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Environmental Youth Award Recipients 11/15/89 [OA 3537]

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 15, 1989

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO  
ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH AWARD RECIPIENTS

Room 450  
Old Executive Office Building

11:30 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: I told Administrator Reilly he looked a little lonely standing up here with all these about-to-be-filled places. But I am very pleased to be here. And let me, at the outset of these remarks, while we're talking about the Environmental Youth Awards, say how proud I am to have Bill Reilly, an outstanding environmentalist, heading this big agency, the EPA, and being at my side as we try to move forward legislatively and every other way our concerns and your concerns about the environment. We're lucky to have a man of his stature doing what he's doing.

Speaking of environmentalists, I don't want to embarrass Gil Grosvenor, but there he is -- head of the National Geographic Society. And I think of what they do, every single issue in one way or another, and in many other ways as well, to help in this crusade.

It's a pleasure to be about to meet so many young people who are deeply involved in protecting our environment. I am told that you come from as far away as Alaska, from every corner of this beautiful country of ours. And I want to thank you for what you've done and welcome you warmly to the White House.

Some people might ask: What can young people do to protect our environment? Well, we had five kids, and there were times when I thought that the kids could make a major improvement in the environment just by cleaning up their rooms. (Laughter.) But I realize now we have broader responsibilities. And anyone who has seen all of you at work knows just how much kids can do to protect and preserve this world that we live in.

And I've heard about your projects. I've been briefed on those -- everything from recycling to conservation to some very sophisticated environmental research. Impressive, all of them. But what impresses me the most is how many times you took an idea that began in the classroom out into the community.

And every one of your projects is making your communities a little cleaner, a little more pleasant, a little more aware of how much the environment matters. And that's a credit to each of you and to your schools and your teachers and your parents who gave you the necessary encouragement and support.

But your work has an impact even beyond your own communities. Your projects teach other kids that no one's ever too young to care about the environment -- and they tell us something else, too: that if kids can be environmentally aware, maybe a few more adults will join in.

The fact is that everyone can be an environmentalist, every one of us has got to be. What we're seeing today, not just here, but as Bill knows so well all around the world, is a new sense of urgency about the environment, about the state of our world.

MORE

Greater awareness that pollution and the destruction of our environment hurt all of us -- that everyone of us has a common interest in the fate and the future of this planet, and that it's simply not acceptable to continue to do environmental damage today and leave the cleanup for you and your children to worry about later on.

All of your projects are special, but I hope I don't offend anybody, I hope the rest of you won't mind if I mention two projects -- the ones done by our youngest environmentalists. There's last year's 4th grade class here from St. Joseph, Missouri -- I see them smiling away here -- (laughter) -- that decided to adopt a polluted river, adopt the river in their community and clean it up. For one full year, you picked up the litter, tested the water, stocked the river with all kinds of wildlife, and you planted willow trees along the bank, I'm told, to protect against the erosion. I can tell you that, years from now, when you sit on the bank beneath those willows -- maybe with some of your children, some of your grandchildren -- watching that river roll along, you're going to get a very special feeling, then, for what you've done today.

There's another group here today -- Marquette, Michigan. Where are they? Right over here, scattered -- all right, I see you guys -- who collected enough money to save an 80-acre stand of white pine trees from being cut down. And you knew how many trees there were and how much it would cost to buy the land -- so you did a little math and came up with a slogan: "Save a Pine Tree for \$155.28." (Laughter.)

I've tried to make a habit myself, in various events, of planting trees to call attention to the need to care for the future of this planet. Planting a tree is not an act that we do just for ourselves but for future generations, including future 4th graders from Marquette, Michigan and elsewhere, who haven't even been born yet.

Well, the people in your community who heard your slogan thought that saving those trees was worth every penny.

What's true about those trees is true about the rest of our environment -- our lakes and our rivers and our streams; our forests and our mountains; the very air we breathe. And nothing gives me more confidence in your generation than to see what you've already done to protect the gifts that nature has given us. Because "America the Beautiful" is more than just a song that we all sing. It's a treasured inheritance. And so together, we can keep it that way -- America the beautiful.

So I'm glad to join Bill Reilly in congratulating all of you. And now, with no further ado, he and I have the great pleasure of passing out these awards. Thank you all very, very much. (Applause.)

(The awards are presented.) (Applause.)

END

11:40 A.M. EST