

Remarks to the California League of Conservation Voters in Bel Air,
California
September 24, 2000

Well, Ruth has given me a lot of gifts over the years, mostly tapes of great old rock-and-roll songs. [Laughter] But I'm very grateful for this.

And I want to thank you, Ruthie, and Fran Diamond and Wendy James. I thank Rampa Hormel and Hilda Solis for their leadership. I really want to thank Carole and Phil for letting us come to their home on this beautiful, beautiful day and share it.

I thank all the officials that are here, those who have been introduced. But I want to say again to all these congressional candidates—Michael Case, Susan Davis, Gerrie Schipske—of course, Hilda—and my long-time friend Jane Harman. Thank you for running for the Congress, to give it back to the American people and to give our natural heritage back to the future.

I want to thank you for this award but, more importantly, for your leadership on environmental and resource issues. I basically have always thought Presidents shouldn't get awards. I thought that the job was reward enough. But you know, as I get ready to move out—[laughter]—this will look really wonderful in my home. So I do thank you. [Laughter]

The work we have done on conservation is among the things I'm most proud of as President. Ninety-four years ago today—exactly today—Theodore Roosevelt designated America's very first national monument, Devil's Tower, in Wyoming. He set us on a path of conservation a century ago that we are working to make stronger.

For more than 7 years now, Al Gore and I have fought to do that, most of the time with a Congress that was very hostile to our environmental objectives. We believed always that we could grow the economy and improve the environment. And we believed, in a larger sense, that if we didn't deal with the big challenges of climate change and other pollutions, that economic growth would turn in on itself, sooner or later anyway.

So over the last 8 years, we've cleaned up 3 times as many toxic waste dumps from neighborhoods as the two previous administrations did

in 12. We've taken the most dramatic steps to improve the quality of air in a generation. We've also improved the quality of our water and our drinking water with major new legislation. We made record investments in science and technology designed to reduce the threat of global warming.

You heard Ruth say some of the things we have done in California. We've had the national monuments designed to preserve the redwood forest, the coastal lands and waters. We had a big conference on preserving the oceans on the Monterey Peninsula a couple of years ago. We've begun to do some significant things to try to recover the quality of the oceans, particularly those that are near us.

There is a dead spot in the Gulf of Mexico the size of the State of New Jersey today because of pollution and runoff that will have significant adverse impacts on marine life over the long run if we don't do something to deal with it.

I was honored to create the national preserve in the Mojave Desert and to expand the Pinnacle Monuments, as Ruth said. We've done this from the Grand Canyon to Yellowstone to the Florida Everglades. And we have already set aside over 40 million roadless acres.

Today we took another big step by protecting almost 800 acres of the southern gateway to Big Sur. I'll never forget the first time I saw it 30 years ago. It's a coastline we value not just for its breathtaking views but as a home for endangered species like the steelhead trout and Smith's blue butterfly. And thanks to funds provided by the lands legacy initiative the Vice President and I have worked for, for the last several years, we are able to make this gift to the future.

I want the National Government and every community in our country to be able to have the resources to make gifts like this well into the future. That's why I have asked Congress to provide permanent funding for our open spaces and pass the "Conservation Reinvestment Act," CRA, that would significantly boost our lands legacy initiative.

The House passed it with over 300 votes, and now we are trying to get it through the Senate. If any of you can help us, I'd really appreciate it. [Laughter]

I want to mention just a couple of other things, too. First, one more time, even in the teeth of an election, even in the face of evidence that the overwhelming majority of the American people support a strong environmental policy, Congress is larding up these bills, these appropriation bills, with anti-environmental riders. And the theory is that if you can just put enough amendments on enough bills, that eventually all us Democrats will get veto fatigue, and it'll be 3 hours and 15 minutes before the polls open, and everybody will want to go home to vote, at least, if not to campaign, and so they'll be able to pass their anti-environmental agenda.

Now, I say that, first, to ask the Congress, if they want to go home and campaign, to take the anti-environmental riders off the bills, because I've got nowhere to go, and I'm not running for anything. [Laughter] And I'd be happy to stay there until election day.

But secondly, I want to emphasize how important these congressional races are, every House seat and every Senate seat—although, at least to me, some Senate seats are more important than others. [Laughter]

Let me just tell you what the lives of Members of Congress are like. Okay. It's late September. There's an election in early November. People want to go home. They want to be with their constituents. The party that's in the majority gets to decide what is voted on in the committees, gets to have the votes to add these anti-environmental riders, in this case. And they hope that at some point you just keep putting these bills out and there's a defense bill. Do you want to be against defense 2 weeks before the election? There is an education bill that might have anti-environmental riders—do you want to be anti-education?—and a health bill. There may even be a good bill for the EPA and a decent budget, but it's all larded up with this stuff. Do you want to be in the position of voting for this? Now, if we had about 12 more Members of Congress who were pro-environment and we could organize the committees, this would not happen. This is a big, big, big deal.

Let me just make two other points. You know, some people in the other party have continued to try to distort some of the things that the

Vice President said in his book, "Earth in the Balance." But even the oil companies now admit that all those years ago he was right and they were wrong about climate change.

The 1990's were the warmest decade in a thousand years, we now know. And we know that an extraordinary amount of the warming of the climate is due to human activity, and we know that, if we don't do something about it, sometime in the next three to five decades it will substantially change the pattern of life here in our own country. The sugarcane fields in Louisiana, the Everglades in Florida could flood; agricultural production could be forced upward in America; and whole massive stretches of farmlands could be dramatically less productive; and all of the other things that you know very well could happen.

I've already seen the change in the biodiversity on the Pacific Coast. When I was on the Monterey Peninsula, I saw some small, microscopic, almost, animal life in the bay, that just 40 years ago was 20 miles south at its northernmost point. So I'm seeing all this happen. And I just want to say that I'm working hard to deal with the present energy problem. But the real issue is, how are we going to grow the economy and save the environment over the long run?

Today, there are technologies available off the shelf that would dramatically boost productivity in America and increase output per energy input. If you don't believe me, go look at that low-income housing project out in the Inland Empire in San Bernadino, where they cut power use by more than 50 percent by simple, off-the-shelf technologies. I have been trying for 3 years to get Congress to give tax credits to accelerate research and development into conservation technologies and alternative fuels and to increase investment in that kind of research and development and to give tax credits to consumers and to businesses to buy conservation technologies and employ alternative fuels.

Now, that's another reason you need more people in the Congress, because the President, if his party sticks with him, even if they're in the minority, can stop bad things from happening. Although as I just explained, it gets tougher as you get closer to the election. But if you want good things to happen and you believe, as I do, that there's a world of environmentally responsible potential growth out there, by investing in and betting on the fact that

we can reverse the tide of climate change without all going back to the Stone Age to live, the way the other side talks—now, you’ve got a big choice here.

And every House seat and every Senate seat and this White House matters. Because, unlike some areas—I’ve got to give it to the other side, they’ve been quite forthright here, and I appreciate it. They’ve been very, very honest in saying, “I disagree with Bill Clinton. I disagree with Al Gore. Vote for us. We will repeal the 43 million roadless acres in the national forests. Vote for us. We will relax the air standards. They’re too hard, and they’re going to slow the economy down too much. Vote for us. We will reexamine all these national monuments.”

And I could give you lots of other examples. So it’s not like we don’t know what the deal is here. And that’s good, because that’s why you have elections, so people can make choices.

But I want to say to you, it’s been a great honor for me to work in the environmental area. I’m glad to know that we’ve had the strongest economy in history with cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food, and more land set aside than anybody since the Roosevelts. I’m proud of that.

But the huge question out there, hanging out there, is whether or not we will create out of this information technology revolution a post-industrial form of energy use, even for manufacturing, if we will unlock the last chemical step keeping us from using biofuels in an efficient way.

The scientists that work for the Department of Agriculture say, you know, you can’t really take ethanol too seriously now because it takes 7 gallons of gasoline to make 8 gallons of ethanol. But they are a short step away from a chemical advance that would enable us to make 8 gallons of ethanol from one gallon of gasoline.

Think about it. That would be the equivalent of 500 gallons of gasoline—500 miles to the gallon in modern cars. We’re so close. And you have to decide.

We need people in the White House and in the Congress that understand the future and are committed to making sure that we get out of denial here, or as my daughter’s generation says, it’s not just a river in Egypt. *[Laughter]*

And this will not be a headline issue here. Most people say this election is about the Medicare drug issue or the Patients’ Bill of Rights or whether the Republican nominee’s tax cut plan is too big, especially when you compare it with privatizing Social Security. You add them up, and we’re back in deficits. All those things are real important.

But I’m telling you, 50 years from now, our generation will be judged on whether we met the challenge of climate change. And it is not necessary for us to go in a hut and quit making a living to do it. The technologies are there, are right on the verge of there. We can increase productivity. We can grow this economy, and we can do it. You’ve got to decide. Help them get elected, and help Al Gore and Joe Lieberman.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Ruth Hunter, president, California League of Conservation Voters; Fran Diamond, member, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board; Wendy James, president, Environmental Media Association; Rampa Hormel, honorary event chair; State Senator Hilda Solis; event hosts Carole King and Phil Alden Robinson; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Hidden Hills, California

September 24, 2000

Well, first of all, let me tell you what I’d like to do. I like small events like this, with fewer people. And what I’d like to do—most of what I have to say about the last 8 years I said at the convention in L.A., and maybe

you saw it, and if you did, there’s nothing else I can say.

I would like to just talk for a few minutes, not long, and then just take the microphone