FIRST WORD

By Bruce Babbitt

"As populations have skyrocketed and technology has created new hazards, we have gained the power to contaminate not just a river, neighborhood, or city; we have the power to poison the entire planet."

In the last 50 years the population of our planet has grown by 25 percent. We have invented and released a host of new chemicals. And we are now restructuring the building blocks of life itself—through genetic engineering.

As world population skyrockets and technology creates new hazards, we have gained the power to contaminate not just a lake or river or neighborhood or city; we have the power to poison the entire planet. The burning of fossil fuels creates acid that flows across wilderness boundaries. The radioactive fallout from Chernobyl has saturated the lichen tundras of the far north. And everywhere under the sun life is menaced by ultraviolet radiation streaming through a leaky ozone shield.

There is certainly ample reason to be disheartened, but the darkest hour often comes just before dawn, and I believe we are on the threshold of a new and hopeful international opportunity. The lessening of cold war tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union will provide the opportunity for joint environmental leadership. The European community has already taken a strong lead to eliminate the use of chlorofluorocarbons, which are destroying the ozone layer. Here at home President Bush has made a good start on air quality, although he has yet to provide international leadership.

As capital flows from one country to another and trade increases, the emergence of a new, interdependent world economy can be channeled into environmental progress. The countries sharing the benefits of interdependent world growth must also share responsibility for international environmental standards.

In 1958 the nations of the world participated in an International Geophysical Year (IGY). IGY triggered cooperation among scientists for worldwide research. Thirty years later it is time to create another IGY but this time an International Greenhouse Year. It could show once again that scientists and leaders working together can solve problems on a global scale.

It is also time to award a Nobel prize for environmental science and leadership. For more than eight decades the awarding of Nobel prizes for physics, chemistry, and, more recently, economics has focused a great deal of attention on the work of scientists throughout the world whose accomplishments would have otherwise gone unnoticed. A new Nobel prize would bring to the environmental sciences a recognition commensurate with the urgency of the issue.

The most important task, however, is to use our leverage in the international economy to promote environmental responsibility. We have that leverage in at least three areas—trade, aid, and debt. Consider the aid we provide to other countries. Why should the United States subsidize dams that inundate tropical forests and displace indigenous peoples? And why should we sponsor agricultural practices that ruin the land and destroy wildlife? Before such projects are funded environmental concerns should be considered.

The United States can also play an influential role in molding international policy regarding the crushing burden of debt in the Third World. Within the next few years this debt must be reduced, presenting an opportunity for linking economic and environmental reform. As usual, environmental organizations captured the public imagination with a proposal to swap debt for commitments to preserve tropical forests. The next step is to persuade government and the multilateral banks to become involved in debt-for-nature swaps.

The most neglected of our international economic–environmental links are caused by issues related to trade. It is access to American markets that has made possible the rise of trading states and the growth of the new world economy. Yet access to American markets should not be an inducement to destroy the environment.

Some progress in linking economic gains with environmental concerns in trade relationships has been achieved. To instill energy conservation, we passed laws requiring automakers to meet fuel-economy standards and apply those standards to both domestic and foreign cars.

More recently the United States halted the import of ivory in response to a 1989 report indicating that the African elephant is in serious danger of extinction. Other countries are doing the same. We should now extend that concept to a ban on imports of timber from endangered rain forests. And we need to go further still, moving against products that themselves are risk-free but that are manufactured by processes threatening the environment.

The times cry out for an international agreement that integrates worldwide economic and environmental policies. Such legislation could provide the first step toward making environmental treaties with sanctions on those countries that fail to comply.

The United States, long the engine of world economic growth, must now become the engine of world environmental progress. For too long we have considered economic and environmental issues in opposition to each other. Our challenge is to link the two together, proving to a skeptical world that we can have both growth and a quality environment and that we are willing to use one to achieve the other.

Bruce Babbitt, former governor of Arizona, was a 1988 presidential candidate.

In the last 50 years the population of our planet has grown by 25 percent. We have discovered nuclear fission, although we have not learned how to control it. We have invented and released a host of menacing new chemicals. And we are now busy restructuring the building locks of life itself - through genetic engineering.

As world population skyrockets and technology creates new hazards, we have gained the power to contaminate not just a lake or river or neighborhood or city; we have the power to poison the entire planet. The burning of fossil fuels creates acid that flows across wilderness boundaries, blackening forests and poisoning lakes. The radioactive fallout from Chernobyl has saturated the lichen tundras of the far north, forcing Laplanders to truck their reindeer to other pastures.

The President of the Maldives, an island nation in the Indian Oceans, has made a public plea for action to prevent the disappearance of his nation beneath rising oceans. And everywhere under the sun, life is menaced by ultraviolet radiation streaming through a leaky ozone shield.

There is certainly ample reason to be disheartened, but as the darkest hour often comes just before dawn, I believe we are on the threshold of a new and hopeful international opportunity. The lessening of cold war tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union will provide the opportunity for joint environmental leadership. The European community has already taken a strong lead in a world movement to eliminate the use of CFCs that are destroying the ozone layer. Here at

home President Bush has made a good start on air quality, although he has yet to provide international leadership.

The emergence of a new, interdependent world economy can be channeled into environmental progress. As capital flows from one country to another, as production sharing among countries becomes the norm, and as trade increases, the countries sharing the benefits of interdependent world growth must also share responsibility for international environmental standards. Here are three proposals for research, recognition and use of economic leverage.

In 1958 the nations of the world participated in an International Geophysical Year (IGY). IGY is remembered for triggering an ongoing pattern of cooperation among scientists of all nations for worldwide research. Thirty year later, it is time to create another IGY; but this time an International Greenhouse Year. It could fire the world's imagination, and show once again that scientists and leaders working together can discover facts and solve problems on a global scale.

It is also time to award a Nobel Prize for environmental science and leadership. For more than seven decades, the award of Nobel Prizes for physics, chemistry, and economics has focused a great deal of attention on the work of scientists throughout the world accomplishments otherwise would have gone unnoticed by the public. A new Nobel Prize would bring to the environmental sciences a prestige and recognition commensurate with the urgency of the issue. It could spark a

global education campaign awaking the people to the consequences of environmental pollution.

But the most important, and the most difficult, task is to use our leverage in the international economy to promote environmental responsibility. We have that leverage in at least three areas - trade, aid, and debt.

Consider the foreign aid that we provide to other countries. Why should the citizens of the United States subsidize the destruction of the planetary environment? Why should our money pay for dams that inundate tropical forests and displace indigenous peoples when there are alternatives grounded in conservation and renewable energy? And why should we sponsor agricultural practices in Botswana and Costa Rica that ruin the land, destroy wildlife, and impoverish the people? Before such projects are funded they should undergo environmental analysis.

Another arena where the United States can play an influential role in molding international policy lies with the accumulation of a crushing burden of debt in the Third World. Within the next few years the debt of developing countries must be compromised and reduced. That process presents an important opportunity for linking both economic and environmental reform. As usual, it was environmental organizations (Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund) that captured the public imagination with an ingenious proposal to swap debt for commitments to preserve tropical

forests. The next step is to persuade government and the multilateral banks to become involved in debt-for-nature swaps.

The most important, and the most neglected of our international economic-environmental links are caused by issues related to trade. It is access to American markets that has made possible the rise of trading states and growth of the new world economy. Yet access to American markets should not be an inducement to the destruction of the environment.

Some progress to link economic gains with environmental concerns in trade relationships has been achieved. To instill energy conservation, we passed laws requiring that automakers meet fuel-economy standards, and those standards applied to both domestic and foreign cars. Since America is the largest auto market in the world, our standards quickly worked their way into similar laws and regulations in Japan and Germany.

More recently, the United States halted the import of ivory into this country in response to a 1989 report indicating that the African elephant is in serious danger of extinction. Other countries are doing the same. We should now extend that concept to a ban on imports of tropical timber from endangered rain forests.

We need to go a step further, however, and move against products that themselves are risk-free, but which are manufactured by processes that threaten the environment. For example, the countries of the world could refuse to buy copper

from Chile and Zambia where smelters are operated without pollution controls.

The times cry out for a Biosphere Protection Act that reaches out to all facets of our participation in the international community including the integration of our economic and environmental policies. Such legislation could provide the first step to integrating our trade, aid, and debt policies into the making of environmental treaties, signed by all nations, with agreed sanctions on those countries that fail to comply.

The United States, long the engine of world economic growth, now must become the engine of world environmental progress. For too long we have considered economic and environmental issues in opposition to each other. We must now think of them not in opposition but in concert, using the one to enhance the other. Our challenge is to link the two engines together, proving to a sometimes skeptical world that we can have both growth and a quality environment, and that we are willing to use one to achieve the other.

Bruce Babbitt is the former governor of Arizona and a 1988 presidential candidate.