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NEWS RELEASE

Today Gov. Christie Whitman testified before the Senate Budget Appropriations Committee in support of a Constitutional amendment for a stable funding source for open space and farmland preservation.

Attached are a copy of her remarks.

**TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ON SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 66
FRIDAY, JULY 24, 1998**

Thank you, Senate President DiFrancesco. Chairman Littell, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of our open space, farmland, and historic preservation proposal. And I want to thank the Senate President for all his efforts in sponsoring this legislation, along with Senator Bob Martin.

It is highly unusual for a sitting governor to testify before a committee of the Legislature, and indeed this is my first time speaking to you in this forum. But this issue is so important to me - and I believe to all of us - that I welcomed the opportunity to testify before you today.

As you know, I have proposed that we make a commitment to preserve 1 million acres of open space and farmland within the next 10 years, and that we establish a stable source of funding to achieve that goal.

One million acres is the amount recommended by the Council on New Jersey Outdoors. One million acres to preserve our water supply and clean our air. One million acres to keep farming a way of life and a strength of our economy. One million acres for people to enjoy parks, go fishing or hiking. One million acres so our grandchildren will know the character of a state we're all so proud to call home.

The legislation before you will enable us, with the voters' approval, to save this land. Just as important, by establishing a stable source, we will for the first time be able to think long- term about preservation.

We will be able to do intelligent planning. Preserve the right acres - the acres that make the most sense to preserve. Not just five acres here and 10 acres there because we have the money now but don't know if we'll have it tomorrow. But intelligent planning - planning that says, let's preserve farmland in a way that farms are contiguous and pose fewer problems with nearby development or right-to-farm issues. Planning that says, let's save contiguous parcels of open space so that you can hike upon miles of undisturbed land. Planning that says, let's protect our watersheds so that we can have clean and plentiful drinking water. Planning that says, let's make sure to save the most precious acres.

Clearly, intelligent planning will also allow for intelligent development. This proposal is not - I repeat, not - a no-growth plan.

As a governor who prides herself on job creation, I recognize that development is essential to a healthy economy. We need development. This bill will allow for that. What's more, it will also encourage us to develop in places where we'd all like to see economic growth, in particular our great cities.

We need to maintain a vibrant economy. We need to preserve our land. I am confident that this proposal will promote both goals.

Farmland preservation will have obvious benefits to our economy as it strengthens our agricultural industry. The Department of Agriculture has stated that we must establish a base of at least 500,000 acres of permanently preserved farmland in order for the farming industry to remain a viable part of our economy. That's why fully half of the million acres we intend to preserve will be farmland.

And it's not just the Jersey Fresh tomato being sold at the farmstand. It's the ketchup that is made, and the other food- related industries and their many employees that benefit from our farms. According to the Department of Agriculture, farming is part of a \$56 billion food and agriculture complex in our state. So this initiative will keep the green in the Garden State in more ways than one.

Open space preservation, historic preservation, and park development also have benefits, like their effect on our second largest industry, tourism.

And preserving land can help us save money in the long run. Take, for instance, the farm I visited in Morris County this week. At one point, the Township considered allowing the farm to be developed. So they did a study, and discovered that developing that land would create a net tax deficit of \$1 million in operating costs alone, not even including any capital costs that might be needed for schools or other facilities.

I'm pleased to report that well over 100 municipal bodies have passed resolutions in support of this proposal. And those endorsements echo the positive response I've heard from people around the state. People with whom I speak recognize the economic benefits. They recognize the environmental benefits. And they understand the need for open space in a New Jersey that the Census Bureau again today ranked as by far the most densely populated state in America.

But for many New Jerseyans, this isn't about economics or the environment. It's about preserving the Garden State that they know and love. In the polls and at the ballot box, citizens of this state time and again have shown their unwavering support for preservation of open space, farmland, and historic resources.

Almost without fail, a parent will come up to me at an event and say, "We have to do this for our kids." And it's not just them. The other day, a boy about 15 years old came up to me and said, "I've lived here all my life. It's great for me to think that some of this open land will still be there when I grow up."

This is the most permanent legacy all of us together can leave to the people of New Jersey. Roads and bridges will come and go. Buildings will rise and buildings will fall. Policy directives established today will change in time.

But once this land is preserved, that's for life. Not just for today. Not just for you and your children. But for their great-grandchildren. And for the generations that will follow them.

There are a million reasons to protect these million acres. I ask you for your support of the legislation that will enable us to bring this to the voters. Let's let them decide. Let's give the people of New Jersey a chance to preserve a million acres for a new millennium.