

Statement on the Death of George Burns *March 9, 1996*

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of one of the great entertainers of all time. Like all Americans, we are grateful George Burns kept us laughing for so long. As a young boy I enjoyed the Burns and Allen show every week. His sense of timing and capti-

vating smile touched the hearts and funny bones of more than three generations. He enabled us to see humor in the toughest of times and laugh together as a Nation.

We will miss him greatly. Our prayers and sympathies go to his family and friends.

Remarks to the Community in Hackensack, New Jersey *March 11, 1996*

Thank you very much. President Mertz, thank you for making us feel so welcome at Fairleigh Dickinson. And Mayor Zisa, thank you for making us feel so welcome in your hometown; we're glad to be here, sir.

I want to thank all the New Jersey public officials who are here. I thank Senator Lautenberg, especially for his work on the environment. I thank Congressman Torricelli and Congressman Menendez and Congressman Payne. I thank my former colleagues, Governor Florio and Governor Brendan Byrne. And I want to thank Carol Browner for the fine job she has done here and in every State in the country, at the EPA. And most of all I want to thank the Vice President for being a constant inspiration to me on the subject of America's environment.

I thank the two families who are here who were introduced by Senator Lautenberg, the Dukers and the Flatows; and I thank them for their incalculable sacrifice and their continued devotion to the integrity and the freedom of Israel and the cause of peace in the Middle East. God bless you, and thank you both very much.

I know that, as President Mertz said, my friend Leah Rabin was here just a week ago to accept an award on behalf of herself and her late husband from this distinguished university. Yitzhak Rabin was a good friend of mine, and he always took issue with those who characterized the creation of Israel and its continuance as some sort of a miracle. He didn't think there was anything miraculous about it. He thought it was the direct result of thousands and thou-

sands of people being able to devote a lifetime of hard work and effort and courage and ultimate sacrifice to a common cause. Tomorrow I will go to Egypt to try to advance that cause and beat back the terrorism that threatens it today.

But I want to talk to you today about the common cause we must make in our efforts to preserve and enhance our environment for ourselves and for our children. It will not be a miracle that preserves America's environment and the global environment; it will be the result of thousands and thousands of people, ultimately millions of people, devoting themselves to a common cause.

When I became President, I had a pretty straightforward vision. I wanted our country to come together, to create the opportunity that would permit every American who was willing to work for it a shot at the American dream. I want to go into the next century with our country still the strongest force for peace and freedom and security and prosperity in the world. I want this country to come together around its basic values of responsibility and opportunity, of work and family, and of community. I was then weary, and I remain even more impatient, with those who seek to divide the American people for short-term political gain.

In the State of the Union Address I gave all of you and our fellow Americans a report on where we are, where we have been, and where I think we have to go, and on the seven challenges I believe we have to address in order for those objectives to be reached as we begin a new century and a new millennium. We have

to have stronger families and better childhoods for all our children. We have to open educational opportunity to every person so that every child and every adult has access to learning throughout life. We have to provide economic security for families who are willing to work for it, including those who have worked hard without raises, those who live in places that have not felt the impact of the recovery, and those who are being downsized today but still have much to contribute to their families, their communities, and the future of our country.

We have to take our streets back from crime and drugs and gangs. We cannot walk away from our obligations to lead the world in the fight for peace and freedom. And we must continue to work to reinvent our Government so that it works better and inspires more trust. But finally, we must also recognize that if we want this country to be the greatest country in the world in the next century, we have to provide for a clean and healthy environment.

This is not a luxury; it is not an option. It is about self-preservation, about the preservation of our children's future. It indeed is at the core of the spiritual beliefs of nearly every American, for Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, all could embrace the words of the psalmist, "The Earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof."

It is incredible to me now that the environment has for the first time in a generation become a source of political division. I just came from Wallington, and you know there are some people here from there. You heard from them earlier. There in the middle of a residential neighborhood the Vice President and I looked up a hill toward Jefferson Elementary School and then across a field that is a toxic waste site, the land that is being cleaned up under the Superfund law.

Not so very long ago there was a factory there that had been abandoned. It was an unsafe building; there were barrels full of unsafe chemicals. They were all taken away as evidence of the success of the law. The problem is the cleanup is not finished. There is still the fence topped with barbed wire that severs the 9-acre site from the rest of the community. And land within that fence remains contaminated with PCB's, which are known to cause cancer. Families can't walk there, children can't play there. This is a hole in that community, when it could

be the source of a new, revitalized neighborhood.

The mayor said he wanted new housing for the people. He said perhaps senior citizens could live there. All that remains to be done is to finish the job of purging the soil of that site of the poisoned chemicals. I can't think of why we ought to tolerate this in Wallington or anywhere else in the country. But listen to this: 10 million children under the age of 12 live within 4 miles of a toxic waste dump—10 million. In New Jersey alone there are 100 toxic hot spots that need to be cleaned up; 800,000 children live a mere bicycle ride away from these places. Well, this is America, my friends, and that's not good enough for me. It ought not to be good enough for you.

No child should have to live near a toxic waste dump. No child should have to drink water contaminated with chemicals. No child should have to eat food poisoned with pesticides. And I am determined that every child will have the safe and healthy future that every child should have as a God-given and a legal right in the United States of America.

Make no mistake about it; just as others have said before me, this has for a long time not been a political issue in the traditional sense. America is indeed a much cleaner and healthier place after a generation of bipartisan commitment to cleaning up the environment. Since our laws were put into place 25 years ago, toxic emissions from factories have been cut in half. Lead levels in children's blood have dropped 70 percent. Once, because it was so polluted, a river of ours caught on fire but no more, and Lake Erie, which was once declared dead, is now teeming with fish.

So should we say, well, since we've done all this, we can just treat this as an ordinary issue now and start fighting about it again? There is more to do. A third of us still breathe air that endangers our health. Our national parks are the envy of the world. But as the First Lady and our daughter and I found last summer when we visited two of those parks, they're still in need of repair and continued maintenance if they're going to remain the Nation's treasure. And in too many communities, the water is still not safe to drink.

We've worked hard on a broad-based environmental agenda. The Vice President has been of great inspiration to me in that. When I was a Governor, the preservation of the environment

involved things that I understood from my own experience. I was lucky enough to grow up in a national park surrounded by three lakes. I was never, I don't suppose in my whole childhood, more than 10 minutes away from the mountains and the woods and the creeks that became all too easy for me to take for granted. And when Hillary and I had our daughter, we loved to go to the State parks in our home State and to expose her to the world of natural beauty that I took as a given as a child.

Thanks to the Vice President, I've learned how all of this relates to things that are going on all over the world and how the phenomenon of global warming can radicalize our own weather patterns here in America and disrupt the future of America if we do not deal with the environment in a comprehensive way from the grassroots communities all the way up to the international issues. And that is what we are committed to doing.

And our agenda included expanding the community right-to-know law, which requires industries to tell our citizens what substances are being released into their air and their water. We're cutting toxic air pollution from chemical plants by 90 percent. Because of tougher clean air laws, 50 million Americans in 55 cities are now breathing easier. Stricter meat safety tests have dramatically reduced the chances of a child eating a hamburger with the lethal *E. coli* bacteria. Working with some of our country's best corporate citizens, we kicked dozens of dangerous chemicals out of the marketplace and quickly replaced them with safer substitutes.

And just as important as what we have done is how we're doing it. The laws and regulations that brought our environment back from the brink worked well for their time. But what worked yesterday may not work today or tomorrow. We believe in higher environmental standards, but we also believe in more partnership between environmentalists and people working in the private sector. We believe in more flexibility and more focus on results instead of rule-making. We know that going through Washington may not be the only road to a safer and cleaner world.

And so under Carol Browner's leadership, we're cutting paperwork at the EPA by 25 percent. We're working with the auto companies to develop a clean car, a partnership that could triple automobile mileage in the next few years and dramatically reduce toxic emissions into the

air. We're asking businesses and communities to work together. The EPA's new Project XL encourages responsible companies to find inexpensive, efficient ways to exceed pollution standards, and if they can, they can get rid of the rulebook. We're interested in the results, not the rules.

Our commonsense initiative for small business emphasizes results, not punishment. If a small business makes a mistake and is committed to fixing that mistake, we will waive the fine if they repair the problem—excuse me, my wife and daughter and I have been passing around the last cold of winter, you'll have to indulge me. This new way of doing business overturns the conventional wisdom that we have to somehow choose between the health of our environment and the health of our economy.

Look at the last 3 years. We have stepped up efforts to protect the environment in the last 3 years. We've also stepped up efforts to advance the economy. We have a cleaner environment and 8.4 million new jobs. You do not have to choose between the two.

It used to be said that if you had a commitment to a clean environment it would be especially burdensome for small businesses. Well, we not only have the lowest combined rates of employment and inflation in 27 years, we have set records in each of the last 3 years for new small business formation. It is a myth. You do not have to choose between the environment and the economy. Indeed, I submit to you that good environmental policy will grow the economy, especially the kind of good high-wage jobs we need more of in America.

Now, if this legacy of environmental protection has been good for all Americans and it's been bipartisan for 25 years and it clearly is not hurting our ability to generate jobs in a world where the other wealthy economies of the world are struggling, struggling to create jobs, why would we abandon 25 years of bipartisan commitment when there are new challenges that have to be met and when, in fact, a lot of people who worry about their ability to have these good high-wage jobs in yesterday's economic organizations should be looking to tomorrow's environmental opportunities as a way to create those jobs? Why would we do that?

Because in the last year a small army of very powerful lobbyists literally have descended on Capitol Hill as if they owned the place. They have mounted a full-scale attack on our environ-

mental laws and on our public health protections. Some in this Congress actually allowed these lobbyists to sit down at the table in the committee rooms and rewrite these important environmental laws, from gutting enforcement of clean air and clean water, to weakening community right-to-know, to selling off our great and precious store of public lands to the highest bidder, to tying up our enforcement agencies in litigation. This Congress has mounted the most aggressive antienvironmental campaign in our history. And I am proud that we have stood against that.

Now, because the Congress knew that the American people would never put up with an outright repeal of these laws, they also took another, more subtle, approach. They tried to take the environmental cop off the beat by simply cutting resources for health and safety protection. And I'm proud we stood against that, too.

We have fought off a lot this year, but you know and I know the fight is far from over. This budget impasse has been used by Congress, and this crazy way of running the Government by continuing resolution instead of a budget, to slowly and quietly keep the EPA from doing its job. The EPA is now operating at about a 15 percent cut from its last year's budget.

So what happens? They get what they want by indirection. The Agency is running behind on its inspections. There have been delays in putting in place safeguards to keep things like cryptosporidium out of our drinking water. Now, that's a big word, but you'll know what it is when I remind you that that's what killed all those people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We don't want it in our drinking water. We need to get it out and get it out now.

And cleanup has stopped on more than 60 toxic waste sites around the country, including the one the Vice President and I just visited at Wallington. There are 14 in New Jersey, 17 in New York, and it is wrong. And if that weren't enough, the funding on the current continuing resolution runs out on Friday. And Congress again is threatening to shut down the Government for a third time unless I accept their drastic cuts in the environment and education, Medicare and Medicaid. Let me make something clear. It was wrong for them to shut down the Government the first time because I wouldn't accept the cuts. It was wrong the second time. And three wrongs on the environment do not make a right.

Let me remind all of you, my fellow Americans, without regard to your party, we can balance the budget in 7 years and protect the health and safety of our people. We have identified \$700 billion in savings common to both plans that will still permit us to protect the environment, invest in education, protect Medicare and Medicaid, grow the economy, and get rid of the deficit. That is what we ought to do.

And in this budget I challenge Congress also to join me in adopting our brownfields initiative. The brownfields initiative encourages businesses and communities to turn old polluted sites into homes for safe and sustainable businesses. Now, this effort that we've had under way has already created jobs in 29 different communities. To include more of them, we have made it clear that brownfields purchasers will not be liable for the mess they inherited and neither will those who lend to them to finance the cleanup.

Today I'm proposing the next step in revitalizing these communities, a brownfields tax initiative for those who clean up and redevelop contaminated abandoned properties, a \$2 billion tax incentive targeted specifically to areas where the poverty rate is 20 percent or higher, to make it possible for brownfields investors to deduct their cleanup expenses immediately and cut the cost for this type of investment in half. That will bring jobs to the places that have missed out on this recovery.

This proposal is expected to spur \$10 billion in private investments nationwide, to return to productive use as many as 30,000 brownfields throughout the United States. It is fully paid for in my 7-year balanced budget. It is good for Americans, and I urge Congress to join me in making it happen.

Now, this brownfields effort is only part of the larger picture of environmental efforts we are making. Look what I saw today in Wallington. We have to repair the Superfund toxic waste cleanup program. Superfund has been an important tool in helping us to protect the environment. In the past 16 years, toxic waste has been removed from more than 3,000 sites. And in the last 3 years, I am proud of the fact that our administration has completed more cleanups than in the previous 12 years. We need to keep doing this until the job is done.

My fellow Americans, we have reached the limit, unfortunately, of what we can do alone.

We have to have help with Congress to cure the remaining problems with the Superfund. Small businesses and communities trapped in the liability net, lenders afraid to finance clean-ups—all these have to do with the way the law is written. And only Congress can change it. Only Congress can finish the job. They should do it the right way, by making sure, as Senator Lautenberg says, that polluters pay. Right now, Congress is moving forward with Superfund legislation that would let polluters off the hook and make the taxpayers pay. I don't think the taxpayers should pay when the polluters can pay. That is wrong.

All of you have been very patient to listen to us today make our plea for a new bipartisan commitment to the protection of the environment. But all of you here know that our ability to make America strong in the 21st century and to keep our people living in the place of greatest possibility in the world is clearly, clearly based on our ability to continue to make progress in the environment.

As President I take no particular pleasure in exercising the power of the veto. I like to get things done. I like to move things forward. I like to work with people who have different ideas in a positive way. But when it comes to protecting our air, our food, our water, I cannot sacrifice America's values and America's future, or America's health and safety. It is important to remember—let me say again, as so many have said—that this current state of affairs that we have endured for over a year now is a drastic aberration from the pattern of a previous generation.

When Jim Florio was in Congress working with Senator Lautenberg and Congressman Torricelli and others on the Superfund legislation, people knew that these were things Republicans and Democrats did together because it was good for America. The natural blessings God gave this country were not given to Democrats or Republicans because of their political party. They were given to people who live on this particular piece of God's good Earth, and we had better go back to protecting them together.

Robert Frost once wrote, "The land was ours before we were the land. Our environment is fundamentally us. Its well-being is ours. And when we revitalize it we nourish our souls and restore our communities." I thank you for coming here today. I thank you for your good citizenship. I ask you in this coming year to exercise that citizenship to make sure that when we leave this Earth it is cleaner and fresher and purer than we found it. That is our fundamental obligation.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the Rothman Center Auditorium at Fairleigh Dickinson University. In his remarks, he referred to Frank Mertz, president, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Mayor John F. Zisa of Hackensack; James J. Florio and Brendan Byrne, former Governors of New Jersey; the families of Sarah Duker and Alyssa Flatow, U.S. citizens killed in terrorist attacks in Israel; and Leah Rabin, widow of Yitzhak Rabin, former Prime Minister of Israel.

Interview With the New Jersey Media in Hackensack

March 11, 1996

Corporate Downsizing

Q. You talked briefly in your speech, and you talked more about it last Friday, about the new jobs that have been created while you've been President. Yet here in New Jersey there's a terrific amount of economic insecurity on middle management people—AT&T laying off thousands; two major drug companies have just announced a merger, more people are going to be laid off. What do you see as the Govern-

ment's role in—or the Government's response to the fact that people are losing good jobs and they're not interested in how well you say the economy is growing?

The President. First of all, I think we do have a responsibility to them. And I think to address the responsibility, you have to ask yourself first what is the problem and what is the answer to the problem. It is clear—what's happening basically is that in—this is the second great wave