Forty years ago, our nation faced a series of environmental crises. Toxic chemicals flowed into our waterways; lead from gasoline and paint additives pervaded our communities; and air pollution was so bad in some cities that children were not allowed outside to play. This was the stage onto which the EPA was born, and its achievements over the last 40 years have been nothing short of spectacular. Our air is cleaner, our water is cleaner, and environmental protection has become the expectation, not the exception. Over this rich history, the EPA faced a variety of new challenges, such as the impact of chlorinated fluorocarbons on stratospheric ozone or the impact of sulfur dioxide emissions from coal plants on acid rain and human health. With the assistance of new legislation, the EPA developed solutions that protect our environment and our communities without threatening the continued prosperity of the American economy.

Today, we still face a series of environmental challenges, both new and old. Our national commitment to clean air and water for our citizens is not complete, especially in many of our underprivileged communities. Our nation faces difficult choices in our energy systems, requiring trade-offs between different types of environmental risks. And climate change has emerged at the top of the environmental agenda as a challenge, with its long timescale and global reach, unlike any our nation has ever faced. On this occasion, forty years to the day after the EPA started its operations, it seems an appropriate moment to reflect on EPA's legacy and the nature of the challenges ahead. As Director of the Harvard University Center for the Environment, I am proud to welcome you to Harvard for what I hope will be the start of a continuing conversation on these important issues.

Daniel P. Schrag