

I am going to veto anyway; instead, let's go on with the work of America.

Let me say in closing one very personal thing. As I have already explained, I am as deeply indebted to the work of the Department of the Interior as any President could possibly be—to the visionaries like John Wesley Powell and Harold Ickes and Rachel Carson, to the park rangers that I've seen in Yellowstone and Grand Teton and other parks, to the people that were kind to me as a boy when I roamed the trails and the mountains of the national park which was my home.

In one way or the other, almost all of us have come to see nature as a precious but fragile gift and an important part of the fabric of our lives. Probably every one of us could cite one particular example where that came home to us as never before. I remember once in 1971, when I was driving to California to visit Hillary—we had just started seeing each other—and I stopped at the Grand Canyon. And I crawled out on a ledge about an hour-and-a-half or two before sunset, and I just sat there for 2 hours, and I watched the Sun set on Grand Canyon. If you've never done it, you ought to do it. And because of the way the rocks are layered over millions of years, it's like a kaleidoscope. And the colors change over and

over and over again, layer by layer by layer as the Sun goes down. It is a stunning, stunning thing to see the interplay of light and stone and realize how it happened over the ages. I never got over it. I think about it all the time, now, nearly 30 years later.

That kind of moment can't be captured in the words I have shared with you, or even photographed, because the important thing is the interaction of human nature with nature. But we've all felt it. And we all know that part of our essential humanity is paying respect to what God gave us and what will be here a long time after we're gone.

That is what the Interior Department means to me. And after 150 years, it's what it means to all of America's past and to America's great future.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Sidney B. Yates Auditorium at the Department of Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Interior Department employees Dagmar C. Fertl and Mark Oliver, winners of the Unsung Hero Award. The related proclamation on the death of Harry A. Blackmun is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the Death of Harry A. Blackmun *March 4, 1999*

Justice Harry Blackmun, who died this morning, was a great American citizen. In 24 years on the Supreme Court, Justice Harry Blackmun served with compassion, distinction, and honor. Every decision and every dissent was firmly grounded in the Constitution he revered and his uncanny feel for the human element that lies just beneath the surface of all serious legal argument.

You can see his mind and heart at work in the landmark decision he wrote protecting women's rights to reproductive freedom and in his decisions to make the promise of civil rights actually come alive in the daily existence of the American people.

Hillary and I were deeply privileged to know Justice Blackmun and his wonderful wife of 58

years, Dottie, for quite a long while. I saw up close Harry Blackmun's intense passion—his passion for the welfare of the American people, for defending our liberties and our institutions, for moving us forward together. We send our respect and our prayers to Dottie and to his three daughters.

To the millions of Americans whose voices he heard and whose rights he defended, to the countless numbers of us who knew and loved him, Harry Blackmun's life embodied the admonition of the prophet Micah: He did justice, and he loved mercy. And now, he walks humbly with his God.

NOTE: The related proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.