Administrator Lisa P. Jackson

Environmental Law Institute Awards Dinner

October 19, 2010

Acknowledgements

- Nancy Sutley
- William Riley
- EPA Alumni
- TBD

Intro – Credit Where Credit's Due

- Let me begin by saying what an honor it is to lead the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at this historic moment.

- It is a happy coincidence that my time as Administrator comes during the 40th Anniversary of the agency. I get to attend a lot of awards ceremonies and stand on stage while people go on about the achievements and the success of EPA.

- ☺ It can be a nice relief from, say, a congressional hearing where I might not feel so well appreciated. It is very gratifying to have a schedule filled with friendly celebrations.

- But it is not lost on me that I accept these awards on behalf of the dedicated public servants who have worked for the EPA over the last four decades.

- What is being recognized here – and what we're celebrating this year – belongs to every person who has walked into an EPA office and set to work to protect the environment…to safeguard our health…and to make this country a better place to live.

- When I started with EPA as a staff level scientist in 1987, I never imagined I would be in this position. The **true** prestige of this job is knowing that I have been part of this agency's success, and to share that with so many others.

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- Let me also give credit where it is due – to the Environmental Law Institute and other organizations that have advised and partnered with us, and at times **pushed** the EPA to do its best work. You, too, deserve enormous credit for the last 40 years.

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- In the time between 1970 and today, the EPA and the ELI have had front row seats to the great advances and the shifting challenges of environmental protection.

- The issues we confront have gone from fighting pollution we can see, smell and taste, to dealing with pollutants and chemicals we've only recently had the science to detect.

- We've gone from taking action in local communities, to being a model for global environmental protection. And along the way we've seen incredible innovation that has not only protected our environment, but also created new jobs for American workers.

- And in the time between 1970 and today, environmental law has carved out a unique space in our nation.

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A Unique Space – Common Sense and Beyond

- At its roots, environmental protection emerges from very fundamental notions. The vast majority of Americans believe it's common sense that our health and our environment are protected by law.

- USA Today and Gallup recently released a poll on "How Americans View the Federal Government." As you can imagine, there were plenty of issues where those polled believed that government should stay out.

- Yet, only **<u>five percent</u>** of the respondents felt that government should stay out of environmental protection. Forty-two percent believed that government should have “total responsibility,” while the remaining majority fell somewhere in between.

- Clearly the American people don’t think factories should be permitted to dump uncontrolled amounts of waste into our rivers, or that the millions of vehicles on our roads today shouldn’t meet some standard for emissions that is protective of the air we breathe.

- This movement got started when it became clear that the forces of the market were not going to be enough to stop Los Angeles from becoming the smog capital of the world, or prevent situations like the Santa Barbara oil spill and the Cuyahoga River Fire.

- People demanded a new mechanism for preventing pollution. The EPA was created and a suite of environmental laws was passed so that government could set and enforce standards.

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- But there are also less-straightforward instances, times when the common sense solution is not always so apparent. This is where environmental law is put to the test.

- We want to foster a system that is creative and flexible – but not toothless. In a democracy, we won't long benefit from environmental regulations that are perceived as a greater burden than pollution itself. But neither can we open an easy path to fraud, or simply overlook risky behavior.

- These are areas where we must decide how much the law should cover, and how strong a presence EPA must be to uphold the bedrock notion that government should play a role in protecting our environment.

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Progress in Both Areas

- I mention these elements of environmental law because I believe the last four decades have marked incredible progress in both areas. Fundamentally, our air, water and lands are much cleaner.

- The Clean Air Act has cut millions of tons of pollution from our skies. Through that, it has reduced the incidence of asthma attacks, heart disease, and numerous other health conditions.

- I often think of my youngest son who has battled asthma his whole life. Without the Clean Air Act protecting the air around our home, around his school, around our church and the places we have traveled, there is no telling how much more challenging his condition could have been. I'm

sure similar stories can be told by many of you – and by millions of people across this country.

- Most importantly, that law has literally saved lives – some 200,000 in its first 20 years of existence, and many thousands more since.

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- Similar accomplishments can be listed for our water. The Clean Water and the Safe Drinking Water Acts have significantly reduced threats to our environment and our health.

- Years ago, many cities and towns lacked facilities to treat contaminated water, and had little or no information on what bacteria or chemicals might be in the water they delivered. Today the widespread expansion of water infrastructure has brought clean, safe water to millions of Americans. The Cuyahoga – along with a number of other major water bodies – are cleaner than they have been in generations.

- We've also made great strides cleaning up our lands, with extremely successful initiatives like the Superfund and the Brownfields programs.

- These programs have revitalized some of our country's most polluted places, provided jobs for thousands of Americans, protected communities from dangerous pollutants and – through effective laws – held polluters responsible.

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- Those are the fundamental protections. But we have also done a good job on the less straightforward issues – the places where our efforts must be balanced.

- More often than not, the balance in question is between the environment and the economy. I've worked in environmental protection long enough to see worthy environmental initiatives meet with doomsday predictions about their economic impact.

- We saw it in the 1970s with the introduction of catalytic converters and unleaded gasoline. We saw it the 80s when the Clean Air Act Amendments were being debated. And we saw it in the 90s, when it became imperative that we cut out CFCs that were damaging the ozone layer.

- In each case, instead of the doomsday outcome, we got the targeted environmental improvements and a steadily growing economy. In fact, over the last 40 years of environmental protection, our GDP has climbed 207 percent.

- Don't get me wrong: environmental protection is not free. Taking actions without consideration for their economic impacts can – in the long run –

be as counterproductive as holding off out of fear of those same impacts.

- But we have found balance – and I consider it one of the most notable achievements of our 40-year history. The same environmental laws that **regulate** the negative externalities and pollution from a free market have been written not only to respect but to **thrive on** the openness and creative capacity of our economy.

- It creates a "virtuous cycle" in which environmental laws spark new technology innovation – serving our fundamental belief that we can create jobs and opportunities without burdening our citizens with the effects of pollution.

- That is what allowed the Clean Air Act to have all the benefits I mentioned, and still be one of the most cost-effective things the American people have done for themselves in the last half-century.

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- That is the legacy we must continue today. As we confront a new era of environmental challenges we need smart, effective laws more than ever.

- The United States is taking its first official actions on climate change and clean energy. We must make new efforts to expand the conversation on environmentalism and include the most vulnerable and overburdened

communities. These are the poor and minority populations whose health and economic possibilities are hurt by environmental degradation. These are America's tribal groups, who oversee 72 million acres of land, and are eager to partner with EPA and other groups to improve environmental conditions on their lands.

- And of course, we continue to respond and recover from the Deepwater BP oil spill, an important wakeup call about our energy future and the critical importance a healthy environment can have to an entire way of life.

- These are **some** of the challenges that are going to define the next 40 years of environmental protection in this nation. And with that, let me say one last word about our accomplishments.

Close – The Kids are Alright

- For forty years the EPA and its partners in the environmental movement have fought to create a better world. And we did that for the benefit of the coming generations – for our children and their children.

- It's the same thing we fight for today and it's something to be very proud of.

- Along with passing on those environmental benefits, I believe we've also managed the truly amazing feat of passing on our environmental **values**.

- ☺ As the first EPA Administrator with a Facebook Page I think I can speak to this pretty accurately. I've had opportunities to meet with young environmental leaders all across the nation. I've had high level discussions in board rooms and executive meetings, I've been to Earth Day festivals and the Daily Show, and I've stood on stage with the Flaming Lips and Biz Markie.

- And what I've seen is that growing up in a world with clean water and clean air have not made the next generation complacent. They do not take these things for granted. They are as engaged – if not more engaged – than the generation that got everything started 40 years ago.

- And that gives me **extraordinary** hope as we think about the 40 years to come.

- I thank you once again for this honor, and I look forward to working with you all. Thank you.