



"Better hurry, guys!!!"

HUEY D. JOHNSON

Earth heroes

EARTH DAY 1990 was a success. The world's environment, one can thankfully say, will never be the same.

Some 141 of the 180 nations in the world were involved.

Yap Island came in on Earth Day, bumping Bhutan as the final nation to be heard from.

Global events — ranging from 500,000 people flying 3,000 kites to protest air pollution in a French industrial area, to hundreds of thousands wearing green in Bogota, Columbia — swept the world as a statement of how ripe and relevant the need for environmental improvement has become.

It was described as the largest gathering of its kind in human history.

SITTING IN THE press tent at the San Francisco event and listening to numbers coming in from around the nation and world was stunning. I had just given my speech to a sea of humanity at Crissy Field, estimated to number up to 100,000, and was a bit overwhelmed.

I thought back to years ago when support for the environment was practically nonexistent. I remembered traveling to Arizona to be the featured speaker at an annual meeting and having six people show up.

Environmentalists spent 50 years engaged in endless small battles. It was a form of guerilla warfare, underfunded, and lonely. Today concern for the environment has leapt out into the public arena. We seem to all be environmentalists. A form of U.S. green political action is certain to be one result of Earth Day 1990.

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AS A GLOBAL celebration, Earth Day showed that the environment as an issue has an important strength. It reaches across layers of frustrating conflict — including religion, industry, labor and ethnic groups — as people join together to reduce and solve common threats.

One important accomplishment of Earth Day is that the environmental message reached more minorities. The past lack of awareness

The Earth is big news these days.

and support from minorities has often limited political clout.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson campaigned for Earth Day '90 among minority groups and encouraged minorities to enlist in the environmental movement.

"Over the years," he told them in his speeches, "I've led many demonstrations — the right to open housing, the right to be free of a third world war, the right to register and vote. Yet none of those rights is more basic than the right to breathe free. For unless I have the right to breathe, the right to drink good drinking water, no other right can be realized."

There are many more examples of cooperative responses to Earth Day.

Religious organizations and labor unions are two groups that have often discounted the urgency voiced by environmental organizations. But this time, they were broadly involved.

The National Council of Churches distributed sermon materials with an environmental message. The AFL-CIO and its member unions, including the UAW, appealed to their members to support Earth Day.

The wonder of the day was that someone could come up with an idea like Earth Day 1990, believe in it and in a short time make it happen. The example is a tribute to our system of government.

Two Californians — Denis Hayes, chairman of Earth Day 1990, and Christina Desser, the executive director and manager, both courageous as young lions — made the celebration the beginning of a new era. They inspired a good team of people to join them in the effort. Those two are the kind of young leaders nations so desperately need.

We owe all those involved in creating Earth Day 1990 our appreciation. They and others like them who are willing to fight for their beliefs and dreams give me a reason to be optimistic about the fate of the world.