

As prepared for delivery

Remarks for

**2008 President's Environmental Youth Awards Luncheon
Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

Thank you so much for inviting me to join you here today. I am honored to be here, and am so inspired by your commitment to environmental protection. On behalf of all the staff at EPA, we congratulate each one of you.

Over the years, thousands of young people from all 50 states and the U.S. territories have submitted projects to EPA for consideration.

This year's winners hail from New Hampshire to Alaska, Pennsylvania to Nebraska, and all points in between. Your projects tackle issues such as waste reduction, environmental outreach, alternative fuels, energy efficiency, habitat restoration, and public health. Some of you even made an impact internationally.

You've involved your communities, educators, policy makers, and even national celebrities in your efforts.

We shouldn't be surprised by these impressive accomplishments, though! Young people have always been at the forefront of the environmental movement in the United States. Even the first Earth Day, in 1970, was organized by young people and college students from across the nation.

And, as winners of this year's Presidential Environmental Youth Awards, you have proven that our newest generation of environmental leaders is already on the job and making a difference in your communities, your country, and your world.

Equally as important, you also embody the spirit of service, which is something the President has called on all Americans to embrace. President Obama believes in empowering ordinary people to do extraordinary things by improving their local communities through service.

He says that through service, our lives will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, we may remember it as the moment when our own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century.

This is a lesson that you have all already learned – by caring about the environment and making a difference in your communities, you are role models for both your generation and for all Americans.

I encourage you to continue your commitment to the environment and to service for the rest of your lives. Considering the impact you've made already, just think of what you can accomplish over the course of your lifetime.

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You might even consider pursuing a career in an environmental field. Bright minds like yours are needed in all sorts of positions that support environmental protection, and not just at EPA, though we need you here as well. But there are all kinds of jobs out there for people who care about the environment – in government, in nonprofits, in research, and at green companies nationwide. I know it has been a very rewarding career for me.

Scientists, lawyers, engineers, communications experts, computer specialists – the environmental community needs every kind of expertise in order to succeed in addressing today's environmental issues.

As you know, our country and our planet are currently facing unprecedented environmental challenges.

At EPA, we work every day towards our mission of protecting human health and the environment and addressing these unprecedented challenges. You may be interested in hearing what EPA is working on right now, especially since your projects align so well with our current priorities.

Over the next few years, EPA will focus on: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, managing chemical risks, cleaning up hazardous waste sites, and protecting America's water.

As you can see, there is so much to be done, and these are just a few of the tasks before us. We can't do it alone! We need help from citizens, and especially young people, all across the country. So, stay engaged in your communities. Keep spreading the word about the environment. Encourage others to join you.

I'd like to congratulate you again on what you have accomplished. As I mentioned earlier, you are an inspiration to me, and all of the employees at EPA. It is gratifying to know that there are young people who are as committed to the environment as we are.

I'm looking forward to hearing you explain your projects in more detail. [only if your schedule allows you to stay for another hour or so.]

Before I wrap up, I want to take just a moment to acknowledge all of the parents, teachers, and other mentors who have helped these students design and carry out their projects. Your commitment and dedication to children and the environment are invaluable, and we sincerely thank you for it.

Thank you again for having me, and please, keep up the great work!