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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL AWARDS LUNCHEON
BILTMORE HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY
NOVEMBER 19, 1968

Thank you, Mr. Perrin. It is a pleasure to be with Keep America Beautiful -- its officers and members -- on this day of tribute. I am touched and grateful for the honor you have given me.

I am honored by your award, and I am grateful for the library of educational films about litter prevention. I will be so glad to place them in the Johnson Library at the University of Texas, but more important to keep them in circulation to youth, civic and garden clubs.

Today I have come to convey a very special thank-you to seven women and seven organizations whose achievements in litter prevention have been notable. Each of these ladies has turned her talents to civic betterment, and each has been the catalyst that has evoked cooperation from hundreds and thousands in her community. These are records of ingenuity, and courage, and faith, and hours and hours of hard work.

One of the awardees, Mrs. Mattie Coney, wrote me a few weeks ago that "the work of getting many of the things done that have been neglected so long is going to be hard and tedious. It will be like straightening a bone that has grown crooked."

Mrs. Coney -- and all the participants in this Keep America Beautiful meeting -- have been straightening this bone. Public opinion is aware of litter as never before; and public opinion dislikes litter as never before.

A week does not pass without letters or reports crossing my desk of new clean-up and litter-prevention successes.

* I remember the Sierra Club teenagers who backpacked cans and rubbish out from high alpine lakes last summer. They measured their haul in tons.

* I have admired the informative anti-litter kits distributed by Pepsi-Cola and a number of other major firms to their officials and employees.

* Public service advertising has stepped up with the anti-litter message.

* Federal agencies -- the Forest Service that has enlisted America's favorite dog, Lassie, in anti-litter leadership, and the Bureau of Land Management with its exemplary figure of Johnnie Outdoors -- are educating the young, and prodding the behavior of their parents.

All these efforts -- with the millions of hours of time and thought they represent -- must continue. And they must increase, for population is going to increase; awareness is going to increase; products and their packages are going to increase. Surely it is time for Americans to cure the litterbug habit!

And there is another side of the story as well. That is the packaging material itself, which appears to the consumer to be free and often boasts of being disposable. About 50 million tons of packaging material are produced each year, and of that, only 10% is recovered and re-used. The rest is litter, quantities of municipal litter and scatterings along the highways and byways, waterways and mountainsides of America. It is wasteful as well as unlovely and costly.

I have been watching civic anti-litter efforts during the past four years. I am convinced we must find packaging that will disintegrate or is worth re-deeming. A number of packaging concerns are represented on the Board of Keep America Beautiful, and I hope some day soon their public relations men who support this fine organization, will sit down and talk with their research and production men and explore new paths leading toward products that will disintegrate or can be re-used

Of course some fine work is already underway. The Adolph Coors Brewery has been doing research on a salvagable aluminum can. The Reynolds Metal Company undertook a pilot project in the Miami area of can recovery.

Public imagination was captured a few weeks ago with stories in the press of a Swedish bottle that would disintegrate when emptied and broken. And there is a professor at Clemson University here in this country who is doing research on similar glass that could disintegrate. His studies are far from complete, and already he has a mailing list of 500 who are eager for news.

The insidious, demoralizing blight of litter must be arrested at its source, as well as cleaned from our cities and countryside once its damage is done.

It will take effort and money to develop ways to salvage and re-use the products that have been so lavishly discarded, but the social cost of not doing so is even higher.

I look for exciting new developments in this field in the years to come, and I thank you with all my heart for the outstanding strides each of you has made toward a more livable, more inspiring America.

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