

Remarks at the Department of the Interior March 2, 2012

Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. Well, it is good to have all of you in here. Welcome to Washington.

I want to thank Ken Salazar for the introduction. Did everybody know that it's his birthday today? All right, has he milked that enough? *[Laughter]* I just want to make sure everybody wished him a happy birthday. Turning 40 is tough. *[Laughter]*

We've also got our outstanding Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, in the house. Our wonderful EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson, is with us. And I want to thank all of you for being a part of this conference.

Now, I have to say that this is a pretty diverse group here today. We've got hunters and fishermen, we've got farmers and ranchers, we've got conservationists, we've got small-business owners, we've got local government leaders, we've got tribal leaders. And some of you may have just wandered in, I don't know. *[Laughter]* But you're all here for the same reason: Each of you has a deep appreciation for the incredible natural resources, the incredible bounty that we've been blessed with as a nation. And you're working hard every day to make sure those resources are around for my daughters and your children and, hopefully, their children to enjoy.

Doing that takes creativity. The great Aldo Leopold once said that conservation is "a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence and caution." It's not just about doing nothing. It's about doing something affirmative to make sure that we are passing on this incredible blessing that we have. And you also know that effective conservation is about more than just protecting our environment. It's about strengthening our economy. When we put in place new common-sense rules to reduce air pollution, like we did in December, it was to prevent our kids from breathing in dangerous chemicals. That's something we should all be able to agree on. But it will also create new jobs building and installing all sorts of pollution control technolo-

gy. And since it will prevent thousands of heart attacks and cases of childhood asthma, it will also take some strain off our health care system.

When we make a commitment to restore a million acres of grasslands and wetlands and wildlife habitat, like the Department of Agriculture and Interior did today, we're not just preserving our land and water for the next generation. We're also making more land available for hunting and fishing. And we're bolstering our—an outdoor economy that supports more than 9 million jobs and brings in more than a trillion dollars a year.

And when we make it easier to visit this country, like we've done recently accelerating the process for foreign travelers to get visas, we're not just boosting tourism in big cities and places like Disney World. We're helping more people discover our parks and our mountains and our beaches. And more visitors means more people renting cars and staying in hotels and eating at our restaurants and buying our equipment.

So the work you're doing today is important if we're going to grow our economy and put more people back to work. But conservation is also important when it comes to another issue that I've been talking about lately, and that's developing new sources of American-made energy.

Obviously, gas prices are on a lot of folks' minds right now. And we're getting another painful reminder of why developing new energy is so important for our future. Of course, because it's an election year, everybody is trotting out their three-point plans for \$2 gas. And you know what that involves, is you drill, and then you drill, and then you drill some more. We've heard this for 30 years.

The American people know better. They understand we can't just drill our way out of high gas prices. We're doing everything we can to boost U.S. production. But if we're going to take control of our energy future and avoid these gas price spikes in the future, then we've

got to have a sustained all-of-the-above strategy that develops every available source of American energy: yes, oil and gas, but also wind and solar and biofuels and more.

And we're making progress on this front. In 2010, our dependence on foreign oil was under 50 percent for the first time in 13 years. Because of the investments we've made, the use of clean, renewable energy in this country has nearly doubled. And in my State of the Union Address, I announced that we're allowing the development of clean energy on enough public land to power 3 million homes—3 million homes. That protects our environment, and it helps families and businesses save money.

But while it's important to use public lands to develop things like wind and solar energy and reduce our dependence on foreign oil, we've also got to focus on protecting our planet. Now, that's why Teddy Roosevelt made sure that as we build this country and harvest its bounty, we also protect its beauty. That's part of our national character. And historically, it's been bipartisan.

That's why, even as our country grew by leaps and bounds, we made sure to set aside places like the Grand Canyon for our children and our grandchildren. It's why my administration has stood up to protect its waters. That's why President Kennedy directed a portion of the revenues from oil and gas production to help communities build trails and ball fields, and why my administration has fought to protect the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

That's why the hunters and anglers in this country have always been willing to pay a few extra bucks for a fishing license or a duck stamp that helps protect streams and habitats, because they want to make sure that their grandkids can enjoy these same pastimes. That's why my administration is expanding access to public lands so that more Americans can cast a rod or teach their children how to hunt.

We have to keep investing in the technology and manufacturing that helps us lead the world. But we've also got to protect the places that help define who we are, that help shape our character and our soul as a nation, places

that help attract visitors and create jobs, but that also give something to our kids that is irreplaceable.

And all of us have a role to play. One of the first bills I signed after taking office was the public lands bill that protected more than a thousand miles of rivers and established new national parks and trails. And 2 years ago, thanks to some great work by my Cabinet, and Ken Salazar especially, I kicked off the America's Great Outdoors Initiative to support conservation projects happening in all 50 States, including Fort Monroe in Virginia, which just became America's 396th national park.

Right now we're restoring the River of Grass in the Everglades, providing clean water to millions of residents, creating thousands of jobs, construction jobs, in southern Florida. We need to keep moving forward on projects like these. And I know we've got ranchers and farmers and landowners here today who represent places like the Crown of the Continent in Montana, the Dakota Grasslands, and everywhere in between. We need to keep working to protect these incredible landscapes that all of you know so well.

The bottom line is this: There will always be people in this country who say we've got to choose between clean air and clean water and a growing economy, between doing right by our environment and putting people back to work. And I'm here to tell you that is a false choice. *[Applause]* That is a false choice. With smart, sustainable policies, we can grow our economy today and protect our environment for ourselves and our children.

We know it's possible. And we know it because of what's been happening in communities like yours, where compromise isn't a dirty word, where folks can recognize a good idea no matter where it comes from.

A while back, I heard a story about the Rogue River in Oregon. And every year, the Rogue is filled with salmon swimming upstream to spawn. But because factories were allowed to—allowing warm water to run back into the river, the temperature was becoming too high for the salmon to survive. So to fix the problem, the town could have required the

company to buy expensive cooling equipment, but that would have hurt the local economy. Instead, they decided to pay farmers and ranchers to plant trees along the banks of the river, and that helped to cool the water at a fraction of the cost. So it worked for business, it worked for farmers, it worked for salmon.

And those are the kinds of ideas that we need in this country. Ideas that preserve our environment, protect our bottom line, and connect more Americans to the great outdoors.

And this is personally important to me. Some of you know that I grew up in Hawaii mostly, and we got some pretty nice outdoors in Hawaii. *[Laughter]* And you spend a lot of time outdoors, and you learn very early on to appreciate this incredible splendor. But I remember when I was 11, I had never been to the mainland, and my grandmother and my mother and my sister, who at the time was 2, decided we were going to take a big summer trip. And we traveled across the country. And mostly we took Greyhound buses. My grandmother was getting—she had some eye problems, and so she couldn't see that well, so she was a little nervous about driving long distances. Sometimes we took the train. And we went to the usual spots, Disneyland and—yeah, I was 11, right? So—*[laughter]*.

But I still remember traveling up to Yellowstone and coming over a hill and suddenly just hundreds of deer and seeing bison for the first

time and seeing Old Faithful. And I remember that trip giving me a sense of just how immense and how grand this country was and how diverse it was. And watching folks digging for clams in Puget Sound and watching ranchers and seeing our first Americans guide me through a canyon in Arizona, and it gave you a sense of just what it is that makes America special.

And so when I went back to Yellowstone with Ken and my daughters—that was the first time they had been—and I'm standing there. I'm thinking not only about them and the first time they're seeing this, but I'm also remembering back to when my grandmother and my mother had shown me this amazing country so many years before.

And that is part of what we have to fight for. That's what's critical, is making sure that we're always there to bequeath that gift to the next generation. And if you'll work with me, I promise I'll do everything I can to help protect our economy, but also protect this amazing planet that we love and this great country that we've been blessed with.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:32 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

Statement on Representative Norman D. Dicks's Decision Not To Seek Re-election

March 2, 2012

I want to thank Norm Dicks for more than 30 years of service on behalf of the people of Washington State. Norm has spent his career working to protect our national security, championing the men and women of our Armed Forces, and fighting for the many natural re-

sources of Washington State and the Pacific Northwest. Norm's dedication to our Nation's intelligence personnel and his leadership on the Appropriations Committee will be missed in Congress, and Michelle and I wish him and family well in the future.