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Richard Nixon Remarks on the Signing of the Clean Air Act

December 31, 1970

Ladies and gentlemen:

On the last day of the year 1970, I think it would be appropriate to make a very few remarks with regard to this piece of legislation that I will now be signing, the clean air act of 1970.

And I see in this room a few who were present in San Clemente on the first day of 1970 when I said that this would be the year of the environment, that it was now or never if we were to clean up the air and clean up the water in major parts of the United States and to provide the open spaces that are so important for the future generations in this country.

The year 1970 has been a year of great progress in this field. In February, you will recall that I submitted the most comprehensive message on the environment ever proposed by a President of the United States. During the year, there have been some administrative actions, some legislative actions.

Time, however, has been required for the Congress to consider the proposals of the administration and, finally, to agree on the legislation that will be sent to the President for signature.

This is the most important piece of legislation, in my opinion, dealing with the problem of clean air that we have this year and the most important in our history.

It provides, as you know, for provisions dealing with fuel emissions and also for air quality standards, and it provides for 'the additional enforcement procedures which are absolutely important in this particular area.

How did this come about? It came about by the President proposing. It came about by a bipartisan effort represented by the Senators and Congressmen, who are here today, in acting. Senator Randolph, Senator Cooper, and Congressman Springer represent both parties and both Houses of the Congress.

And I thank the Congress, and the country owes a debt to the Congress in its closing days, for acting in this particular field.

I would say, however, that as I sign this piece of legislation, it is only a beginning, because now comes the enforcement and that allows me to comment briefly upon how we in the administration are set up to handle the problems of the environment in the years ahead.

We have, first, the Environmental Quality Council under the chairmanship of Russell Train. That Council advises the President on the policies which should be recommended to the Congress and to the Nation. And consequently, as I submit new recommendations, and there will be very significant new recommendations submitted to the Congress early in the next session on the environment, those recommendations will be the result of the actions that the Council has taken and its studies and its proposals.

And then there is the Environmental Protection Agency, which has been established by the Congress, where Mr. Ruckelshaus is the man responsible. And that is the enforcement agency. He enforces those proposals that, first are recommended by the Council, submitted by the President to the Congress, enacted by the Congress, and then become law.

So, we have the enforcement agency on the one side. We have the policy agency on the other. We have the legislative branch of the Government, both parties represented here, and, of course, the President in the primary role of having to submit the legislation and then backing up those who have the responsibility for enforcing it.

If I can summarize briefly, I think that 1970 will be known as the year of the beginning, in which we really began to move on the problems of clean air and clean water and open spaces for the future generations of America.

I think 1971 will be known as the year of action. And as we look at action, I would suggest that this bill is an indication of what action can be, because if this bill is completely enforced, within 4 years it will mean that the emissions from automobiles which pollute the environment will be reduced by 90 percent.

And the problem of automobile pollution, as we know, is one that not only now plagues my native area of southern California but all the great cities of this Nation, particularly those which have heavy automobile traffic, and most of the great cities of the world have similar problems.

So, what we are doing here is, first, by signing this legislation, to provide the tools through which we can have action to avoid the dangers that continuing air pollution by automobiles and through other methods will be going forward.

So, it seems very appropriate that in this room, the Roosevelt Room, a room that is named for both Roosevelts, Franklin Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt, but particularly in view of the fact that Theodore Roosevelt, who was the man most remembered in American history for his interest in conservation, his interest in the environment, that this bill is being signed here; this, it seems to me, is most appropriate.

And I would only hope that as we go now from the year of the beginning, the year of proposing, the year 1970, to the year of action, 1971, that all of us, Democrats, Republicans, the House, the Senate, the executive branch, that all of us can look back upon this year as that time when we began to make a movement toward a goal that we all

want, a goal that Theodore Roosevelt deeply believed in and a goal that he lived in his whole life. He loved the environment. He loved the clean air and the open spaces, and he loved the western part of the United States particularly, which will be greatly affected by this kind of action.

And if, as we sign this bill in this room, we can look back and say, in the Roosevelt Room on the last day of 1970, we signed a historic piece of legislation that put us far down the road toward a goal that Theodore Roosevelt, 70 years ago, spoke eloquently about: a goal of clean air, clean water, and open spaces for the future generations of America.

Source: Richard Nixon: "Remarks on Signing the Clean Air Amendments of 1970.," December 31, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2874>.