



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

TAYLOR NELSON
COUNSELOR

August 9, 1993

Hans Janitschek
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Dear Mr. Janitschek:

I have received your letter and I am happy to respond to it. If you have further questions after reading my letter, please let me know.

Quite clearly you have a high regard for John McConnell as do I. He is a fine gentleman who has long dedicated his considerable talents and energy to the cause of peace and the protection of the environment. His has been an important voice in these causes and all who share his concern honor him for it.

Based upon your understanding of the history of Earth Day, you obviously believe I have been responsible for some kind of injustice to Mr. McConnell. After a careful reading of your letter, I am satisfied you are perfectly sincere in your feelings and belief.

However, at this point I must state, unequivocally, that in no way whatsoever have I been responsible for any injustice or injury of any kind to Mr. McConnell. I think a narration of the history of the annual April 22 celebration, now universally referred to as Earth Day, will clarify this issue for you.

The facts, history and background of the April 22 Earth Day are as follows:

1. For several years I had been concerned about our failure as a nation to recognize the serious environmental challenge that confronted us. Finally in October 1962, it occurred to me that a presidential conservation tour was the answer. I flew to Washington and explained my proposal to Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

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2. I recommended that President Kennedy go on a nationwide conservation tour alerting the country to the disastrous consequences of continued environmental deterioration. I argued that the environmental situation was critical to our future and that a Presidential tour would attract enough attention to force the issue onto our agenda of national priorities. Bobby Kennedy agreed and recommended the tour to the President.

The President liked the idea and began his national conservation tour in the Fall of 1963. Senators Humphrey, McCarthy, Clark and I went on the first leg of that tour to Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Wisconsin with the President. For many reasons it did not succeed in bringing the environment into the mainstream of political issues as I hoped it would. That was seven years before Earth Day.

For the next several years I continued to puzzle over what could possibly be done to nationally dramatize this issue.

3. In July 1969, while on a conservation speaking tour in the West, I read a magazine article about the anti-war protests on college campuses, called "Teach-Ins." It suddenly occurred to me - This is it! Why not promote a National Environmental Teach-In - a huge public demonstration of concern for the environment. My objective was a demonstration so large it would finally get the attention of the political establishment and the media. Having spoken around the nation on this issue for several years, I was satisfied the public was way ahead of the politicians and would respond in a dramatic way to the opportunity to express their concern.
4. As soon as I returned from my speaking tour, I created a non-profit organization called "Environmental Teach-In, Inc." In September at a conservation conference in Seattle, I announced that there would be a national Environmental Teach-In early in 1970 and that this would be the opportunity for a huge public demonstration of concern for the environment. The AP and UP wire services carried the story. It got notice on network news and in all of the major daily papers across the nation. This was two months before Mr. McConnell went to the United Nations with his proposal.

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By the time I returned to Washington, D.C. four days later, the response by letter and phone was overwhelming. Inquiries were flooding in from all across the country.

It soon became obvious that the demands upon my staff were too great to continue to manage the Teach-In activities out of my Senate office, so I opened a Washington office and staffed it during November-December, 1969.

Before long several people suggested the April 22 event be called Earth Day instead of Environmental Teach-In. One such suggestion came from a friend of mine who had long been in the field of public relations and the same suggestion came from a New York advertising executive. Still other suggestions included "Planet Day," "World Environment Day," etc. I did not pay any attention to these suggestions because the excitement, interest and overwhelming response to the idea of a national demonstration in behalf of the environment had nothing to do with the name of the event. Whatever name was attached to it didn't matter one way or the other. People were responding to the opportunity to voice their concern for the environment - this was the first time a national forum had ever been created for public participation - and the public response was nothing short of remarkable.

By mid-February, some 2 1/2 months after opening our Washington office, the grass roots momentum was so great I even considered closing our office because of a shortage of funds - but that problem was resolved. The important point is that there was already so much grass roots interest that success was assured with or without a national office. The real story is that we didn't have to organize Earth Day. It organized itself.

Meantime, the press increasingly referred to it as Earth Day, with some calling it Planet Day and others, including me, continuing to refer to it as a National Environmental Teach-In or just Teach-In for short.

Enclosed is a copy of my speech notes from a University of Michigan speech in April 1970. You will note that they are titled "Ann Arbor Teach-In." Also enclosed is a copy of my schedule on Monday, April 20 through Friday, April 24. You will note the heading which reads, Senator Nelson's Schedule -- Teach-In Tour."

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As you look through the schedule you will see that the event is identified under various titles:

1. Mass. legislature - "Environmental Action Day."
2. Madison - University of Wisconsin - "Earth Day Rally."
3. Milwaukee - "Environmental Teach-In Kick-off Rally."
4. Bloomington, Indiana - Bloomington "Environmental Action Day."
5. University of Colorado - "Environmental Teach-In."
6. University of California - "Environmental Teach-In."
7. University of Southern California - "Environmental Teach-In."

By April 22, 1970 the media - T.V. and the press - were practically unanimous in calling it Earth Day. That is, in fact, an obvious and logical name to evolve from an event that revolves around the concept of "protecting Mother Earth," "Saving the Planet," "Preserving the Earth's Resources," "Protecting the Environment," etc. If you sponsored a contest to name an event with these purposes as an objective, someone is going to suggest "Earth Day" or "Planet Day" as a number of people did.

In 1971, 1972 and 1973 I sponsored Earth Week events. My objective was to institutionalize annual Earth Day observances in our schools, colleges, and local communities. While these Earth Week events were successful, the fact is the grass roots didn't need any encouragement. Every year since 1970 Earth Day has been observed on April 22 by increasing numbers of people and institutions and continues to grow.

In 1990, the 20th Anniversary of Earth Day involved tens of millions of people in the United States and elsewhere around the world.

I discussed all of this with Mr. McConnell three years ago. He was hoping somehow to have the name changed to something else. I pointed out that the name of the April 22 celebration was firmly established by 20 years of use in the press, radio and TV as well as in magazines, books and in the curricula of our grade schools, high schools and

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colleges. It isn't possible for someone to just wave a wand and change the name of an event so deeply imbedded in custom and practice.

Mr. McConnell's proposal and mine had entirely different objectives. Mr. McConnell did not propose a major mass demonstration in behalf of the environment but that was the central core of April 22. My specific purpose was political - its' objective was to force the environment onto the National Agenda of major issues. It was a complete, indeed, an overwhelming success.

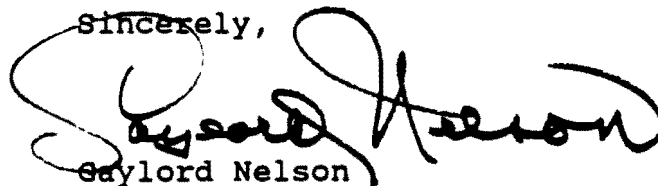
Because it involved millions of people it attracted widespread press and T.V. coverage and continues to do so.

In conclusion, I think this history makes it quite clear that:

1. I did not take Mr. McConnell's idea. My purpose and his were not in any way similar. And, as the history shows, eight years before Earth Day I began the process of attempting to design some event that would be so dramatic that it would finally force the country to start paying attention to the environment.
2. I did not take the name Earth Day from Mr. McConnell. Indeed, I was still referring to Teach-Ins on my final four day tour April 20-24. The terms "Earth Day," "Planet Day," "Earth Celebration," etc. occurred to many people simply because those were obvious descriptive names for an event that had as its goal the protection of the environment and the resources of the Earth.

This is a fairly detailed background summary - but, if you have further questions please feel free to let me know.

Sincerely,



Gaylord Nelson

Enclosures (4)