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Office of the Vice President

REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY LUNCHEON
MAYFLOWER HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 10, 1975

Yesterday, I completed the last of six public forums on domestic policy review which President Ford has asked me to hold throughout the country.

Everywhere we went we found -- along with concern about the economy, unemployment and inflation--that the American people are still deeply committed to the environment. We found that the American people want economic growth that will not destroy this country's environmental heritage. At the same time, they want balanced environmental protection that does not paralyze economic growth and future job opportunities.

The environmental movement, which began in the 1960s -- and for which we owe so much credit to our young people -- has proved to be no fad. It continues to be a high priority of the American people.

Yet, much has changed since the euphoria of Earth Day celebrations in 1970. Since then, the country underwent its worst economic decline since the Great Depression. Since then, we experienced the oil embargo which, together with subsequent price increases, has more than quadrupled oil prices. Since then, crop failures in parts of the world and the Russian wheat sale drove up food prices, as well. The American people found themselves confronted with simultaneous inflation and recession.

Yet, public support for environmental programs has held up. As Mr. O'Neill, of Opinion Research pointed out to you earlier, 90 per cent of the people believe that if we do not clean up the environment now, it will cost more money in the long run. And 60 per cent of the people are willing to pay higher prices to protect the environment.

It seems safe to say, therefore, that those of you manufacturing environmental equipment are engaged in a growth sector of the economy. However, the watchwords today have got to be realism and balance between our environmental aspirations and our economic necessities.

I am presently serving as Chairman of the National Commission on Water Quality. And I would like to draw upon this experience to illustrate the need for balance and realism. The Congress created this Commission to find out the total economic, social and environmental impacts of the Clean Water Act passed in 1972.

(MORE)

For example by June 30, 1977, municipalities are required under the Act to give their waste waters secondary treatment and the estimated range in costs for doing so is considerable. If storm water problems are not included, the cost of secondary treatment will run about \$78.5 billion. If treatment of storm water run-off is included, the cost could climb to nearly \$600 billion.

As for industries, by that June 1977 deadline, they are to give their wastes the best practicable treatment, or better if necessary. And the cost of this treatment to industry is estimated at \$44.3 billion, assuming that all firms could meet these expenses. However, the Commission's studies indicate that a considerable number of plants will fold because they cannot meet these costs. On this basis, the cost for industries which can survive this investment becomes \$36.6 billion.

From this example it is obvious that we have got some hard thinking ahead of us. We have got to make sure, especially in the current tight budgetary climate, that the environmental dollar is invested where it is needed most. We have got to make sure that environmental laws, rules and regulations are reasonable, that they are formulated with a clear awareness of their potential impact on the economy, and that the goals set are realizable.

I have no doubt that there is enough resourcefulness in this country so that we do not have to pit the environment against the economy. We have to proceed with both in harmony. It may be harder. It may take longer. It may cost more. But we have to do it -- and we can do it.

In meeting your responsibilities, the government owes you continuity and consistency in its environmental programs so that you can plan intelligently without being plagued by "stop-and-go" bureaucratic behavior and uncertainties.

And I believe there is also something that you owe your customers. To a degree, your markets are assured by the fact that industries have to buy your wares in order to comply with the law.

At the same time, you have a challenging responsibility to develop the technology, to promote research and development, and to call upon your highest managerial skills, so that your products and services enable your customers to clean up their wastes at the lowest possible cost. In that way we can have the clean environment that our people want. And at the same time we can have the economic growth and jobs that people need if they are to be able to enjoy clean waters, pure air and unspoiled lands.

I thank you for this opportunity to be with you. And I congratulate you for making your business the vital business of restoring a more livable world.

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