

**EPA ADMINISTRATOR LISA P. JACKSON**  
**Address 2009 USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum**  
**February 26, 2009**

**MS. LISA JACKSON:** Thank you all. And good evening.

First and foremost, the dinner looks pretty good, so I'm mindful that soon you're going to want to retire to the bar, retire to your room, one or the other. So I just wanted an opportunity. I actually asked Secretary Vilsack for an opportunity to spend a few minutes with you here tonight, to get to know you a little bit, let you get to know me and the person at EPA, and maybe talk a little bit about where I see our priorities are at EPA and the work we jointly have to do together.

And it really is joint. Let me start with that. Certainly the agricultural community, broadly defined as I understand it to be in this room, is first and foremost a partner with you today in its mission, which is to, simply, protect human health and the environment.

Today is a good day for EPA. The President introduced the budget for EPA that begins to make up for the fact that over the last eight years EPA was cut drastically, about 27 percent, the second largest cut across the federal government. And so this proposed budget for 2010 is actually the largest budget in real dollars that EPA has ever seen.

Now before you say 'oh my,' understand that in the time that EPA's budgets were being cut 27 percent, our mandates were not being cut at all. There continues to be an expectation on the part of the American people, which is actually who we all serve or who all of us public servants serve, that we would continue to be on post, guarding air quality, guarding water quality, cleaning up sites, dealing with the laws that Congress has passed and expects us to administer.

And even further, there's an expectation that we would be stewards, that we would be advocates for environmental protection. And that's where our partnership comes in; because when it comes to stewardship of the land, in many, many cases that land is under the purview, either the ownership or operationally, of the agricultural community. And so I like to say that we cannot be successful without a vibrant and steady partnership.

I promised I would tell a story. A few of you may have heard it the other day. If you did, bear with me. I kind of like it, and I use the analogy of my brother.

I love my brother very much, but you know every family has one character. My brother is it. And our family, you know, as we've gotten older we've been flown to the winds. But we try to get together every year for Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner, one or the other. And without fail my brother always is a big question mark. We don't know if he's going to come. He's a year older than me, he's a free spirit, and almost always he rarely misses it. And we always know something serious is up if he misses it.

But it's always a challenge because we know he's going to call us at the very last minute from a bus station or an airport, a train. And we have to go get him and bring him to dinner. Of course we do that; we love him. He's an extraordinarily important part of our family. He comes, and we have a great time.

And then at the end of dinner we play a little cards, relax and talk, and everybody starts cleaning up, and it's time to go. And inevitably, we all know this is going to happen, my brother doesn't have a way to get home.

**[Laughter]**

It's actually brilliant when you think about it, because he knows that indeed we are probably ready for him to go home.

**[Laughter]**

He's family, but let's face it, the familial bond is all about going home.

**[Laughter]**

But he also knows that if we want him to go home we're going to have to help him along. And so we do. And inevitably one of us picks up the mantle of responsibility, usually buys him a ticket, drives him somewhere, puts him on that bus, that plane, that train, and we make sure he gets home. And it's well worth it because that's what a family does for its members.

And I tell you that story to simply illustrate the fact that oftentimes at EPA we know in the federal family and in the regulatory world you all who live with us sometimes see us the way my family sees my brother.

**[Laughter]**

It's a softball. Go ahead and take it.

**[Applause]**

Simply put, you know we're part of the family, you know we're going to do our best to be there, you know we have a role to play in this family, and most importantly when you're done you're hoping that we'll go home.

**[Laughter]**

Now, here's the key to going home. Your key to going home is actually to remember that as members of the family we really are after the same thing. In fact when it comes to the agricultural community I'm sure I will get head nods to say, 'Clean water is not only important for drinking, for your family's health, but it's the life blood literally of your

industry.’ So when we talk about wanting clean water, I would bet there’s not a person in this room who’s not going to find some synergy in that.

When we talk about wanting land that’s free from pollution and being able to assure people that we have a handle on toxic substances and risk and risk assessment and residues and all those things, I would bet at its core there’s not one of you who, probably both because you care as a human being, as a parent, or as a member of society, but also because your business depends on it, that you were to find some resonance. So to the extent that we go home and leave you alone, we need your help.

We’re going to need help and partnership to deal with the issues that face us now because most assuredly--and while I take very seriously our role as regulator, and EPA has much regulatory authority as you know--to get that last bit, to actually get to the point where we can leave the table and say, ‘Okay, we’ll catch you next time,’ we’re actually going to need some partnership, because so much of what we do does not lend itself to plain old regulation. It lends itself to partnership.

And there is any number of doomsday scenarios that I know folks like to spin about where EPA’s regulatory authority might take it. And part of the reason they are doomsday is because it’s an application of regulations that don’t make sense: taxing cows, ‘bovine belches’ was the one I read today, all the issues that make people worry that EPA’s regulatory authority is the only tool in its tool kit.

Again, I’m not afraid to use it. I’m certainly not afraid to. But I think in order to be successful and if the end goal is actually clean water and clean air and land that’s safe and healthy and food that’s safe and healthy, the last bit of it is going to have to be because we agree to try to find ways to accommodate our mutual needs and to respect our mutual desire to get those things done.

When it comes to EPA’s role, you heard Joe [Glauber] say that I’ve been very clear about my commitment to science, the law, and overwhelming transparency in how we do our job. EPA’s reputation with the American people needs to, and in fact depends on people believing that we live and adhere to those principles. And by and large, EPA is staffed with incredible professionals who understand and embrace those principles. And I consider it my job as leader to remind us and to ensure that we live by them every day.

We do have incredible challenges ahead of us. Climate change I’m sure, if Secretary Vilsack were here—and by the way he is an extraordinary Secretary already. I’ve enjoyed his thoughtfulness, his passion for issues that I know affect each and every one of you, and his progressive but forceful way of making decisions and making his opinions known. If he were here, and he was here, I bet the issue of climate change comes up. And he sees it as an opportunity for the agricultural community. It’s a challenge.

But unless you sit down at that table and eat with us, you’re not going to be at the table when we work to resolve the challenge. And if you’re not there, it truly will be a missed opportunity for the agricultural community, and one that we’ve seen in fits and starts.

Whether we are discussing renewable fuels or whether we're discussing offsets or any of the major issues that will come up in the climate change debate, it's extraordinarily important that first and foremost you be present. And in the person of Tom Vilsack, I know he will be.

We also have air pollution to deal with at EPA. We find ourselves at a point where the cores—again, the rule of law had thrown out many of the major rules that were promulgated. And we find ourselves in the country in the year 2009 without basic air pollution controls and with a pending crisis for human health as a result.

We have water issues to deal with, everything from jurisdictional issues regarding wetlands and wetlands fill. My staff right now spends an inordinate amount of their time in the water program just to try to determine whether they have jurisdiction over waters. And I know there are issues to be discussed with this community among other stakeholders.

We have a lot of work to do on toxics. EPA really is almost singular in the federal government in its role of assessing risk and assessing the toxicity of chemicals and repairing Americans' belief that we actually have a system in place that is designed to make sure that the chemicals that reach them in products, in food, wherever they reach them, have been thoroughly vetted and tested. That belief, I believe, is sorely shaken.

And we have work to do on cleaning up toxic waste sites. And the President's proposed budget as well as the Recovery Act has money to once again start up the engine of brownfields and toxic waste cleanup.

So there is much work ahead. And I look forward to the dinners, the spirited debate. I imagine we won't be playing cards, but the times when we in the person of all the good folks at the USDA represent your interest and where we find the way to move past what sometimes feel like intractable problems.

And in closing I would simply leave you with the thought I left with my employees. We actually hosted the First Lady today, and it was lovely to see the energy in the room when she thanked them for doing their job every day. And I know she visited USDA and did much the same. But I say to my employees all the time that when you're entrusted with protection of human health and the environment for the country, it is an awesome responsibility. It needs to be tempered with compassion and with a listening ear and a willingness to hear from all stakeholders, and to make sure that EPA is always seen as having an open mind and an open dialog even when we know we may be ultimately going to disagree. That is oftentimes an extraordinarily important part of this puzzle.

But at the end of the day, the other part of that job is the responsibility of it. And when EPA doesn't do its job correctly or effectively, the result is something as basic as dirtier air. And the result is something as basic as water that either isn't safe or isn't plentiful. And so therefore, human health and our economy suffer.

So I want to leave you with a thought that I take great pride in knowing that we have work to do, but I also take great and awesome responsibility in knowing that we must do it. It is work we don't have the choice of doing; it is a job that the American people should and must expect us to do.

Enjoy the rest of your conference. Enjoy the rest of your evening. And thank you so very much.

**[Applause]**