

Denis Hayes Keynote Address

Coalition for a Livable Future / Regional Livability Summit
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Thank you very much for that introduction, woefully inadequate though it was <laughter>. Being introduced in the age of Google sometimes leaves you in this embarrassing position of having a talk that's more brief than the introduction.

It's great to be back in Portland. [Jill] mentioned that I have been at the Bullitt Foundation now for quite a while. In fact it is the second longest that I've ever held a job. The longest actually being at the Hubbard Dairy Queen in Camas, Washington, 14 miles to the east. I was there for 5 years. But it means that whenever I get back to Portland I really feel like I'm at home.

And it's particularly true when I am returning here from someplace bizarre, like Washington, DC. I was in Washington, DC last week, which is always a fascinating trip, fascinating in sort of an anthropological sense; fascinating sort of like a car wreck. For the first time last week George Bush admitted in a public press conference that we were not winning in Iraq. And about one hour later his press secretary comes on with a subsequent press conference saying, yes we are not *winning* in Iraq, but we are not *losing* in Iraq. At which point John Kerry piped up and said, "Will you folks please make up your minds?"

Perhaps best summarizing the difference between that and Portland was the first bumper strip [sic] that I noticed when I got into town yesterday, which was 'Impeach Cheney First,' <laughter & clapping> which seems so quintessentially Portland: it's politically wise and strategically brilliant. In my other home, the place where I live up in Seattle, the best selling bumper strip last year was "Yahoo! is not a foreign policy" <chuckles>.

So, before we get started with it, it's going to be kind of a serious, and at some points kind of a heavy thing. I want to warn you that I'm going to be appearing to be wandering over an extremely broad set of topics, some of them pretty deeply disturbing, and also reassure you that I intend to tie it all back to the **Coalition for a Livable Future** before I'm done. But I'm setting out to be deliberative[ly] provocative.

A hundred years from now I think that the Iraq war will likely be a fairly modest paragraph in a history text - Almost certainly not as important in the grand sweep of history as say, the 'Seven Years War' in the 18th century in Europe. But when we remember the 18th century today, what we remember is the industrial revolution; we remember the breaking away of the 13th colonies in the United States with the decision to have a publicly approved constitution. Neither of those things being anything that caused much of a stir, actually, in the 18th century, but proved to be enormously important in the sweep of history.

The 21st century will likely be placed in perspective by future historians, at least in part, as the time when human being *really* began to effect the environment - the time when homo-sapiens acquired some of the attributes of a geophysical force, like hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes. We humans now have the power to permanently change the climate of the whole planet, the power to destroy the stratospheric ozone layer, to create deserts, to trigger the greatest epidemic of extinction since the last time that an asteroid hit the planet. We have nuclear and biological weapons sufficient to decimate and perhaps exterminate humanity. We've already dammed and channeled and diverted most of the mightiest rivers on the planet. We are beginning to engineer entirely new forms of life.

The enormity of all of this is often lost in a world dominated by cable networks that briefly pretend that the biggest news story of the last quarter century is a '*gutter utterance*' by Don Imus. These huge planetary issues fall within an intellectual framework that is generally referred to as the environment. They address the ultimate threats and the biggest opportunities that are facing the planet.

Environmentalism properly considered is a value-based philosophy that promotes a diverse, resilient, just, sustainable world. It applies to human society basic rules that ecologists have discovered while researching other complex, interdependent biological communities. It has important insights to offer not just on the proper management of parks, fisheries, and sewer treatment facilities, but macroeconomic policy, nutrition, urban and industrial design, foreign affairs, transportation, healthy housing, energy.

And yet environmentalists who have been proposing this philosophy are consistently portrayed as just one more special interest. It's a very effective line of attack; there is nothing the average American loathes more than special interest. But the charge itself, of course, is silly. What in the world could I possibly have as a personal interest in the health of Orca whales, or tigers, or orangutans, or the Brazilian rainforest? And such concerns are utterly unconnected to any immediate financial or personal interest. In fact, one of the problems faced by environmentalists is that so very many of our issues are inherently, if you will, selfless. And we're constantly urged by intelligent strategists to pay much more attention to issues that are closely tied to the interest of people. And that is very good advice. And it's going to be the heart of this talk, and I'll come back to it in just a few minutes.

But even when environmentalist address issues like clean air, and clean water, safe food and toxic waste, renewable energy, issues that do effect us directly, they are public interest not special interest; we're not trying to get our own air cleaner than our neighbors' air, we're trying to get clean air for everyone.

So how in the world did this special interest business come to be? Exactly the same way that those who were struggling for racial justice came to be viewed as a special interest: that seeking to improve public education came to be viewed as a special interest. The charge was broadcast repeatedly from political leaders and conservative columnists year after year, after year and it bubbled up hourly in the Fox News echo chamber. And we did not effectively rebut it. That's the end of the story.

Environmentalist had an early genius for communication. I will immodestly contend that Earth Day was one of the half dozen best brands in the nation's history. I mean, *immediately* understandable, everybody knows what it's all about, and it translates into every language in the world in a way that is completely transparent.

But that communication skill atrophied and we grew enamored of complex scientific and economic jargon. We talk about polycyclic-aromatic hydrocarbons, George Bush talks about Clear Skies. I mean; how weird is that? As Frank Lunce has been telling republicans for years, "***Words really matter.***" Here's a typical Lunce example: In a national poll 23% felt that America is spending too little on welfare, 42% thought that America is spending too much on welfare. In the very same poll, of the very same people, 68% felt that too little is being spent on assistance to the poor, and only 7% felt that too much is being spent helping the poor. Let me really pound this home. By two-to-one, Americans feel that too much is spent on welfare, by ten-to-one Americans feel that too little is spent helping the poor. **Words really matter.**

We environmentalists are mostly responsible for how we're being seen. We've not made it clear to people that we care about them, care about their problems. We've been too fixated on good science and sound policy, and candidly, on showing how smart we are. We've ignored the solid truth in that old bromide that, "***people don't care how much you know until they know that you care.***"

It wasn't always this way. The five-year environmental golden age from late 1969 through 1974 arguably saw a wider array of far reaching legislation adopted with strong bipartisan support than any other period since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term. And environmentalists didn't have a widely popular president like Roosevelt to lead them, we had Richard Nixon; we prided ourselves on being citizens led. I won't go through the whole litany, which is a full page here of national laws that we passed in that five year period, but they utterly transformed the economic landscape of the country. They have caused trillions of dollars to be spent differently - *better* - than they otherwise would have been spent. It was a heady period.

Even more profoundly, the right to a safe, healthy environment - the *right* - was a concept that essentially did not exist when I was growing up in Camas, Washington up the river, where every single morning I woke up with a sore throat from uncontrolled sulfur dioxide and hydrogen sulfide coming out of the stacks. That right has become a fundamental, American core value - possessing wider, deeper public support than many of the values that are actually enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

It does not detract at all from the environmental accomplishments of the early 1970's to acknowledge the context within which they occurred. **This environmental revolution was fundamentally a product of the 1960's, one of the most astonishing decades in the history of any country. And nothing more exemplified the very best of the 1960's than the astonishing courage and the brilliant strategies advanced by the leaders of one of the other dominant movements of the era: the civil rights movement.** Many of the problems that we are wrestling with today, many of the problems being addressed by this conference (*over the course of it*) stem from the fact that that struggle is not yet completed, and its roots, alas, have been largely forgotten - especially by a couple of subsequent generations. So I'm going to deal with them just a little bit, and this is mostly for the younger people in the audience.

The Jeffersonian impulse toward decentralized democracy in American government has many very attractive elements, but as it played out between 1875 and 1965, it had a remarkably ugly side. States rights and community empowerment, in the American south, were often code words for virulent racism and segregation. Following reconstruction the solidly democratic south (*that's the democratic-party dominated south*) backed by a profoundly racist US Supreme Court essentially overturned every racial achievement of the civil war, except the abolition of slavery. By the end of the 19th century the south had embraced a style of all-encompassing racial segregation, right down to drinking fountains, that provided the model, the explicit model, for South African apartheid a half century later. It was a horrible chapter of American history and I'm not going to dwell in any length on it. But because things have changed so very much in the last several decades and because the earlier period is largely unknown to a couple of generations of Americans, who are often baffled by some of the tensions in society today - I'm going to deal with it briefly.

The setting is Montgomery Alabama where a 26-year-old African American minister named Martin Luther King is spearheading a boycott against segregated buses. King's home has just been destroyed by a firebomb, though his wife and family managed to escape. A rally, billed as the largest pro-segregation rally in history, is being staged in the Montgomery coliseum to lustily cheered remarks like the following quotation from an out of town speaker. These are probably the most disgusting words that I will ever utter, but they're worth everyone hearing at least once

because we have to remember where we came from. I thought, when I first put these down on the paper, that I would have to apologize to the African Americans in the audience, and as I actually wrote them down I realized that, no, they know this; it's the white people who are going to be surprised and shocked, and perhaps require the apology.

"In every stage of the bus boycott," this guy said, "We have been oppressed and degraded because of black, slimy, juicy, unbearably stinking niggers – African flesh eaters. When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to abolish the Negro race, proper methods should be used, and among these are guns, bows and arrows, slingshots and knives. All whites are created equal with certain rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of dead niggers."

OK, no big shock that there were racists in the south, but this particular speaker was a man named Jim Eastland. He was a United States senator from Mississippi. But James O. Eastland was not just *any* senator; the man who uttered those words was the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary committee - the committee that had to approve all legislation affecting civil rights and voting rights, as well as all Federal judicial appointees. Nine days after Eastland had been elected Chairman of the Judiciary committee he signed the "*Southern Manifesto*", calling for massive, unified defiance of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. That manifest was signed by 19 of the 22 senators from southern states. They were *all* democrats.

The history of this period is rich. I've mined it on other occasions; I wish I had time to more fully explore today with you. I don't, so I'm going to skip straight to my point, which is the 1968 election. Lyndon Johnson (*when he became President after the assassination of John F. Kennedy*) steered through an agenda on civil rights and voting rights that was viewed throughout the south as a betrayal of his roots, of the people who had put him in power, people from Georgia, Mississippi, Texas. And then when the democrats nominated Herbert Humphrey, whom I guess the south almost viewed as the 'anti-Christ' for the Presidential nomination, that solidly democratic South was suddenly put in play in a Presidential election.

In 1968 Richard Nixon -- who had been a champion of civil rights, actually, a decade earlier, he was much stronger, say ten years earlier than John F. Kennedy had been in the senate -- Nixon devised a brilliant, cynical, politically opportunistic, precedent shattering southern strategy, explicitly designed to flip the south to the Republican party while holding onto traditionally Republican strongholds in the Midwest. At the same time Nixon's southern strategy put the so-called 'Rockefeller Wing' of his own party (*the moderates who'd lost badly in 1964 when Barry Goldwater captured the election*) up for grabs.

In the 1972 election Nixon had managed to execute this strategy so perfectly that he won 61% of the popular vote; he carried every single state except Massachusetts. That's one of the weird mysteries of Watergate – I mean; it was so utterly unnecessary.

This awesome shift completely destroyed the Franklin Roosevelt coalition that had defined the National agenda for forty years. Notice those two dates: the 1968 election, the 1972 election; and Earth Day in 1970.

The Republicans shifted, literally, from being the party of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Herbert Brownell, Ed Brook, into becoming the party of Strom Thurman, Ronald Reagan, Tom Delay, and George W. Bush.

In 1969 when we began organizing that first Earth Day, American politics were in complete turmoil. America was enmeshed in a deeply unpopular war in Vietnam. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy had recently been assassinated. Woodstock nation was extolling sex, drugs and rock and roll. Lifelong southern Democrats were defecting on mass and becoming

ardent Republicans. Prominent Republicans throughout the west and northeast were becoming Democrats. In short, very much like 1932, 1970 was a time of utter political chaos.

And although this is a very different talk, I think that 2008 is shaping up in what may be somewhat the same way. We have another deeply unpopular war. We have the fracturing of the evangelical alliance. We have huge issues having to do with immigration and the rising important Hispanic vote. We have for the first time a viable women candidate, and for the first time a viable African American candidate for President. There are a whole wild set of things that can throw this election to be one of those that absolutely redefines the direction of the country.

The first Earth Day (with 20 million participants), emerged from this chaos with a set of reasonably clear, broadly shared values that quickly became an agenda. And in a nutshell a positive agenda is another name for a dream. When Martin Luther King boldly proclaimed that he had a dream, what he really was doing was sketching out the elements of a positive agenda.

This, since, has proven to be a huge mistake on the part particularly of national environmental leaders. **We have replaced the dreams with nightmares.** There's a story, probably not apocryphal, of an environmentalist who asked his friend's child what she wanted to be, "*if she grew up.*" There's a sense that as a movement we sort of have a congenital aversion to good news.

Our standard operating procedure has been the self-undoing hypothesis. Rachael Carson wrote of a silent spring with no bird songs. Since no one would want that, she hoped to stir up the public to ban DDT and to control other common pesticides. She succeeded, and as a consequence I've got eagles that are less than a hundred yards from my back door, and have fledged at least seven eaglettes since I've lived there.

Used sparingly this approach can be very effective. Used to the exclusion of everything else it creates a perpetual sense of Chicken Little: the sky is *always* falling. **And we environmentalists need to shift our emphasis from selling fear to selling hope. This is the special value of Portland, Oregon to the United States. This is the model of what are trying to achieve elsewhere. Imperfect but moving in a direction that actually constitutes a dream - It's why Portland, and why this - particularly meeting here, is so incredibly important.**

Hope provides a far stronger basis than fear for building long-term commitment. And a nightmare-dominated strategy can be hijacked to promote someone else's dream. That's precisely what's happening right now in climate change. We have a worldwide scientific consensus that climate change is real, and barring a resurgence of the nuclear arms race, it's the biggest threat to the well being of the planet. Climatologists and geophysicists have prevailed over Exxon and Halliburton and Peabody, as surely as Galileo finally triumphed over the Vatican. Al Gore won an Oscar for his movie (*so far the Supreme Court hasn't reversed that vote*) <laughter>. President Bush famously gives more credence to the novelist Michael Crichton than to the National Academy of Sciences. Both the House and the Senate have invited Crichton to testify on global warming. Let me be clear on this: reading Michael Crichton for science is like going to the Da Vinci Code to learn history. Or, at least half the audience will understand this one: it's like going to Hooters for the food <laughter>.

The nightmare of climate disruption should provide a powerful lever to dramatically advance energy efficiency and wind and bio-fuels, and very especially, direct solar energy. But we've spent far too little time describing our dreams for a better future, on the climate debate. Al Gore's superb movie is all about rising oceans, spreading deserts, vanishing glaciers, melting icecaps, hurricanes, desiccated farmlands, starving polar bears. And we now face a distinct possibility, maybe even a probability, that the answer will include huge subsidies to nuclear power; that the

answer will include a 300 billion dollar a year '*right to pollute*' grandfathered to today's worst polluters under a jury-rigged cap and trade system.

Nuclear power isn't really an issue in Portland. I'm not going to go off on a nuclear toot; you guys have had Trojan, you've had whoops. But let me make at least one point that's really important on it, because it is going to be coming up fiercely in debate; it's already up.

To obtain one-third of the lowest end estimates of global energy demands in 2050 from nuclear power would require the completion of four, huge, one thousand mega-watt nuclear power plants every week, for the next fifty years. Any atom of fissionable uranium or plutonium that can be used to fuel one of those reactors - can also be used to make a bomb. The amount of plutonium required if the world replaced coal with nuclear power would be about five million kilograms per year, every year. Ten kilograms is needed to make an atom bomb with roughly the explosive power of Hiroshima. And for those who can't do that math in your head, that's 500,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs per year.

If nuclear power is going to be the answer, globally, to climate change, than every country must have a nuclear power plant. If 180 sovereign nations follow the nuclear path of India and Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Israel, than our children's world will be a very terrifying place - with our without climate change. Because environmentalist recognized a nightmare but failed to link it to an explicit dream, others now plan to substitute a new nightmare for the old one.

So, dreams. A decent affordable home is the core element of the American dream. But affordable has to encompass more than just low first costs. Homes have to be affordable to heat in the winter, as well as to buy. Homes that lead to huge medical bills and irreversible health problems are not affordable. Homes that are healthy to live in and that make efficient use of energy and water are generally termed green, and green building is generally thought of as play things for the rich. But a healthy, efficient home should not be an indulgence; it should not be a luxury. A healthy, efficient home should be a right.

Then there's transportation. Families at the poverty level spend almost 40 cents of every dollar that they earn on transportation. For the most part they can't afford to live near where they work; increasingly they can't afford to live near transit. It's absolutely crucial in places like this (*places that are trying to do things right*) that low cost housing providers begin to buy and bank land near where you're transit facilities are going to be, while its still affordable, and hold it for the point when the transit actually gets there, and you put something in.

Housing and transportation are just the start of course. We have to address schools, healthcare, energy, food, jobs, banking and financial literacy, dozens and dozens of topics that are part and parcel of a vibrant, functioning urban ecosystem. **What's the proper sequence? What's the stuff that you need to do first, and then second and third, as you're trying to wrestle these things down?**

Sequencing reminds me of the old question: "*What's the difference between a golfer and a skydiver? The golfer goes 'whack', 'damn'. The skydiver goes 'damn', 'whack' <laughter>.*" The answer is that you have to pretty much address all these issues simultaneously. **That's the value of something like the Coalition for a Livable Future. It brings all these diverse strands: architects and transportation planners, and medical professionals, preservationists, and educators, and others. It weaves all of their interests together into a coherent fabric.** Perhaps my most important job this morning, coming in as an outsider (*even though I do think of this as home*) is to tell you that the fabric, for all of its beauty, for all of its leadership, for all of the things it does so very well, appears to have a design flaw.

Portland is probably my favorite American city, for reasons that relate to the lifetime work of so many of you that are in this room. It's culturally vibrant, intellectually stimulating, its pretty efficiency, it's eminently livable. But like European cities with the same characteristics, Portland has spun its problems centrifugally to the suburbs - to the East, the South, up North to Clark County. Where Detroit is hollowed out at the center, your problems are in the perimeter, the black energy out in space: the void. You really need to figure out how to address this - I know this is what the conference is all about.

You have to share the benefits of downtown Portland with the whole metropolitan area. You need to address it because this is the most common outside criticism of the Portland version of the American Dream; that ordinary people can't afford it. You need to address it because in Europe the '*outer ring*' riots have replaced the inner city riots that have affected many American cities. You need to address it because the changing demographics of the region will soon lead the downtown area to be a minority, and a minority is a very dangerous thing to be in a democratic polity. You need to address it because it's the right, just thing to do, and because that's the kind of people you are. And finally, you need to address it because **Portland embodies the Smart Growth dream for so much of the world. We can't afford to have you fail. So the responsibility is on your shoulders, literally the shoulders of you at this conference, is pretty enormous.**

The twentieth century brought the most astonishing change in history. My wife's grandmother walked across America on foot behind a covered wagon, and lived to see Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. Global interdependencies are knitting us together in a way that makes old paradigms irrelevant. It just makes no difference whatsoever to the planet where a lump of coal is burned, whether it's in China or the United States, or Brazil or Germany. It makes no difference where a rainforest is destroyed. We are all in this together.

If the whole world is ever to enjoy prosperity we need a different model of what prosperity means. Someone asked me over dinner last night how it is we could make smaller, more efficient houses, more attractive than "*McMansions*." And it was really embarrassing; I didn't have a good answer. I mean, I blathered a little bit, but that is really, really a hard question, and it's a question that deserves a good answer - and that again, in a fundamental way what this conference is all about.

It's technically possible, and in my view it's even technically fairly easy, to envision an attractive world in which the recycling of basic materials approaches a hundred percent. In which, for example, all paper is routinely recycled several times before finally converting the cellulose that remains into ethanol or another fuel - where all energy is derived from renewable source - where healthy, low-meat diets are within the biological carrying capacity of the planet - where information-dense, super-efficient, pollution-free technologies guide commerce and industry - where interesting, challenging, living-wage jobs meeting private or public needs are available to every person who wants them. Technically, we know how to do *all* that stuff. The tough part is to envision, and somehow achieve, the social and economic and political framework that makes it happen. Which leads me to my final point.

(The late John Kenneth Galbraith always used to say: towards the end of every speech the speaker should utter the words, "So in conclusion..." - just to give the audience hope.)
<laughter>

So in conclusion, let me just say a couple more words about hope. America has seen some very bad times and some very good times. We've occasionally behaved abysmally toward our poorest countryman, and sometimes we have extended a generosity of spirit, unequalled, elsewhere, anytime. We're on an ascending curve. *No one* today could deliver Senator Eastland's speech and remain in public office, much less chair the Senate Judiciary committee of the United States

senate. Don Imus' remarks were ghastly, but they were not in the same league as Jim Eastland's, and Imus was fired. But it is not a smooth upward curve; it has bumps and dips, and these days it has often felt like we are in free fall, shredding safety nets for the very poor in order to ensure that the very rich can pass on all of their wealth for generations to come, effectively converting America into an aristocracy.

There is a great pendulum in American politics and it swings back and forth, always seeking an equilibrium that it never achieves. That pendulum has now been pulled so very far to the fanatic, right wing, Attila the Hun edge - that it must either swing back, or break. Break is what has happened at different times in Germany, Russia, China, Japan. In America, the pendulum has always swung back. But that's not automatic. The pendulum swings back because the people manifesting a Jeffersonian common sense have arisen and pulled it back. If America - frankly led by this conference and by other similar gatherings, and other progressive outposts of the values that we all share - can find ways to link those who are motivated by social justice, with those that are motivated by concerns for personal health and community health; with those who are fascinated by new technologies that promise comfort and creativity while reducing energy requirements and material requirements (*not a little bit, but maybe by a factor of ten*) with those who are motivated by the drive for a sustainable future on a diverse planet shared with myriad other species, and with all races achieving a level of comity.

If we can find the common dreams to build that coalition - first in the northwest and then nationally - then we can give that political pendulum one hell of a tug. So let's go do it!

Thank you.

<Applause>