

Address by Theodore Roosevelt at San Luis Obispo, California

May 9, 1903

(Note: Highlights added to conservation message)

Mr. Chairman, and You, My Fellow-Citizens:

It is indeed a great pleasure to have the chance of meeting you this afternoon. For three days now I have been traveling through your wonderful and beautiful State and I marvel at its fertility. I am not surprised to see you looking happy. I should be ashamed of you if you did not. [*Applause*]

I know of this county in connection with certain Eastern agricultural producers, for unless I mistake, those who offered prizes for the largest vegetables and fruits of certain kinds have had to bar the products from this county, because they invariably won the prizes. [*Applause*] I know of one Eastern producer who said that the products of this county would have to be barred, because he had spent already \$500 in prizes to the county and had gotten back but \$14 for seeds. I have forgotten all of the records that you have in the county. I know that the largest pumpkin, watermelon and onion came from here, so that your agricultural products have made a name for themselves to be feared. Of course, in stock raising and dairying the county stands equally prominent. I am glad to learn that the State of California is erecting here the polytechnic institute for giving all the scientific training in the arts of farm life. More and more our people have waked to the fact that farming is not only a practical, but a scientific pursuit, and that there should be the same chance for the tiller of the soil to make his a learned profession that there is in any other business.

For three days I have been traveling through one of those regions of our country where the interests are agricultural and pastoral, where the tiller of the soil, the man who grows stock, who is engaged in agriculture, is the man whose interest is predominant; and of course it is the merest truism to say that it is the earth tiller, the soil tiller, the man of the farms, the man of the ranches, who stands as the one citizen indispensable to the entire community. The welfare of the nation depends even more than upon the welfare of the wage-worker, upon the welfare of the home-maker of the country regions. I congratulate you people of California upon the evidence that you have grasped the fact which our people must grasp, that the legislation of the country must be shaped in the direction of promoting the interests of the man who has come on the soil to stay and to rear his children to take his place after him. We have passed the stage as a nation when we can afford to tolerate the man whose aim it is merely to skin the soil and go on; to skin the country, to take off the timber, to exhaust it, and go on; our aim must be by laws promotive of irrigation, by laws securing the wise use in perpetuity of the forests, by laws shaped in every way to promote the permanent interests of the country. Our aim must be to hand over to our children not an impoverished but an improved heritage. That is the part of wisdom for our people. We wish to hand over our country to our children in better shape, not in worse shape, than we ourselves got it. [*Applause*]

I have congratulated you upon your material well-being and upon the steps that you are taking still further to increase that material well-being. I wish further to congratulate you upon what counts even more than material prosperity, upon taking care of the interests that go to make up the higher life of the nation. I am

greeted here by men who wear the button that shows that they proved true to a lofty ideal when Abraham Lincoln called to arms in the hour of the nation's agony. [Applause] Our nation showed itself great in those days because the nation's sons in '61 and the years immediately following had it in them to care for something more even than material well-being, because they had it in them to feel the lift toward lofty things which only generous souls can feel. I see around me the men who took part in the great Civil War, whose presence should excuse me from preaching, for their practice preaches louder than any words of mine could. [Applause]

I have seen everywhere through your State, in addition, the care you are taking in educating the children. I have been struck by the schools, and as I have said a special word of greeting to the men who deserve so well of the nation, so I wish to say a special greeting to the future, to the children, to those who are to be the men and women of the next generation; and upon whom it will depend whether -this country goes forward or not. It is a good thing to raise such products as you have raised on your farms; it is a better thing to bring up such children as I think I have been seeing today. I like the way in which, through your schools, you are training the children to citizenship in the future. Ultimately, though soil and climate will count for much, what will count for most is the average character in the individual citizen, the individual man or woman; that is what counts in the long run in making a nation. [Applause]

I go from you with an even increased faith in the future of our country, the future of America, because I go with an even increased faith and confidence in what the average American citizen is and will be. I believe in you, men and women of California, men and women of America, of the United States, because I feel that you are not only sound in body and sound in mind, but that which counts for more than body, more than mind—character, into which many different elements enter—but above all, the elements of decency, of courage, and of common sense. [Cheers and applause]

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