

Remarks on Earth Day in Knoxville, Tennessee April 22, 2005

It's great to be back in the State of Tennessee—I'm sorry we're not at the Great Smoky National Park. Senator Lamar Alexander has been urging me to come to the park and see the great beauty of a part of the world where he was raised. I'm proud to be traveling with Senator Bill Frist, the great majority leader of the United States Senate from the State of Tennessee, and Lamar Alexander. The thing about old Lamar is he's constantly reminding me that without Tennessee, Texas wouldn't be much. *[Laughter]*

I appreciate traveling with Congressman Jimmy Duncan, the Congressman from this district. I remember all too well going to the Duncan family picnic that he gave. Evidently, he's got a pretty good-sized family, since there was about 15,000 people there. *[Laughter]* I'm proud to be with Bill Jenkins, from east Tennessee, and Zach Wamp, Congressman Wamp. We had a good visit on the airplane, talking about issues that are important to Tennessee and our country. It's an honor to work with these fine leaders as we work to protect our country and secure our country and enhance the prosperity of our country.

I'm traveling as well with the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton—one of her jobs is to oversee the national parks of our country—as well as Acting Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Steve Johnson. I picked Steve to head the EPA. I did so because, like me and like the folks serving in Congress here, we care about our environment. He also comes from the ranks of the EPA. He knows the Agency. He knows how to work with local folks to get things done. And I urge the Senate to confirm him as quickly as possible.

Before I begin, it was an honor to meet Pat Summitt, basketball coach of the Lady Vols. I told her I was heading down to

Crawford, which is right next door to Baylor. And she said, "Well, make sure you say hello to one of my pupils," a person she coached, Kim Mulkey-Roberts. So I'm going to do that. If you're watching TV, Kim, Pat sends her best. What an honorable woman Pat Summitt is, and what a great role model she is for those of us who aspire to leadership.

In the park, had I been there, I would have reminded people today is Earth Day, a day in which we recommit ourselves to being good stewards of our land. We didn't create this Earth, but we have an obligation to protect it. One of the interesting things about our Nation is that since 1970, the air is cleaner, and the water is more pure, and we're using our land better, and our economy has grown a lot. My point is, it's possible to have economic growth and jobs and opportunity and, at the same time, be wise stewards of the land.

I remember traveling with Lamar down here one time, and he said, "I want you to understand, and I want you to pay attention to the ozone levels in the Smokies." And so I did a little research, and I'm proud to report, since 2000, the ozone levels have dropped. But there is more to be done to make sure the Smoky Mountains and the Smoky Mountain National Park is as beautiful as possible.

And I want to share with you too, two issues that we have worked together on that will make a difference not only to the folks here in Tennessee but around the country. First, we have finalized a rule that will cut pollution from heavy diesel engines by 90 percent. We worked with the manufacturers of those engines, and we've come up with a way to reduce pollution from diesel engines, and that's going to help a lot.

And secondly, I put forth a rule—a series of rules called the Clear Skies Initiative, which will cut air pollution from coal-fired

powerplants by 70 percent. This is a commonsense approach to dealing with this important issue. We use a market-based system, a cap and trade system to provide flexibility so that the powerplants can meet the goals we set of reducing pollution by 70 percent. The initiatives we did through Executive order are important, but it would sure be helpful if Congress passed the Clear Skies legislation as well.

The water quality of the United States is good because we're strictly enforcing the law. Ninety percent of the United States have water that meets very stringent health standards. That's up, by the way, from about 74 percent. And we'll continue to work hard to make sure everybody has got good water.

One of the initiatives I announced on Earth Day last year was to restore, improve, and protect 3 million acres of wetlands over a 5-year period of time. The policy used to be no net loss. I thought we needed to be more aggressive on wetlands. And so the new goal is to restore, improve, or protect 3 million acres of land. This year we enhanced 830,000 acres, so we're on our way to meeting that goal, and that's good for the country.

The farm bill is working, and I appreciate the Members behind me who understand the importance of the Conservation Reserve Program, which helps our ranchers and farmers restore grasslands and build valuable habitat for wildlife.

I was concerned about forest fires that have decimated a lot of our national treasures, so I worked with the Congress to pass the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. I want to thank Senator Frist for working that piece of legislation through the Senate. Last year, as a result of that bill, we removed hazardous fuels in forested areas—over 10 million acres. It's really an important piece of legislation, to be wise about how we conserve our national forests.

We're making good progress when it comes to restoring industrial sites through the brownfields initiative. We've restored

1,200 abandoned industrial sites since I've been the President and converted them to productive use.

One of my concerns back when I first started running for President was to make sure that our National Park System worked well for all our citizens. The parks belong to the people, and the parks should be accessible to the people. A lot of good folks use our parks, but as a result of not paying close attention to the maintenance backlogs in our parks, some of the parks weren't meeting the standards that we should expect. And so I laid out a 5-year initiative to spend \$4.9 billion to end the maintenance backlog of our parks. We'll meet that initiative when Congress meets my budget request this year. I want to thank Senator Frist, Senator Alexander, and the Members of the Congress for supporting this important park initiative.

We spent \$20 million last year in the Smokies on maintenance backlog. In other words, we have an obligation to maintain these valuable assets on behalf of the people, and we're meeting that obligation. Secretary Gale Norton and Fran Mainella, who runs our park system, are doing a fine job of setting clear priorities and explaining to Congress the nature of those priorities and then restoring these parks back to where they need to be so people can use them.

I wish I had been there at the park to thank the park rangers who work so hard to make sure our parks are accessible to our citizens. The rangers are a fabulous group of people, whether they be here in Tennessee or around the Nation, and they work hard on behalf of the citizens of our country. But one of the things that makes our park system work well is the fact that there are a lot of volunteers all across America who want to work in the parks. I don't know if you realize this in this part of the world, but there are 2,000 volunteers who work in the Smokies. Doesn't surprise me; after all, this is the Volunteer State.

If you're interested in serving, if conservation interests you, if you want to be

a part of our national effort to be good stewards of the environment, you ought to go on to the usafreedomcorps.gov web site. It's a web site we set up to encourage voluntarism in America. And if you volunteer to serve in a national park, to restore trails, for example, you'll find a lot of other good citizens right there with you.

So my message to the good folks of Tennessee on Earth Day is, we have a duty and an obligation to protect our environment. We're meeting that obligation, but that obligation is not just a Federal obligation. There is a State obligation, a local obligation, and each of us as citizens can do our part as well.

I appreciate you all coming out. I'm honored to be traveling with some fine members of the congressional delegation from Tennessee. May God continue to bless the good folks of Tennessee and our country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. at the McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base. In his remarks, he referred to Pat Summitt, head coach, University of Tennessee's women's basketball team; and Kim Mulkey-Robertson, head coach, Baylor University's women's basketball team.

The President's Radio Address *April 23, 2005*

Good morning. My most solemn responsibility as Commander in Chief is to protect the American people. At this moment, our courageous men and women in uniform are serving in distant lands, risking their lives to ensure our security. We must give them all the resources they need to protect us from the threats of determined enemies and to prevail in the war on terror.

I applaud the House and Senate for their strong support of my supplemental funding request for our troops serving on the frontlines. This funding will help provide the weapons, ammunition, spare parts, and equipment that our troops need to do their job. I urge Congress to come together to resolve their remaining differences and send me a bill quickly.

As our service men and women make our Nation more secure, they're also helping to transform other nations that until recently knew only tyranny and despair. In Afghanistan, millions went to the polls after we helped liberate that country from the Taliban. In Iraq, the sacrifices made by our Armed Forces are helping Iraqis build a

Government that answers to the people instead of the other way around.

As Iraqis assume increasing responsibility for the stability of their country, Iraqi security forces are becoming more self-reliant and taking on greater responsibilities. Today, more than 150,000 Iraqi security forces have been trained and equipped, and for the first time, the Iraqi army, police, and security forces outnumber U.S. forces in Iraq. Like free people everywhere, Iraqis want to be defended and led by their own countrymen. We will help them achieve this objective, and then our troops will come home with the honor they have earned.

As we fight the war on terror and spread freedom abroad, we continue to pursue pro-growth economic policies at home. Sustaining America's prosperity requires restraining the spending appetite of the Federal Government. That's why the 2006 budget I submitted to Congress holds the growth of discretionary spending to 2.1 percent, below the projected rate of inflation.