

Good Morning.

It's a pleasure to be at the College of St. Catherine.

I am very proud of our colleges and universities and especially proud of the contributions of private colleges to the quality of higher education in Minnesota.

However, I am even more proud of St. Catherine College.

Why?

Because two of my most valuable cabinet members, Commissioner Karen Studders and Commissioner Pam Wheelock graduated from this fine institution.

And believe me I know it must be a fine college because these are two very smart women. As smart as they are they must not have partied too much while they were here.

But seriously, I am happy to be here today to celebrate Earth Day.

We've made great progress since the first Earth Day in 1970.

Government, citizens and business have all worked hard and the results have been good. Many of the factories and power plants that were such major sources of pollution 31 years ago are still there, but thanks to a lot of hard work, they produce far less pollution.

Many wild animal populations have made remarkable

Comebacks as the environment has become cleaner.

Bald eagles, once practically gone from Minnesota, now nest in growing numbers in our state.

Personally, I've always been interested in the environment. I even got my start in politics because of an environmental issue.

Have we solved all our environmental problems?

Not by a long shot.

But now our biggest environmental problems come from our own actions, our own choices, rather than pollution produced by big business.

- One of these problems is damage to lakes and rivers from our use of lawn, garden and agricultural chemicals.

It's a simple fact: chemicals applied to the ground eventually end up in our rivers and lakes. The solution isn't rocket science: each of us can cut down the chemicals we use.

We can choose types of plants that need fewer chemicals. We can try organic growing methods.

And we can work with farmers to help them develop good land conservation practices. In fact, I want to use this opportunity to urge the legislature to work with me to continue funding one of the better land conservation projects in the state.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is taking thousands of acres of farmland out of production along the Minnesota River and will eventually help solve the terrible pollution problems in what was once a beautiful and pristine waterway.

- Another problem is electricity.

Every time we buy another gadget and plug it in, we use more electricity. And the more electricity a power plant has to make, the more it pollutes the air.

As we address the need for more power it is important that we don't overlook alternative sources of energy available from the sun and the wind.

- Of course, one of today's biggest environmental problems is those things we all drove in here today.

How many of you came here today by bus?

How many rode a bicycle?

How many walked?

Good for those that didn't drive a car to school today but the fact is many of us - including myself - came by car.

Everywhere we go our communities are designed around cars. Why?

Because it's convenient, that's why.

But we all know that there's a price to pay for this convenience.

In the four years from 1994 to 1998, our state population grew four percent.

The number of miles we drive increased 11 percent.

There are four million registered vehicles in Minnesota now and the number continues to grow. We - you and I and everyone else - drive more than 51 BILLION miles in this state every year!

Cars are a lot cleaner today than they were in 1970, but even catalytic converters can't overcome the air pollutants coming out of four million cars driving 51 billion miles. Cars and trucks emit half the pollutants that form smog or ozone, and levels of smog are on the rise in the Twin Cities.

Cars and trucks are also a major source of air pollutants that cause cancer and other serious health problems. Yet, incredibly there are legislators and citizens that fight me every inch of the way when I want to build light rail, a commuter rail system and busways to help cut down on the congestion on our roads.

Ultimately though, we can't point fingers at someone else for these air problems. We're the ones using more and more electricity every year, making our power plants burn more fuel and emit more air pollution.

You're probably wondering what I'm going to tell you to do.

I'm not going to tell you to do anything. That's not my role. And I'm not going to ban cars or make you get a horse.

But I am going to ask you to make some changes. I'm going to ask you to take responsibility for the air you breathe.

- You can carpool or use transit or bike once a week. I'll do my part by supporting public transit, whether light rail, buses or commuter rail.
- You can choose low-sulfur and other less-polluting fuels whenever possible.
- You can choose a fuel-efficient car when you're ready to buy a new car.
- If you've got kids, you can teach them that energy - gasoline, electricity and natural gas - is not like a bottomless cup of coffee. Our energy supply doesn't get refilled every time we use it. Teach them that the energy your family uses has its benefits - and that it also has its costs.

Teach them well, so that when another 30 years goes by, we can all sit and listen to the 61st Earth Day speeches and know we've accomplished something truly worthwhile.

Thank you and happy spring.