

Radio Address to the Nation on Environmental Issues

July 14, 1984

My fellow Americans:

I'd like to talk to you today about our environment. But as I mentioned earlier this week, in doing so I might be letting you in on a little secret -- as a matter of fact, one of the best-kept secrets in Washington.

More than 15 years ago, the State of California decided that we needed to take action to combat the smog that was choking the beautiful cities of my home State. Out of that concern was born the first serious program to require manufacturers to build cleaner cars and help control air pollution. The auto industry had to build two kinds of cars -- one that would be for sale in the other 49 States and one that would meet the stiff antipollution standards required in California.

We had other concerns in California, such as protecting our magnificent and unique coastline. And we took the lead in that area as well. It took the rest of the Nation a few years to catch on, but in 1970 the Congress followed California's lead and enacted the Clean Air Act. Other laws to protect and clean up the Nation's lakes and rivers were passed, and America got on with the job of protecting the environment.

Part of the secret I mentioned is that I happened to have been Governor of California back when much of this was being done. Now, obviously, neither the problems in California nor those nationally have been solved, but I'm proud of having been one of the first to recognize that States and the Federal Government have a duty to protect our natural resources from the damaging effects of pollution that can accompany industrial development.

The other part of the well-kept secret has to do with the environmental record of our administration, which is one of achievement in parks, wilderness land, and wildlife refuges. According to studies by the Environmental Protection Agency, the quality of our air and water has continued to improve during our administration. In many big cities, the number of days on which pollution alerts are declared has gone down. And if you live near a river, you may have noticed that the signs have been coming down that used to warn people not to fish or swim.

We came to Washington committed to respect the great bounty and beauty of God's creation. We believe very strongly in the concept of stewardship, caring for the resources we have so they can be shared and used productively for generations to come. And we've put that philosophy to work, correcting deficiencies of past policies and advancing long-overdue initiatives.

Let me give you some facts that our critics never seem to remember. When we took office in 1980, we faced a dusty shelf of reports which pointed out our predecessors had been so busy spending money on new lands for parks that they seriously neglected basic upkeep of the magnificent parks we had. So, we temporarily put off acquiring new parkland and started a new billion-dollar, 5-year program to repair and modernize facilities at our national parks and wildlife refuges. If you've been to just about any national park lately, you've probably seen the results.

We've nearly finished repairing the damage from years of neglect, and I've asked the Congress for almost \$160 million to resume buying lands to round out our national park and refuge systems.

We also took the lead in developing a new approach to protecting some 700 miles of undeveloped coastal areas -- the dunes, beaches, and barrier islands that are some of our most beautiful and productive natural resources.

Now, there are some who want you to believe that commitment to protecting the environment can be measured by comparing the budgets of EPA under the previous administration with those proposed and approved by the Congress under my administration. But they deliberately ignore that the major Federal environmental laws are designed to be carried out by the States in partnership with EPA.

By the time the clean air, clean water, and other big programs put in place in the early 1970's moved into their second decade, the States had largely taken over the job formerly performed by the Federal Government. With the successful delegation to the States, EPA, under the leadership of Bill Ruckelshaus, has been freed to move on to the challenges of the 1980's -- such as cleaning up abandoned toxic waste dumps.

Under our administration, funding for the Superfund cleanup program will have increased from just over a hundred million dollars in 1981 to \$620 million in 1985. By the end of this year, EPA expects to have undertaken more than 400 emergency actions to remove and contain public health hazards. And because we recognize that we need to do more cleanup work than the current law provides, I'm committed to seeking an extension of the Superfund program.

As I said, our progress on protecting the environment is one of the best-kept secrets in Washington. But it's not, by far, the only secret. And I'll have more on that in the months ahead.

Until next week, thanks for listening, and God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. from Camp David, MD.