

ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES — THE WHITE HOUSE

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Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today. The title of this morning's panel is *Environmental Regulatory Process: Does it Work?* The short answer to that question is yes and no. In many cases, the environmental regulatory process has resulted in cleaner air, cleaner water, and reduced threats to the public health. In other instances, such regulations have not worked as they were originally intended. My remarks will be brief to allow plenty of time for questions.

Let me begin by highlighting two tenets of the Clinton Administration's environmental policy. First, we reject the notion that a healthy economy and environmental protection are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, we believe that the economy and the environment are inextricably linked. Our economy will not remain healthy over the long-term if we consume renewable resources faster than they can be replaced or if we consume non-renewable resources faster than we can identify safe and economic substitutes.

Second, we are committed to "reinventing" environmental protection to ensure maximum protection of public health and the environment while minimizing economic and social costs. Our goal is to sort out what works from what does not, and—when necessary—to develop new approaches to environmental protection that make more sense.

The central theme that runs through both of these goals is *efficiency*. My dictionary defines efficiency as "the ability to produce a desired effect or product with a minimum of effort, expense, or waste."

For example, pollution is nothing more than an indication of economic inefficiency. If we can prevent pollution through innovative thinking or technology, we can simultaneously protect the environment and increase business profits.

The Administration is committed to achieving economic savings by encouraging pollution prevention in the manufacturing sector; sustainable agricultural

practices in the agricultural sector; and greater efficiency in the way that we use energy in all sectors.

The Administration is also committed to achieving greater efficiency in how federal environmental programs are implemented. A good example is the wetlands policy that was announced last August.

I chair the interagency working group that developed the Administration's wetlands policy. One of the major policy recommendations made by our working group was giving the Soil Conservation Service responsibility for identifying wetlands on agricultural lands.

This change resulted from complaints from farmers who had to deal with two different wetlands regulatory programs under two different federal statutes; the Swampbuster provisions of the Food Security Act and Section 404 program under the Clean Water Act. In addition to inconvenience and confusion, the farmers had to potentially contend with two different answers from the federal government as to the existence or extent of wetlands on their property.

In terms of efficiency, it made no sense to force farmers to deal with two different federal agencies for wetlands determinations on their land. I am pleased to say that last week the Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Soil Conservation Service signed a Memorandum of Agreement giving the Soil Conservation Service the lead responsibility for identifying wetlands on agricultural lands.

This is reinventing government at its best. I believe that this agreement will result in increased protection of valuable wetlands resources while minimizing the regulatory burden on America's farmers.

I am convinced that there are numerous opportunities to make common sense reforms in the regulatory process that will result in more efficient environmental protection. This Administration is committed to identifying such opportunities. I would be happy to take your questions.