

Senator Gaylord Nelson  
404 Old Senate Office Building



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HARRISBURG, PA. - Senator Gaylord Nelson Tuesday called for a

~~nationwide political drive~~ to elect an "Ecology Congress" as the 92nd Congress.

Such a drive, the Wisconsin Democrat said, would be a strong focus for political action across the country as the next step "for a decent, sane environment" after the thousands of environmental teach-ins set for April 22nd.

"We've got legislators in Congress and state legislatures who represent the interests of agriculture, of business, of education. Now, we need legislators who represent the environmental interests of all Americans," Nelson told a special session here of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The session was a highlight of the Pennsylvania legislature's week long teach-in entitled 'Earth Day--Pennsylvania.'

Nelson, who last fall proposed the nationwide teach-ins, said the public concern about the environmental crisis has built so rapidly that "people who are disturbed about our poisoned air, our unlivable cities, our filthy rivers and lakes may have become the single most powerful political constituency in this country."

Nelson predicted that, soon after the April 22nd teach-ins, "concerned Americans of vastly differing political, economic and social philosophies will be forming ecology coalitions to fight through sustained political action for a clean environment."

He urged that such groups be formed in every state and community, from San Francisco to New York City. "The time has come for specific political action for specific environmental goals in every community in this country," Nelson told the Pennsylvanians. Election of candidates who will support tough environmental programs must be a key part of such an effort, he said. Nelson is making 17 speeches across the country this month urging an agenda for environmental political action.

He said the tough environmental decisions that now face politicians range from whether the Alaska pipeline will be allowed on U. S. public lands, subjecting the Arctic to the threat of a massive oil spill, to whether detergents, pesticides and consumer packaging will be allowed on the market if their ingredients



continue to pollute our lakes and rivers or litter the landscape.

Nelson said he is convinced that there will be a broad-spectrum demand for politicians to support steps to protect the American environment. "People from coast to coast are disgusted and angry at the accelerating destruction of our environment and the quality of life," he continued.

As just one instance of the new concern, Nelson pointed to a recent national poll which showed Americans three to one in favor of legislation to ban the automobile internal combustion engine, which causes 60 per cent of the country's air pollution.

"No Congress in American history, including this one, has been willing to support such steps," Nelson continued. "Instead, the politicians have always supported bigness and abundance at any price, and the public has been willing to go along."

Now, Nelson said, the public is changing the rules of the game-- demanding quality as well as quantity in American life and, in doing so, challenging the priorities of all American institutions.

"The fundamental question now," Nelson continued, "is whether our institutions--from Congress to Federal agencies to City Hall--are flexible enough to meet this new challenge, or whether they will continue in the same old vein, giving lip service to the public concern while compromising behind closed doors to the special interests." If we are going to put Gross National Quality on a par with Gross National Product as an aim of this society, the people are going to have to call the shots," Nelson argued.

As another instance of bringing environmental matters out into the public arena, Nelson commended the President's Council on Environmental Quality for its recent announcements that it plans to hold public hearings on some environmental questions before Federal agencies.

Matters urgently needing such national, open hearings, Nelson said, include the SST, the Alaska pipeline, the water supply to Everglades National Park from a Corps of Engineers project in southern Florida, the effectiveness of the Administration's announced phaseout of DDT, and the continued drilling of new oil wells in the ocean, despite totally inadequate technology to contain major ocean spills.

Political action groups must testify, petition, begin court action wherever appropriate, become involved on a day-to-day basis in environmental decision-making, Nelson said. He called environmental action "an opportunity, a necessity, for massive, grass roots democracy that we cannot afford to ignore."

Nelson pointed out that environmental problems affect every individual in America. "From the suburbanite who finds a polluted lake on his weekend trip to the ghetto resident who lives along the noisy truck routes, there is no escaping our environmental crisis," he said. "And restoring environmental decency in this country is going to mean eliminating the inhuman conditions of the ghetto as much as it means protecting our recreational waters and open space," Nelson added.