



**Remarks of Governor Christine Todd Whitman,
Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
at the
National Summit on Small Business and the Environment
Washington, D.C.**



March 13, 2003

Good morning. I am pleased to welcome you to this National Summit on Small Business and the Environment.

I recently read something that George Herrera, the head of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce said that I thought applies to the effort we are making at the EPA to build a new and improved partnership with America's small business community. He said, "As a small businessman myself, I've learned that, if you listen to your customers, they will tell you what they need to succeed."

Ladies and gentlemen, that's why we are here today and tomorrow to listen to you, to find out what you need to succeed, not just as businesses, but also as stewards of America's environment. For we all truly are environmental stewards. Every one of us shares the common value of caring about the condition of our natural environment – and a common responsibility to do our part. We all want to leave our environment cleaner than we found it. We owe that to our children and grandchildren.

When I became administrator of the EPA, I said my goal was to leave America's air cleaner, its water purer, and its land better protected. Over the past 30 years, since the advent of the modern environmental movement, we've done much to improve the quality of our air, water, and land. The days when children thought the sky was supposed to be brown and when rivers spontaneously combusted, are history.

But despite the progress we've made, there's more to be done. Our air, while cleaner, is not clean enough. Our water, while purer, is still not pure enough. And our land, while not as threatened as it once was, still needs protection. The most obvious problems have been tackled successfully. Now we are left with the more intractable challenges, the ones that defy easy solutions.

So to achieve this next generation of environmental progress – to address the challenges that remain unaddressed – we have to look for new ways of doing things. We need to cast a wider net, to refocus our efforts to include those who can help us bring smaller, incremental results that will collectively add up to major improvement. That's where you come in.

It is often said that small business is the backbone of America's economy. You employ more than half of our country's workforce. You create the majority of the nation's new jobs. You spark the engine of economic growth.

That's something I really came to appreciate when I was governor of New Jersey. Small business led the way to the largest, longest economic expansion in my state's history, and I never took them – or their needs – for granted.

But too often, the backbone of our economy has been twisted out of shape by government regulations that don't appreciate and understand the unique challenges you face and the contributions you make. It is time for a visit to the chiropractor. For EPA's part, that chiropractor comes in several forms which I want to share with you this morning.

The first is EPA's Small Business Strategy. EPA first developed such a strategy in 1984. Unfortunately, in the nearly 20 years that have passed since then, it hasn't been updated. Just think what that means. The strategy doesn't account for the existence of the Internet. It doesn't factor in such practices as just-in-time inventory. And it doesn't reflect the changed approaches we are taking at EPA to achieve the next generation of environmental progress.

So we have been working with many of you to update this strategy for the 21st century. We want our Small Business Strategy to reflect our commitment to better understand the ways you do business, so we can better do business with you.

That includes making sure that we improve the way we promote compliance with the Nation's environmental laws by making available simple, readable guides that don't require a team of lawyers to interpret. It also includes enhancing partnerships with the states by renewing our support for State Small Business Assistance Programs nationwide. In short, we will treat every small business owner as someone who shares our goals for environmental progress, unless proven otherwise.

Today, we are releasing the draft of our new strategy for your review and comment. I urge you to read it and share your views with us. We want to hear what you have to say.

I should also add that I am committed to ensuring that this strategy doesn't sit on a shelf somewhere gathering dust. It will be a living document, updated on a regular basis to ensure it always meets your needs in this fast-changing world.

The next action we are taking to help strengthen the backbone of our economy is the creation of a new office at EPA whose mission is to create and champion new approaches to achieving environmental excellence in cost-effective ways. This new office, our National Center for Environmental Innovation, will be lead by Jay Benforado, whom you heard from a few moments ago.

At the core of the work this office will do is our belief that environmental protection and economic prosperity can and should go hand in hand. It's not a zero-sum game, where the only way to improve the environment is by placing heavy burdens on the economy. In fact, the environment benefits from a strong economy and a solid commitment to cost-effective environmental policies.

This new office will complement the work of our Small Business Division, which we see as your gateway to the Agency. If you're not familiar with the work it does, let me give you a few highlights. Our toll-free small business hotline answers more than 1,000 calls a month from the small business community. Our twice-yearly newsletter provides updates on issues and resources of interest to small business. And our various publications, such as the new "Practical Guide to Environmental Management," give you some of the tools you need to be good environmental stewards.

In addition, our Small Business Division looks for creative, innovative ways to help promote good environmental management practices. For example, the EPA and the National Park Service have just agreed to work together with the hundreds of small business owners who operate concessions in our national parks.

We will be partnering to help them run their businesses in ways that respect the special environmental needs of the beautiful places in which they are located. We hope this collaboration will become a model for how government can promote responsible environmental management partnerships with the small businesses with which it contracts.

There's something else we will be doing to promote small business – and that's putting our money where our mouth is. Let me bring your attention to just three examples:

- Through our Small Business Innovation Research program, we will be making awards to small, high-tech firms to help develop cutting-edge environmental technologies;
- Through our Design for the Environment program, we will help small businesses become more competitive by reducing their environmental and worker health risks through the development of cleaner technologies in the workplace; and,
- Through our procurement practices, we hope to promote the manufacture of “green products” by purchasing them from small businesses when possible.

In addition, we are establishing an incentive awards program to recognize proven environmental leaders in the small business community, which you will hear more about later. I look forward to participating in the first awards ceremony next year – and I hope to see many of you there.

Taken together, the actions we are advancing at EPA are designed to ensure that we are doing all we can to support you – the backbone of our economy – and to work with you to achieve the next generation of environmental progress. I have touched on just a few of our efforts here this morning. As the day progresses, you will hear about many more. But as I said at the outset, we are also here to listen to you.

As I have traveled around the country – having visited more than 40 states and scores of cities – I have had the chance to visit numerous small businesses. They truly are the laboratories of our economy, the places where timeless dreams and timely new ideas come together to drive the engine of progress. Again and again I have been amazed and impressed by the energy, creativity, and commitment of America's small business entrepreneurs.

We want to use that energy, that creativity, and that commitment to help make America's air cleaner, its water purer, and its land better protected for all those who will follow us. All of you here today are creators. Let's work together to create the next generation of environmental progress, to leave America cleaner and healthier than we found her.

Thank you.

