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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
12TH ANNUAL MEETING OF  
KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL, INC.  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Mr. Perin, Friends:

It is a great pleasure for me to be with the members and friends of this organization -- one of the first to champion the beautification cause.

I hate to contemplate what America's cities and countryside would look like today if your organization had not attacked this problem these many years. All of us applaud your foresight and efforts to spark civic pride and order.

The harvest of help which you have garnered is shown by the awards given today and I congratulate the winners most heartily.

Secretary of Interior Udall tells the story of a visit he once had with Robert Frost at his Vermont farm. Vermont had just published a brochure which stated on the cover, "Come to unspoiled Vermont for your vacation."

Frost said, with his wry humor, that he used to take a pencil and scribble on the bottom, "And help us spoil it."

That is, of course, the dilemma that we face today: Whether we are going to spoil our surroundings or whether we are going to follow a higher standard of stewardship and enhance our bounty.

Litter, of course, is not new. It is just more. We would be deluding ourselves if we thought that litter is solely a by-product of our present day manufacturing prowess.

For litter is recorded as having been a problem in Imperial Rome. In fact, I am sure it is as old as civilization itself. A glance through the writings of Charles Dickens describes the mud, the horses, and the clouds of soot that accompanied the early Industrial Revolution. Beside these, our own litter probably appears pretty tidy and civilized.

The spotlight of statistics can help us grasp the dimension of the litter problem that we are facing in the United States: Each year Americans are devoting nearly a billion dollars to cleaning up after each other! In Washington, D.C., the bill is three million dollars, and I think any official who has had to sign the check for litter clean-up becomes a dedicated spokesman for a positive beautification campaign.

Ugliness breeds ugliness. It seems to me that our two-pronged hope is, first, good taste -- especially a growth of good taste in the younger generation ... the thought, as that hand is in mid-air... "No, I won't toss the soft drink bottle out."

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The attitude of all of us must be, "I love my state so I'm not going to leave this pile of trash here for the next person."

Second, whatever technology can provide to reduce the lasting litter.

Our litter potential in America derives from several well-known factors: among them are an abundance of material goods, particularly disposable packaging goods, and transportation access to anonymous places for which we feel no particular responsibility, such as roadsides or "empty land."

I would like to think that both improved technology and attitude would take place someday, and in the meantime, all Americans might well take a cue from a ten-year old boy in Sudbury, Massachusetts who went to his town elders and asked permission to be assigned the task of "caretaker of the common" -- a one-man picker upper without pay or reward -- except for the grace of his selflessness.

There are many "caretakers of the commons" in this group. And we salute your selflessness.

The drive for national beauty has many facets. Litter is an important one. Another is under discussion and up for a vote today in the House of Representatives where we are attempting to take a vital step forward in making our highways more attractive.

Perhaps by nightfall we can cheer victory. I hope so. If the outcome is a vote against the highway improvement bill, then it is because enough of us who care have not said what we feel in time. But we WILL on another day.

Better landscaping and good design are also part of the new horizons on the natural beauty front. None of these are abstract causes of purely philosophical ideas. They involve the quality of the daily life of every one of us.

Yours are the talented hands that can put them into being.

I know this great organization, backed by longtime experience will be on the frontlines of the broad effort for natural beauty -- with even greater dedication in the future than you have given in the past.

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