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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON
LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

April 7, 1971

Dr. Frank Stanton
PRESIDENT
Columbia Broadcasting System
530 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Dr. Stanton:

I wish to commend CBS and Walter Cronkite, Daniel Schorr and David Culhane for the valuable contribution to the continuing dialogue on the environment as represented by the Tuesday night program on Earth Day and its impact during the past year. In fact, one of the most important results of Earth Day was not mentioned on the program. It is that CBS and all of the media from TV to newspapers and magazines are now devoting extensive time and energy to the task of educating the nation on the problem. There is no way to measure the impact of these efforts precisely, but they are having a massive effect on the public attitude of the country which is being rapidly translated into effective political action at all levels of government. If the media perseveres in its efforts, as I'm sure it will, we will soon have a momentum that will make it possible to really come to grips with the problem in a constructive and significant way.

I have some additional observations to make on the program, one personal and others substantive.

My personal observation relates to Mr. Cronkite's statement that Earth Day was "largely the brain child of a group of college students." In fact, no one else was in any way associated with me in originating the idea of Earth Day or in the development of the concept. Both as a matter of historical accuracy and some considerable personal pride in the most successful environmental idea I have ever had in my twenty-two years in the environmental field, I think it appropriate to set the record straight.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The idea occurred to me in early August, 1969, while I was in Santa Barbara, California, inspecting that awful oil spill and puzzling about what could be done to bring public opinion to bear on the lethargic political community. After returning to Washington, I spent a month developing the concept and then announced the plan at a speech in Seattle on September 9. Sometime after that, I appointed myself chairman and requested Congressman McCloskey to join me as co-chairman and selected Sidney Howe of the Conservation Foundation to be a member of the Executive Board.

The three of us selected the balance of the Board, created the Environmental Teach-In, Inc., as a non-profit, tax exempt organization and selected a national office. Then, a month or two later, after interviewing a number of college students, we selected Denis Hayes to manage the national office which functioned as a clearing house and information center.

The Environmental Action organization mentioned in the program was in no way associated with Earth Day. It was created after Earth Day was over by Denis Hayes and some of the students involved in Earth Day. It is a political action organization. They are a very talented group and are doing a fine job, but the confusion by the press and media of their organization, which is not tax exempt, with our non-political organization, which was tax exempt, has caused some embarrassment for Congressman McCloskey and myself because the Members of Congress who were listed as part of the "dirty dozen" (allegedly the 12 Congressmen with the worst environmental records) read in the papers that Environmental Action was the sponsor of Earth Day. We had to spend several days explaining that this organization was in no way related to Earth Day (however much we enjoyed their creative attack on the "dirty dozen ").

I conclude this point with observation that politicians are like writers in the sense that our only stock in trade is a good idea translated into words or action - - take that away and we ain't got nothing left.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Another inaccuracy that may seem unimportant, but I think is not, was the reference to Earth Day, 1971. There is no Earth Day planned, but rather it is Earth Week. I did not plan another Earth Day because it could not be duplicated and there would be no special purpose in attempting it.

The objective of Earth Day was fully accomplished. My objective was to have a massive nationwide demonstration to show the politicians of the country that there was a genuine grass roots, deeply-felt interest in the issue that crossed all political lines and all age groups.

It was my conviction that nothing significant could be done until the politicians understood this. In other words, the issue had to become a part of the political dialogue of the nation before we could hope to accomplish anything. It has now become part of the political dialogue and that is, in my judgment, the most significant environmental event in the history of the movement. Until that happened, the environmentalists would continue to gather and talk only to each other for the next 50 years, as they have in the past 50.

For twenty years, I have been trying to convince politicians that there was a rapidly growing interest, that it is a critically important issue, and that they should address themselves to it. In 1959 and 1960, I attempted to persuade Jack Kennedy to campaign on the issue, but he was not persuaded. Again in 1962 and 1963, I explained the issue in detail to Bob Kennedy and received what seemed to be a positive response. I then sent the President a six-page memorandum urging him to make a nationwide conservation tour. He finally decided to do it, but his staff had no understanding of the issue so the conservation part of the tour fizzled out and he only gave one brief conservation speech in Ashland, Wisconsin, which was written by Bill Bechtel of my staff (perhaps one other in Wyoming at Jackson Hole).

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In 1968, neither of the Presidential candidates addressed himself to the issue. Hubert Humphrey, who has a good record, did not think there was sufficient public interest. If even a politician who is concerned about the issue did not think that there was enough interest to warrant his political attention, then it seemed to me we were in real trouble.

Finally, one day in early August, 1969, the idea occurred to me that we could get political attention by having a nationwide environmental day patterned after the Vietnam teach-ins two or three years earlier. The dramatic result of that event is well known.

Incidentally, in the fall of 1969, I contacted the three networks respecting Earth Day and took a trip to New York to meet with representatives of CBS, NBC, and ABC. After explaining the event and its purpose, all three expressed interest in the event and, in fact, programmed substantial time on the issue prior to, during, and after Earth Day. Your involvement was a major factor in the success of Earth Day.

Late last summer, I planned and announced Earth Week because it is necessary to sustain our effort. The objective is not a one-day spectacular like Earth Day but an attempt to institutionalize Earth Week as an annual event - - an occasion each year when we can take an inventory of progress for the past year and plan for the next; a time set aside for the nation, the media and the environmental groups to pay special attention to the issue. In particular, however, my objective is to have set aside a period when all the grade and high schools can bring to fruition their educational efforts of the year - - essay and speech contests, projects and clean-up plans. After all, education and understanding are fundamental to gaining commitment on this issue as with any other.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

I have not set up a national office because it did not seem necessary or feasible for that matter. Last summer I requested the Governors' Conference to pass a resolution urging all governors to issue proclamations declaring the third week in April as Earth Week. The Resolution was adopted. All national conservation organizations have joined in a letter to the Governors, and I have written to all mayors and superintendents of schools of all middle size and large cities. The response has been excellent. Over thirty-five Governors have issued proclamations as have a large number of mayors. After several discussions and correspondence with Russell Train, he persuaded the President to proclaim Earth Week which he did a few days ago.

I have explained this in some detail so that it will be understood that Earth Week is a different kind of event from Earth Day with a different objective so they should not be compared.

While I wish to emphasize that I think the CBS program was a good one, it was seriously misleading on the "cost" question of environmental clean up. I know it was not intentional. It is, simply, that on this critical question very few people have studied or understand it. Ed Muskie does understand it, but either because of time limitations or oversight he did not put the issue in proper perspective. Thus, we were left with the assertion by the Philadelphia Coke Company executive that "money spent on air pollution controls does not produce profit" or words to that effect.

This simplistic assertion is widely used by industry spokesmen, begs the question and is totally at odds with the economic facts of life. This is important and goes to the heart of the issue because if the polluters can convince the public that it costs too much to clean up the air and water, they will succeed in passing this problem on to the next generation and the one after it without end.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The question is what is the cost benefit ratio to the nation of cleaning up the air? By conservative estimates, economic damage from air pollution totals about $15 billion per year, not counting health hazards and health costs which are substantial. At a cost of about $10 billion for the installation of equipment over the next few years, 85% of the pollutants could be removed from the air. Once accomplished, that one time $10 billion investment would return to the nation an economic benefit of about $12 billion annually, or a net return of $110 billion in a ten-year span.

The same principle applies to water, though the figures are quite different. We are now using 375 billion gallons of water a day. The total available supply is 600 billion gallons a day. We will be using that amount by 1981 or 1982. By the year 2000, we will be using 1200 billion gallons per day, twice the available supply. However, since water and people are not distributed proportionately, the major metropolitan areas on the east and west coast, around Lake Michigan and the Gulf, will be using the same water 10 or 15 times. If it is dirty, it will have to be cleaned 10 or 15 times at great cost. Obviously, using it and returning it clean will be cheaper than returning it dirty.

The simple fact is that we cannot afford the price of not cleaning up the environment. It seems to me, this is avalid and necessary point to make on any program that raises the question of cost as this program did.

I have dashed off this letter rather rapidly so perhaps I have not made the "cost" argument as compellingly or clearly as it can be made, but there is no doubt that there is a high profit to be made from investments in a clean environment and a very high cost to be paid for a dirty environment.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Since Earth Day and Earth Week were initiated out of my office and two environmental experts on my staff have spent literally hundreds of hours working on these projects with me, I think we have more information about these events and the nation-wide activities, accomplishments and ramifications related to them than any other single source. If at any time I can be of assistance to any future programs related to these events, please feel free to call on us.

Sincerely,

Gaylord Nelson

GAYLORD NELSON
U. S. Senator

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY