

Remarks of Gov. Owens
WGA “North American Perspectives”
April 16, 2004

For generations, men and women have looked to the West for new opportunities. As a place of promise and possibility. And a place to raise their families and build a better life.

Today, that same spirit and determination is alive. And the people of the West represent the very best of the American “can-do” spirit.

Our greatest wealth is in our people. And when we consider the great discoveries of the 21st century, we’re reminded that these are remarkable times. And that things are getting better everyday.

The technological advancement of the last century is further proof. More human progress has occurred in the last 100 years than in all previous centuries combined. We’re living longer, healthier lives. We’re stretching our resources further. Making them more efficient and affordable than ever before.

But if you read the headlines, you would have to look hard to find that message. Because the doom and gloom theme that you read about when it comes to the environment would have you believe we were living in sooty Pittsburgh in the twenties.

It reminds me of what President Clinton once said, “Ignore the headlines. Follow the trend lines.”

I would urge you to do the same. Because there is a lot of misleading information surrounding our environment.

But many of us here today, will recognize that things are getting better.

Take energy for example. Almost twice as much energy is produced per GDP unit today than in the first half of the century. And that same unit now costs far less to produce.

The prices of coal, electricity and oil have all declined since the turn of the century. Electricity prices have dropped eightfold since 1900. And coal almost sevenfold.

Because of innovation, we’re able to enjoy cleaner air. In recent years, the levels of major air pollutants have declined significantly. We’ve reduced every form of air pollution from 30 percent to 99 percent over the past 30 years.

In Denver, our smog levels were once inexcusable. The brown cloud rarely left the Mile High City. But, in the last five years, we’ve been in violation of federal standards only twice. A huge improvement over previous decades.

And while we're breathing easier, we're also enjoying cleaner water. And rivers and streams that we can actually swim in. Wastewater treatment plants are serving more Americans than ever. And industrial water pollution has dramatically decreased. That means less wastes and toxins in our waterways.

But in order to sustain these patterns of improvement, it's necessary that we have two elements intact: the resources and the will to make sure we're doing everything we can to use those resources wisely and efficiently.

Let me first address the issue of resources and the role they play – and will continue to play – in the West. We are fortunate to live in a nation blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Vast resources that contribute significantly to our economies and our high quality of life.

Colorado happens to be the fastest growing of the nation's coal producing states. And because Colorado coal is high in energy content and low in sulfur dioxide and mercury, we're producing a cleaner supply of energy. Already, power utilities nationwide are blending Colorado coal with other types of coal to meet the Clean Air Act requirements.

Natural gas is also an important piece of the pie. After coal, natural gas is the second largest source of energy. In fact, nearly all new power plants in the U.S. are designed to use natural gas. That's good news because natural gas continues to be the choice of new energy sources. We also know our demand for natural gas will become even greater. The

Energy Information Administration predicts an increase of somewhere between 30 to 50 percent by 2025.

And while we're working to meet that demand, we can be thankful that 85 percent of the estimated gas reserves in the Rocky Mountains remain untapped. Proving once again that the West will be a major player when it comes to meeting future energy needs.

While natural resources are important, we're also seeing more focus on renewable resources. This past December, we completed a new wind farm near Lamar in southeastern Colorado, which added 160 megawatts of wind energy. And that's only the beginning. Because the slopes of the Rocky Mountains provide some of the world's best wind resources, we're looking into new ways to harness their potential.

We've also started to look to agriculture to produce more fuel. Farmers and ranchers are learning ways to recycle their waste streams so that instead of being a source of pollution, they're now a source of energy.

But even so, we're still faced with obstacles like wildfires and regulatory restraints that keep us from using our resources efficiently.

Wildfires, in particular, have cost the West a great deal. They are responsible for the loss of our forests, the loss of property, and sometimes, the loss of life. They are a huge contributor to pollution and last year alone burned more than six million acres of land in

the U.S. With the continuing drought, the wildfire risk becomes even greater. We can all relate to the disastrous impacts wildfires have on our states.

That's why I support the President's Healthy Forrest Initiative. It's a plan that will make our forests less of a fire hazard. It will help control fires by restoring the nation's forests to their natural state. And reduces the unnecessary obstacles that prevent good forest management. This initiative will eliminate dense undergrowth. And turn it into a usable energy source.

In Colorado, we're developing ways to convert that excess forest waste into clean energy. We're even experimenting with turning it into hydrogen, the preferred fuel of fuel cells.

Once perfected, we'll not only have healthier forests but a self-renewing source of energy.

But any sensible energy plan must also address the consumer market. In Colorado, we've taken this to heart and are embracing free market principles to make sure the energy we produce is set at the right price for consumers.

Beginning in January 2003, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission adopted a new "least cost resource planning" process. It's a plan that ensures that utilities will acquire energy resources in an open and competitive manner. And a plan that requires power companies to select resources that result in the lowest rates over the next 20 to 40 years.

We've already put this plan to use with the Lamar wind farm I mentioned earlier. And by the end of this month, Colorado's three major power companies will complete the least cost planning process. Their plans will call for a responsible blend of new power sources. Ranging from wind and hydropower to a new clean coal plant and natural gas facilities.

It's a plan that helps Colorado families save money on their energy bills, while encouraging new innovations in energy technology. It's a common-sense approach and the right thing to do.

We must not forget that with our vast resources comes responsibility. The question we must ask ourselves is are we using them efficiently and effectively.

Moving forward, I would encourage you to focus on the facts not the rhetoric. And see the reality beyond the spin.

We're here today because we share a common goal. And whether Republican or Democrat, we're all looking for practical solutions to real problems. It's the same sensible attitude that defined our ancestors generations ago. They came to the West in search of something better. We're also in search of something better. Smoke screens won't help us get there. Common-sense policy, good partnerships and determination will.

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