare your affiliation. We all assume that we drink the same water; we swim in the same lakes;

we breathe the same air; we eat the same food; we love the same natural surroundings; we have the same common stake in preserving the same environment for our children and our grandchildren.

And I hope this vote today indicates that we have several more days, coming in time between now and when the Congress goes home at the end of the week, for this sort of spirit of coming together.

And then, in the next 30 days, during this election season, I hope that ordinary citizens who care deeply about these issues will bring their voices to bear in the election. Just think what would happen if people of both parties and independents simply said, "We're going to do better. We're going to change, at last and forever, the idea that we have to have old-fashioned, destructive energy use patterns to grow the economy. We will not give in to those who want to put the sacred up for sale. The decisions we make today on climate change, water, wetlands, and air will have implications for decades, if not centuries to come. And we want a unifying vision that embraces people who may differ on many other things, to embrace our common home and our common future." I think the American people, for all kinds of reasons, are open to that sort of message in the next 30 days.

We are reminded by every event which occurs that we are living in a world in which we are ever more interdependent not only with each other as Americans, but with those who live beyond our borders and with the Earth we all share. We see it when there's a reverberation in our stock market because of what happens in Russia or Latin America or Asia. We see it when we understand some big chunk of Antarctica has broken off and is floating and indicates that the water level may be rising more rapidly because the climate is warming. We see it when we understand our common responsibility to try to stop people of different ethnic groups from killing each other in the Baltics and the Balkans and to try to get people of different racial and ethnic and religious groups to embrace what we have in common, even as we celebrate our differences at home.

The environmental movement and its leaders are probably better positioned be-

cause of your general orientation of these issues than virtually any other group in America to get the American people to rethink these big ideas; to think about how we can be reconciled to ourselves, to our environment, and committed to our future; to think about how we can appreciate not only our independence but our interdependence with one another and with our fellow human beings throughout the world.

On the edge of a new millennium, I really believe the development of that kind of approach, and whether we can do it and reconcile it, as I believe we can, in a very rich and wonderful way, with our own tradition of individual rights and individuality and autonomy—if we can do that, I believe that will do more to ensure that we make the right decisions as a people across party and regional and income and other lines on the most profound decisions of our future than anything else.

You—you are uniquely positioned to change our people's way of thinking about this. And you could hardly give a greater gift to your country at the end of one century and the dawn of another.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:47 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Deb Callahan, president, and John Michael Hayden, chairman of the board, League of Conservation Voters. The President also referred to the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

October 7, 1998

Thank you very much. Ron, thank you for those words and I thank Beth for them. Hillary and I were over here to dinner not very long ago. It was a smaller crowd. There were just four of us. And I think if we come back again, I should be assessed part of the contractor's fee. [*Laughter*] I'm afraid I'm overstaying my welcome, but I love this beautiful, beautiful home.

I want to thank all of you for being here. I thank Steve Grossman for his tireless efforts