

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL  
EARTH DAY 1990**

Mr. President, twenty years ago this month, America awakened to a new era of consciousness and concern for the quality of the environment. Millions of Americans joined together to say that we must do better than smog clogged cities, rivers that catch fire, and the steady loss of essential wildlife habitat and wetlands.

Congress responded to the first Earth Day by enacting environmental statutes which still form the foundation for environmental protection today. These statutes include the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Solid Waste Disposal Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Superfund statute. My predecessor as Senator from the State of Maine, Ed Muskie, deserves much of the credit for passing many of these landmark laws.

Twenty years of determined effort by local, state and Federal governments and the private sector have reduced some of the most dramatic cases of environmental problems. While we have success stories in environmental programs, the real story is how far we still need to go to achieve the clean and safe environment envisioned at the time of the first Earth Day.

Millions of Americans still breathe unhealthy air. Many of our rivers, lakes, and ocean waters, are filled with toxic and other contaminants. Thousands of abandoned hazardous waste disposal sites are still waiting for clean up actions. Our solid waste landfills are nearing capacity and we continue to generate as much waste as ever. And, vital wetlands and essential wildlife habitat [are] disappearing at a steady rate.

The 20th anniversary of Earth Day is an opportunity to renew our commitment to the environment. Here in Congress, we are on the way towards passage of major amendments

strengthening the Clean Air Act. I also expect that Congress will pass legislation to prevent oil spills, to protect coastal waters, to expand environmental education, and to establish a new Department of the Environment.

As we work to address environmental problems here at home, we must remember that the whole world faces environmental problems. The best example of a global environmental problem is global warming. Other examples include ocean pollution and loss of species diversity. We must find better ways of addressing these issues and the International Parliamentary Conference on the Environment, to be held here in Washington later this month is an important step in that direction.

Mr. President, I want to commend the organizers of Earth Day 1990 for reminding us of progress we have made in protecting the environment and focusing public attention on the significant environmental problems we still face. Public understanding of environmental issues and public commitment to solutions is an essential part of responsible government action to address environmental problems.

We have learned in the past 20 years that government action alone is not sufficient to protect the environment. Each individual citizen must do his or her part to prevent pollution, and these individual actions can have a major impact.

I urge every citizen to participate in the spirit of Earth day by doing what you can to protect the environment, whether it be participating in your local recycling program, saving energy at home and at work, conserving water, or planting a tree.

Thank you, Mr. President.

