

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Whitman Addresses Junior Statesmen

Gov. Christie Whitman today spoke to 70 high school leaders about the importance of preserving open space for future generations.

Addressing the Junior Statesmen at their 1998 Symposium on New Jersey Politics and Government, the Governor said preserving open space "is a legacy that every one of us can leave."

"The world has changed at a breathtaking pace since you were born. In those same years, unfortunately, the available natural land in our state has dwindled at nearly the same pace," Whitman told the high school students. "Where once we saw trees we now see townhouses; places that could have been parks are now parking lots."

"As open space has disappeared, it has begun to threaten the quality of life we enjoy-clean air, clear water, and places to run around and have fun."

Voters will vote in November on Whitman's proposal to dedicate nearly \$100 million a year for ten years to preserve 1 million acres of open space in New Jersey.

Each year, the Junior Statesmen spend a week examining New Jersey state politics. Activities include debates, simulations, and discussions about politics. The group of 70 young women and men this week explored topics including the Whitman legacy, New Jersey urban decay and renewal, education at a crossroads, New Jersey home rule, and the power of the media.

Attached is the text of the Governor's remarks.

REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN JUNIOR STATESMEN FOUNDATION FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1998

Thank you for that introduction. I want to thank the Junior Statesmen Foundation for the chance to talk with you. I know this has been a busy week, and I hope it's been rewarding.

You have heard from many of the key players in New Jersey politics. You've talked about some of the most critical issues New Jersey faces. And I hope your experience has not only given you a taste of Trenton policy-making but also inspired you to consider public service as a career.

On a brochure describing the Symposium, I saw that one of the topics listed was called, quote, "Evaluating the Whitman legacy," unquote. Hmm. I would love to hear what that was about - especially considering that I still have three-and-a-half years left in my term!

In all seriousness, though, I do want to speak with you about what I consider a legacy issue. But it's not a legacy I want to leave. It's a legacy that every one of us can leave. And it's one I hope you can help us achieve through your actions in the next couple of months.

Most of you were born in the early 1980s. A lot has changed since then. The Berlin Wall has come down and platform shoes have come back. The Soviet Union has disintegrated, and today the empire people talk about most is a software company. A baseball star can now earn more in one season than a player retiring the year you were born made in his entire career. And a computer can now beat a chess grandmaster at his own game.

The world has changed at a breathtaking pace since you were born. In those same years, unfortunately, the available natural land in our state has dwindled at nearly the same pace. Where once we saw trees we now see townhouses; places that could have been parks are now parking lots. As open space has disappeared, it has

begun to threaten the quality of life we enjoy - clean air, clean water, and places to run around and have fun.

We've already saved hundreds of thousands of acres through New Jersey's Green Acres and Farmland Preservation programs. But leadership requires that we accelerate our rate of preservation. More than half of all our farmland has disappeared since 1950. We must act now or lose it forever.

A commission I appointed, called the Council on New Jersey Outdoors, recommended that our state preserve 1 million more acres of open space and farmland within the next 10 years.

One million acres to preserve our water supply and clean our air. One million acres to keep farming as 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 your grandchildren will know the character of a state we're all so proud to call home.

I made the 1-million acre preservation goal a centerpiece of my inaugural address in January and stated it as one of the chief goals of my second term. I've spent the past seven months trying to make sure we get there.

When I first proposed a mechanism to pay for preservation, it was in the form of a tax increase - something uncommon for me to propose, as someone who signed into law 17 tax cuts. Day after day, the papers said the proposal was going nowhere - that we didn't have support in the Legislature for the tax increase.

In the end, we decided to propose another funding plan instead of a tax hike. The important thing to me, of course, was that everyone seemed to agree on the larger picture. Everyone agreed that the goal was right: saving a million acres now, before it's too late.

I didn't care so much about the mechanism; I cared about the million. So we worked closely with the Legislature. And we reached an agreement. Last week, the Legislature approved a bill that will ask voters in November to dedicate \$98 million in existing revenues each year for the next 10 years for open space and farmland preservation. This money will pay for preservation and financing the bonds to reach our million-acre goal.

The proposal passed the State Senate by a vote of 37-0. It passed the Assembly by a vote of 70-3. That's 107 votes, and that's a good start. But for this proposal to become a living, breathing plan, it will require another few million votes. Unless the voters say "yes" at the polls this November, we won't be able to start saving more land.

Let me tell you what's so important about getting this proposal approved, and then I'll tell you what you can do to make sure it happens.

In the past, the voters of New Jersey have approved the sale of bonds to purchase open space and farmland. But the amounts - and the years of the programs - were always limited. So it was hard to do long-range planning.

This proposal will give us a steady, stable source that we can count on from one year to the next.

We will be able to do intelligent planning. That means we will be able to 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.

I'm talking about intelligent planning - planning that says, let's preserve farmland to keep farms contiguous, because that poses fewer problems with nearby developments. Intelligent planning means, let's save contiguous parcels of open space so that you can hike upon miles of undisturbed land. Intelligent planning means, let's protect our watersheds so that we can have clean and plentiful drinking water. And it means, let's make sure to save the most precious acres.

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 or for the children you bring into the world. But for your grandchildren and for the generations that will follow them.

This is why I want to ask your help. You've learned a lot about the political process. Nowhere is our democratic way of life more evident than in the voting booth each year. You may not have reached voting age yet, but each of you has an opportunity to make sure this ballot question succeeds.

If you agree with our proposal, I hope you'll get involved. You can do that by writing letters to the editor, not just the daily newspaper but the weekly paper as well. You can do that by talking with neighbors about this issue, and about what preservation will do for our state. You can do that by asking the candidates who are running for office where you live to publicly endorse this proposal.

Junior Statesmen is a fantastic way to transform your interest in government to involvement. A motto on your brochure reads, "Don't just learn it, live it!" I hope you'll take those words to heart.

I hope that as you commit yourself to make a difference in your community, you will consider open space preservation an ideal way to start. It's a legacy you can help to build for our state, for your community, and for yourself and your family. It's a legacy for all time that we can all start achieving today.

Thank you.