



ROBERT MORGAN
ATTORNEY GENERAL

State of North Carolina

Department of Justice

P. O. Box 629

RALEIGH

27602

Speech by
ROBERT MORGAN
Attorney General of North Carolina
Governor's Beautification Commission
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ON LITTERING THE ENVIRONMENT

Let me tell you how much I appreciate the invitation to come to Charlotte and meet with you today. The task which you have undertaken on behalf of the people of North Carolina is an important one and I am pleased that you have asked me--a lawyer, the "people's attorney"--to share with you some of my thoughts concerning beautification.

On second thought, however, I'm not sure that's what you asked me to do. What you requested was that I discuss "anti-litter laws." You were kind to me for it surely is no difficult job to discuss the litter laws of this State. When we see signs along our public highways reading "Fifty dollars maximum fine to litter," we know that the reference is to North Carolina's lone litter law--a law which has been on the books for many years, which refers to the right-of-way of public highways and which needs little or no explanation.

You are familiar with this law--you are familiar enough in fact to know that it is almost impossible to enforce it and that it alone can do little to save the landscape from the accumulated discard of the persons who use our roadways. It is ironic that we North Carolinians who value so highly our tourist trade and boast of our natural beauty would at the same time litter our highways. It is ironic that visitors from other states, attracted here by the same beauty we brag of, would leave their mark also upon the countryside.

But despite the ineffectiveness of our anti-litter laws, we have made great progress in North Carolina. I believe that our children are growing up with a consciousness which perhaps we older folks did not possess--a consciousness that we must use some self-restraint if we are "to keep North Carolina as beautiful as it really is."

And if we have been successful at all in our anti-litter efforts--and I believe we have--it is because public opinion has been mustered on the side of beauty and orderliness and not because we have enacted strict laws and enforced them. It is because people such as you have made the rest of us aware that our state has become, in a very real way, a community in which each must respect the rights of others, where each must consider the natural right of his neighbor to enjoy the pleasures of unblemished nature and order.

I think that you have made your point well, though there is still much to be done in traditional area of anti-litter. But I believe that the greatest

challenge of our day and of the future will be in areas of concern which are now just emerging.

It appears to me that we have been winning a minor skirmish, relatively speaking, in the anti-litter battle but have been losing the war. While we have been teaching our children--and our neighbors not to litter the highways--we have failed to notice the litter which has been accumulating elsewhere--in the air, in the water, in the bodies of birds and animals.

Yes, we have kept the roadways clean to a substantial degree, but have allowed the environment--air, water--essentials of life to be littered with the waste of human existence, and thus have come to the day when such litter actually threatens human existence. The sad story is just beginning to be told. You have seen the television special on the Great Lakes which were once centers of recreation--great natural playgrounds --but are now referred to as "dead". Fish no longer swim there, wildlife cannot live there, and people who once flocked to settle there beside the waters now find themselves bounded by a cesspool.

Rivers and streams which once were made immortal by romantic poems and sentimental songs no longer roll merrily along--they flow at a sluggish pace, clogged by the litter of industrial waste, human sewage and garbage, soil erosion and torrid injections of thermal pollution. And we need not kid ourselves into believing it can't happen in North Carolina, for we all know it is happening in North Carolina.

We here in the sunny South like to believe that air pollution is the sole concern of the industrial Northeast, of Southern California, of big cities like Chicago and industrial Detroit. Again we are fooling ourselves. I can see the smog hanging over the capital city of Raleigh when I arrive in the early morning. I can see it as I travel through the Piedmont to this great city, and the people of Charlotte can talk of smog first-hand.

We are polluting the air of the Tar Heel state, we are littering the atmosphere of North Carolina and we'd better wake up and do something about it.

Jimmy Wallace point this fact out quite graphically in the June, 1967 issue of Wildlife magazine.

"We are dumping over 140,000,000 tons of pollutants into the American atmosphere each year", he noted. "We dump 2.5 billion pounds of garbage in the United States each year--1,600 pounds per person. The garbage includes at least 48 billion cans, or 250 per person. 26 billion bottles and 25 million tons of waste paper are piled up every year.

"About 1,940 cities in the United States have combined sewers, carrying both rainwater and raw sewage, which serve about 59,000,000 people. These sewers flush about 65 billion gallons of raw sewage annually into the nation's watercourses.

"The great bald eagle, symbol of this nation itself, is becoming sterile, a victim of eating fish and game which contain traces of DDT. The blue shell crab might well become extinct because of similar contamination."

And Professor Wallace goes on for several pages, hitting close to home when he talks of the damage done to coastal marine industries by pollution, dredging, channelization and spraying--when he talks of the waste of our precious ground water in the coastal plain and the littering of our streams.

I think it is obvious that we haven't been winning a war--we instead are engaged actively in biological and chemical warfare against ourselves. Because we are a prosperous people we have enough excess to waste, to litter, and we have abused our surroundings. We have reached the point where writers refer to our situation as environmental decay, of "man's inhumanity to man."

We have so long reveled in our bounty that we have talked ourselves into believing that it has no limitations. Nothing could be further from the truth. And no notion could be more dangerous to a people who are daily becoming more numerous and more urbanized.

end → The residents of our large population centers need not be reminded of environmental litter. They have learned what we are just discovering: environmental quality is a human need and not simply a luxury. We in North Carolina have taken it for granted, and our lack of consciousness is beginning to have its toll.

As a result I believe that you will see increasing activity from groups such as yours. You will see the emergence in North Carolina of strong

conservation forces who would speak in the public interest. You will see legislators move to pass significant legislation to protect the environment of this State and insure that North Carolinians will never so abuse their environment that it becomes a hostile force rather than an attribute of this region. The people will demand it.

"Government must provide a framework for this new conservation emphasis; but in the final analysis it must be done by the people themselves. The American People are not by (their) nature wasteful. They are not unappreciative of our inheritance. But unless we--with the support, and sometimes the direction, of government, working with State leaders, working with all of our citizens, (act to preserve it) we are going to leave an entirely different heritage in the next twenty-five years than the one we found." (John F. Kennedy)

And who is there among us who will deny that there is much to be cherished in this State, that there is much to be treasured and preserved? Who is there among us who will refute that this is in fact the "goodliest land under the sun," and that we must muster our resources to guarantee that our children and their children will be able to speak with this same pride and confidence?

I often ask myself how we can really expect our young people to be disciples of law and order, to seek peace and harmony, when the environment about them is becoming increasingly disordered, when litter abounds and when

quiet and tranquility are the exception rather than the rule. We ask them to act contrary to their environment and this is no mean (small) task.

Perhaps as we move to bring order to the environment we shall also be successful in bringing more order to this generation of Americans. Perhaps renewed harmony in the environment will help bring harmony among men.

We in North Carolina have one great resource which many of our sister states do not share and consequently we have one more resource which we must be especially careful not to destroy. We have the ocean--a natural playground, the source of a great industry, an area for gracious residential living.

Thus far we have been fairly resourceful with the seas but I am afraid that we have reached an important point in their use, in their enjoyment. We have reached the point where there is growing conflict between private ownership and development and the interest of the people in preserving natural spawning grounds for fish, in preserving areas which are the natural habitat of the many varieties of seafood which our State produces.

We have reached the point where the State of North Carolina is going to have to become increasingly active in order to make sure that the seafood industry does not perish and that food from the seas continues to be in good supply. It is just as easy to litter the ocean and to destroy its life as it is to pollute an inland stream or lake. This is difficult for many of us to grasp but it is a glaring reality to the oyster fisherman who sees areas

declared off-limits because the waters are polluted--or to the scallop fisher or shrimper who is now forced to steer clear of former fishing grounds because the seafood there is contaminated.

(Here announced appointment of an Ocean Laws Specialist).

Your legislators are going to have to move to protect these coastal areas and they are going to need your support. I hope you will volunteer your assistance, for the beauty of the seas will fade in the wake of the destruction of the life within it. Certainly a portion of its beauty stems from the knowledge of the bounty within.

To sum up, I suppose what I am saying here today is that as an elected officer of this State, I am disturbed because it appears that North Carolina may be following the lead of many other States who have developed rapidly industrially but have forgotten to preserve that which is good and wholesome in their environment. I am saying that North Carolina is and had been all through its history a progressive State, and that I want it to continue to deserve that reputation.

I want North Carolina to have conservation and development, but both together and not one alone. We want our economy to grow and our people to prosper in an environment which conserves our countryside, streams, rivers, ocean and air.

We want our citizens to realize now and our children to learn early that "The earth can be an abundant mother. . . if we learn to use her with

skill and wisdom, to heal her wounds, replenish her vitality and utilize her potentialities." (JFK) We want our people to understand that we are interdependent, that we share the same air, the same water, the same environment-- that one cannot abuse the environment without abusing the rights of his neighbors. We want our people to understand that beauty is a requisite of the good life, that man amidst dismal surroundings becomes a dismal creature himself.

We want our people to take renewed pride in a common heritage and to recognize one and all that this nation cannot survive as a great nation, strong and proud, unless her natural resources are used with wisdom and discretion and unless her beauty is preserved for all to enjoy and draw strength from.

(END)