

ACCELERATING THE PACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION,
WHILE MAINTAINING OUR ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS
NIAGARA UNIVERSITY – AJS
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Thank you, for that introduction and thank you for inviting me here to speak to such a highly respected group of individuals. Niagara is an outstanding institution, and it has made its mark, time and again, during the last century and a half, among the best colleges and universities in our nation.

Of course, as an avid sports fan, Niagara University means Calvin Murphy to me – a great example of a smaller man who played in a very big way. Calvin Murphy is also a fine example of how one individual can impact an institution and a sport in such dramatic fashion. Something to remember when asked – “how can one person impact the environment?”

In talking about the environment, I can’t think of an audience that could be more appropriate and have greater impact. Here, just a stone’s throw from Love Canal – where the nation first came to grips with the consequences of the term “Superfund” – you are uniquely positioned to make a difference.

As students, teachers and administrators, you are in a position to help better the environment and to help improve the quality of life in this community, in this state, on this planet.

At the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we use the phrase “sound science” with a great deal of reverence - and as much promise. EPA is both a scientific and regulatory agency; but we are scientific at our core. Sound science provides the foundation for intelligent decision-making. Our mission is to protect human health and the environment and we couldn’t achieve either of those goals if we ignored the underlying science that guides us.

Allow me to delve into history for a few minutes. About 38 years ago, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was founded – the product of a groundswell of support for cleaning up what had become a very dirty nation. At that time, in 1970, environmental issues were fairly obvious – streams and rivers were contaminated, and in some cases, like the Cuyahoga River in Ohio, they were aflame – the land was compromised by hazardous chemicals and industrial waste - our air was fouled with clouds of smog and soot. To quote the 60s troubadour Bob Dylan, you didn’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind was blowing.

Ironically, one of the most tainted plots of land was in this neighborhood – Love Canal – and the seriousness of that contamination and its impact on human health helped provide the impetus for the Superfund program and the legislation that inspired it.

In fact, there are six Niagara Falls area Superfund sites, including Love Canal – the Niagara County Refuse site, the 102nd Street Landfill, the S-Area Landfill, Hyde Park Landfill and the DuPont Necco Park Landfill. Three of these – Love Canal, Niagara County Refuse and the 102nd Street Landfill have been removed from the National Priorities List.

In the agency's earliest days, most everyone was content to let the federal government shoulder the burden of cleanups and chasing down polluters for contaminating sites such as these. After all, the prevailing thought went, who better than Uncle Sam to find the bad guys and make them pay.

However, as we sank deeper and deeper into the mire of environmental transgressions, we learned we needed help – the agency couldn't travel the cleanup path on its own. Since that revelation, many willing and able partners have joined us in the journey – other federal and state agencies, municipal governments, concerned citizens, community groups, colleges and universities, non-profits and corporations.

Nearly four decades later, individuals and organizations alike are starting to shoulder their portion of the burden. Green has overtaken black as the new “in” color – the color of choice. Kermit the Frog, who said “it isn’t easy being green,” can nevertheless smile a little, recognizing that maybe it’s not so easy, but it sure is in vogue. And, I’ll take vogue over easy any day of the week if it makes for a cleaner environment.

Today, however, environmental impacts have become more discreet – more sublime, if you will. We are dealing with somewhat more obscure and often hard to capture pollutants – particulate matter that comes from diesel exhaust and is many times smaller than a human hair – runoff from fertilizers and pesticides that makes its way from our lawns to our drainage systems to our lakes and rivers – greenhouse gases that are byproducts of factory and vehicle emissions.

Over the next half century, it is estimated that the world’s population will grow by 50 percent! Global economic activity is expected to increase by as much as 500 percent. Consumption and manufacturing will grow exponentially. All of this expansion will have serious implications for the future of our environment.

Thirty-eight years after the very first Earth Day, we again stand at an environmental crossroads – this time with a new agenda. We need to concentrate on creating and sustaining a more prosperous and healthy environment, and we need to work together at it.

We do have cleaner water for drinking, swimming and fishing. Our rivers, lakes and oceans are cleaner today than they were in 1970; cleaner today, in fact, than they were last year.

While ozone, fine particles and mercury still have our keen attention, the air we breathe is also cleaner than it was four decades ago.

Our land is cleaner, as well. Solid waste disposal has improved dramatically in the last few decades.

We recycle paper, plastics and glass. We use unleaded gasoline in our cars and lead-free paint on our walls. Wastewater is better managed and treated. More and more smokestacks emit filtered exhaust.

Lest we congratulate ourselves for a job well done, we need to realize that there is more work ahead. One of the subjects we should all be concerned about is sustainability, the need to marry economic interests with their impact on the environment. Here, as elsewhere, we can see how commercial and recreational development is placing a strain on the state's unique ecology.

Survey after survey tells us that Americans are waking up to environmental responsibilities. People are growing more concerned. Newspapers and on-line news resources are reporting on alternate fuels and related innovative technologies. Corporations are stepping up their plans to develop new green technologies. Companies are realizing the connection between the environment and their bottom line and they are developing and employing more environmentally friendly programs.

Successful companies have begun to realize that they compete not only on price and quality, but also on environmental performance. They have an obligation to their employees, shareholders and customers to be good corporate citizens – to limit their impact on the environment.

When Steve Johnson was appointed EPA Administrator by President Bush in 2005, he was tasked with the mandate to accelerate the pace of environmental protection while maintaining our economic competitiveness. That wasn't a passive statement – the President was, and remains, an advocate for a better environment. His mandate is clear – fix the Earth and continue to stimulate the economy.

Skeptics might see those two goals as mutually exclusive, but they aren't. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to support their travel on parallel paths. Clean air and water mean a healthier population – a healthier

population implies greater productivity – greater productivity begets more jobs and more revenue. Good environmental practices are good for the economy.

When a brownfield site is cleaned up, it can become a productive section of the community again. Solid waste management and recycling programs have become big business. Environmental experts have clearly recognized the economic benefits of cleanups and removals.

Companies have also discovered the efficiencies and cost savings associated with good environmental behavior. Last fall I participated in a national Energy Star event that highlighted – among other things – how changing out just one incandescent light bulb for an Energy Star rated light bulb can result in substantial cost and energy savings.

Energy Star bulbs use 75% less energy and last up to 10 times longer than traditional bulbs. If every American household and every American business switched just one traditional bulb to a high-efficiency Energy Star rated bulb, we would save enough power to light more than three million homes – save \$600 million in energy costs and prevent the greenhouse gas emission equal to more than 800,000 cars. That's phenomenal – and that's a message you can take back to your facility managers, your home and your community.

To help encourage good environmental behavior, EPA has a number of voluntary programs that offer strong, tangible, measurable results and many of the companies you've heard of or perhaps even worked for are participants. Programs like Performance Track, which has 40 plus member companies in our region – companies such as Johnson and Johnson, and Pfizer Pharmaceuticals.

This seven-year-old national program invites and encourages members to conduct their business in an environmentally friendly fashion. Facilities must incorporate an environmental management system – a set of processes and practices that enable an organization to reduce its environmental footprint while increasing operating efficiency. Furthermore, they must commit to greater improvements in their environmental performance and they must provide related information to their local community.

Another voluntary program, the National Partnership for Environmental Priorities, established a few short years ago, has attracted companies that have a strong interest in waste minimization and the reduction of priority chemicals. Member companies have pledged to remove tons of harmful chemicals from the waste stream.

At EPA, we put our money where our mouth is. Our main facilities are powered by alternative energy – our building in downtown Manhattan derives its energy entirely from wind power. We offer compressed work schedules and transit reimbursements. We sponsor cell phone and battery recycling programs and, of course, we are guided by an Environmental Management System that reminds us to print double-sided and turn down the lights and turn off the computers when not in use.

Environmentalists talk a lot about creating and managing a sustainable environment. And much of what we do targets sustainability. The hypothesis is simple - if we can change behavior today, we can reap the environmental benefit tomorrow and beyond. If we can convince people and organizations that there is a direct link between how they treat the environment today and quality of life in the future, then good environmental behavior will become part of the public consciousness – a classic “no brainer” if you will.

The concept of sustainability was crystallized by the Bruntland Commission, a UN sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development that published a report entitled “Our Common Future” in 1986. The report dealt with creating a sustainable environment and the political and economic considerations required to make it happen. This

report defined sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” That’s a definition many of us have embraced.

Now, how do we get there from here? How do we create the sustainable environment? Well, we have to get everyone on board – we have to continue to get people involved in and aware of environmental impacts. We have to make lifestyle changes which, in turn, impact local actions.

Along the way, we also have to take care of environmental transgressions. And, perhaps more importantly, we have to rely on the good work and good will of individuals like you.

The popular environmental buzzword today is “carbon footprint.” You’ve all heard that phrase – the bottom line is to make as little impact on the environment as possible. Ride your bike instead of your car; turn off unnecessary lights; pull out your chargers and don’t idle your engines. Recycle your waste; print on both sides of a piece of paper – these are just simple, every day measures you can execute to create a better environment.

Do that – become more environmentally conscious and conscientious – and not only will our air be more breathable, our land more useful, our water more drinkable – but we will ensure a better, cleaner, healthier environment for generations to come.

I just want to leave you with one more thought. I'm sure all of you have witnessed the majesty and power of the American Falls just a short distance from here. That might be the perfect symbol for purity, passion and power – the bubbling rapids, the crashing currents, the falling water. If you think in terms of that image as the best of our environment personified, how could you ever want it to be any different, to be tainted in any way? Take good care of the world around you, because as strong and resilient as it may appear to be, it has a fragile quality to it and it damages easy.

Thank you all for inviting me to speak to you today and I'll be glad to entertain any questions you may have.