

***. "Arbor Day which has already transplanted itself to every state in the American Union and has even been adopted in foreign lands... is not like other holidays. Each of those reposes on the past, while Arbor Day proposes for the future."*** ~ J. Sterling Morton founder of Arbor Day

With the arrival of spring, the warmer weather and longer days provide a greater opportunity for us to enjoy the outdoors. With the pressures of daily life abounding for almost everyone, this is a good time to take a moment and enjoy a simple breath of fresh air. A change of scenery and an appreciation for nature can be as close as your backyard or one of our many parks here in Piscataway. In my case, today was a nice day so I took a walk in my neighborhood here in Piscataway to think about what to share with everyone.

As Chairman of the Environment and Energy Committee, it is my privilege to work towards a clean and healthy environment here in the Garden State. Our environment is something that we all share in common. This April, we will celebrate Earth Day (April 22) and Arbor Day (April 27). These days each have a unique history have inspired my work in the New Jersey legislature and has molded my choices for legislation.

The first Arbor Day was celebrated in Nebraska in April 1840 and was the legacy of J. Sterling Morton who was President Cleveland's Secretary of Agriculture during his second administration. He was a newspaperman, a politician and a pioneer new to the prairie lands where there were hardly any trees. A practical farmer, Morton knew that trees made a difference as they shielded crops from the winds, held soil in place with their roots, provided shade and cleaned the air. Arbor Day today is celebrated nationwide and across the world. Although planting seasons differ, the benefits of planting trees remain for all of mankind. That is why this year my legislative agenda includes insuring that our forests here in New Jersey have a sound forest stewardship plan. Currently, our forests are ailing, and we cannot afford to compromise one of our most valuable natural resources. Over the course of the past three years, I have held stakeholder meetings and have worked diligently to fashion legislation that ensures that public lands will be protected and maintained. Healthy forests benefit us all.

The first Earth Day was celebrated by more than 20 million people on April 22, 1970. In the late 1960's Gaylord Nelson, a United States Senator and environmentalist from Wisconsin, was working to raise public awareness about the environment. He organized Earth Day. The history leading up to this day is intertwined with my own. Being a student in the 60's, I read the New York Times bestseller *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, who was a writer of natural history. After reading this book which told of how pesticides, specifically DDT, were not only killing pests, but our wildlife and having horrible effects on human health, my mind started spinning. I studied chemistry in college at the University of Scranton and then came to New Jersey, to Rutgers University to study more Chemistry. Although I was accepted into medical school I chose to

become a Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Science. This allowed me to continue studying the impact of chemicals and pollution on our environment and to our public health.

It is staggering to think that just prior to the 1970's environmental protection was not even a topic of discussion. There was no Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and polluters polluted in the name of progress. When we think in terms of progress we are usually referring to industry or technology. Well, in the past decades we have seen environmental problems unlike no others come to the forefront, but we have made progress and we will continue to make progress in the fight for clean air, clean water and a healthy environment.

After the first Earth Day, Dr. Seuss wrote a book about industrial society and nature in 1971 entitled *The Lorax*. This past winter, on Dr. Seuss' birthday, not only were adults and students reading *The Lorax* across America but they were flocking to theaters to also see the movie. I was given a Lorax bookmark that contained a seed and instructions. This during the week of Earth Day and Arbor Day, my grandkids will gather and together we'll plant that seed. We are all environmentalists and we can all make a difference.

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*Having served in the New Jersey State Legislature since 1986, first as a State Assemblyman and in 2002 as State Senator, Senator Smith is the former Mayor of Piscataway. Smith is considered one of the State's leading environmental lawmakers. Some of his legislative accomplishments include the Clean Water Act, Oil Spill Reform Act, the Worker and Community Right to Know Act, Highlands Preservation Act, Site Remediation Reform, Barnegat Bay cleanup, including the most stringent fertilizer law in the United States, the Recycling Enhancement Act, Electronic Waste Management Act, the most recent \$400 million Green Acres Initiative (approved by New Jersey voters in 2009) and a host of legislation stimulating solar and alternative energy in New Jersey.*