



Senator Gaylord Nelson
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

PITTSBURGH -- The United States has seen unprecedented technological progress, ~~but there~~ has been a failure to examine just what the progress has cost us in environmental deterioration, " Sen. Gaylord Nelson said Friday.

Speaking here at the Dreyfus Foundation lecture series and in conjunction with Earth Day teach-ins on the campuses of Carnegie-Mellon University, Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh, Nelson said that "technology too often dictates the nation's policies."

The Wisconsin Democrat argued that "simply because a technology existed for off-shore oil drilling, drilling began without knowing how to handle the consequences of oil spills; and simply because pesticides and herbicides were effective, we began using them without considering the potential damages to the life chain."

Nelson said the examples of technological ability creating a national commitment run a wide range from allowing cyclamates to be used without proper assurances they wouldn't be physically harmful to a massive, expensive commitment to the development of a questionable anti-ballistic missile system.

"As we move into the last third of the Twentieth Century," Nelson argued, "it becomes dramatically clear that the danger we face from the destruction of the habitat and life support systems of man by over-population and pollution of all kinds is greater than that from nuclear holocaust."

Nelson, who with Rep. Paul McCloskey of California is co-chairing the national teach-in efforts this month, predicted the Earth Day activities will mark the beginning of a major effort to clean up the environment and prevent future damages.

It will also mark a period of major political and social movements in which technology will be carefully examined to evaluate the hazards of progress along with the benefits.

"The young people who have the most to lose in a world that is being rapidly degraded," he continued, "are leading the environmental movement



that is calling for new priorities dedicated to preserving the world and repairing the damages that have been committed."

Nelson said the technology of progress and abundance was evident in the development of DDT and the other long-lasting pesticides that proved extremely effective for fighting crop pests and diseases, but also proved to be deadly to other parts of the environment by spreading through the soil and waters and into the air to the farthest reaches of the world.

"Since pesticides were developed in the 1940's, we have turned loose on the earth a massive dose of compounds that can cripple or kill and which are tragically indiscriminate in their attacks," Nelson explained. "When DDT is applied to do one job, it lingers and accumulates in the environment as a toxic threat to fish, wildlife and possibly even man."

One of the newest examples that has surfaced, Nelson continued, is the use of chemical herbicides to defoliate plants and destroy enemy food crops in Vietnam.

"During the last nine years this country has dumped and sprayed some 100 million pounds of chemical herbicides on five million acres of South Vietnam, or an area the size of Massachusetts," he explained. "We had the obvious technology to do this, but not the knowledge to know what future consequences defoliation would have on the small Southeast Asian nation."

Nelson said the traditional secrecy that hides "questionable military operations" has prevented adequate information from getting to the public, even though one of the defoliants used in Vietnam has caused a high rate of fetal deformities in test animals.

"Reports of deaths and illnesses allegedly caused by defoliants have been hushed up," Nelson added, "but late last year the country received some indication that something was wrong when the State Department released information that the United States paid the South Vietnamese government \$3.5 million to settle claims for damages caused by our defoliation program."

He pointed out that in one case chemicals were used to destroy the foliage along the entire 60 mile Rung Sat Canal that leads from the Sea to



Saigon. The reason given for the defoliation was to prevent attacks on ships.

"No ships had been sunk before defoliation, and none since," Nelson argued; "and military sources have admitted a serious attack could be mounted along only a one-mile strip. To prevent that attack, the whole canal was seared, and valuable mangrove trees were destroyed making room for an invasion of bamboo growth--a useless tree."

Nelson said it has been "almost a national standard" that, if something would work, use it and worry later about any harm.

"The environmental teach-ins signal the beginning of a change," Nelson added. "They are delivering the message that progress and technology must be compatible with man and his environment, and that message is one that is important for survival."

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