

## **RECOGNITION OF THE 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH DAY**

**MR. CASEY:** Mr./Madam President, I rise today to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day. Started in 1970 by Wisconsin's Senator Gaylord Nelson as an environmental teach-in, Earth Day has become a global event. More than 20 million people participated in the first Earth Day and that number has grown to over 500 million in 175 countries.

Since the first Earth Day, the United States has made significant strides in improving the quality of our environment – our air, our water, our land, and our natural resources. The days of having to turn on street lights in downtown Pittsburgh at noon because of the pollution emitted by coal plants, steel mills, and other industries are long gone.

No longer does the Cuyahoga River in Ohio catch fire due to the uncontrolled discharge of oil and other pollutants. Long gone too is the mining of coal and other minerals without regard to the impact on land or water. And today, one can hike through Yellowstone National Park or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and hear the howling of wolves, a species that was almost completely wiped out in the lower 48 states. These are just a few examples of how our Nation has embraced the tenants of environmental awareness put forth on that first Earth Day in 1970.

Let me relate to you another story of our Nation's environmental progress that is a source of particular pride for Pennsylvanians. Rachel Carson is considered one of the pioneers of the environmental movement in the United States. Ms. Carson was born in 1907 and grew up on a small family farm near Springdale in western Pennsylvania, went to the Pennsylvania College for Women in Pittsburgh, which later became Chatham College, and completed her M.A. in zoology at Johns Hopkins University. She began her career as a biologist with what was then the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries.

Her seminal work in 1962, *Silent Spring*, brought to the forefront the dangers of DDT and other pesticides. DDT was a major cause of decline in the population of birds of prey,

including the peregrine falcon. Because of the efforts of Ms. Carson and others, DDT was eventually banned from use in the United States in 1972. Today, peregrine falcons have returned to much of their former range, including a pair of falcons that have been nesting on the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection office tower in Harrisburg, which fittingly, is named the Rachel Carson Building.

Ms. Carson's call to action on the environment was also a driving force behind a 1972 amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution that clearly articulates the right of Pennsylvania's citizens to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment, and ensuring these rights to generations yet to come.

The first Earth Day was also a major impetus for our Nation to move forward with a myriad of Federal legislation – including the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, and the Endangered Species Act – that provided the regulatory framework for America to be a world leader in environmental stewardship.

Just as importantly, we have seen since the first Earth Day that environmental protection can go hand-in-hand with economic growth. According to US EPA, since 1980, total emissions of six principal air pollutants -- carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide -- decreased by 54 percent.

And during this same period, gross domestic product (GDP) increased by more than 126 percent while the U.S. population grew by 34 percent, clearly demonstrating that we can maintain a strong, robust economy while at the same time protecting and promoting a safe and healthy environment for all Americans.

Today, as a Nation, we need to applaud the accomplishments we have made since the first Earth Day in improving the quality of our air, water, and land. But we also need to acknowledge that the task of protecting our environment is far from complete.

The remaining challenges are many. Nutrient pollution is still a concern for the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways. Mercury from large stationary sources still threatens the

health of our Nation's vulnerable population of infants and pregnant woman. And many of our urban areas still exceed national standards for air quality.

But the most daunting environmental challenge today is climate change. The scientific evidence about the threat of climate change cannot be disputed. We must move forward with climate and energy legislation that will put us on a path that ends our unsustainable reliance on foreign energy. A path that will create new, clean energy jobs and that will regain our competitive edge over countries like China, which is out-investing us and out-innovating us when it comes to new energy technologies. A path that regains control of our environment, our economy, and our national security.

Let me close with a quote from Rachel Carson. It goes, "*Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.*" So, as we celebrate Earth Day today, let us all take a moment to consider the beauty and wonder of the natural world around us.

And let us use the strength we take away from these moments to continue to preserve and protect our Nation's rich natural history and environment for our children and grandchildren. So that future generations will always have a clean environment, a robust economy, and a secure Nation.