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Governor Mario M. Cuomo - Commencement Address 1989

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Governor Mario M. Cuomo Commencement Address 1989*

“Let me first deal with the obvious. I congratulate today’s graduates! You have worked hard for the past three or four years here at Pace Law School. I also congratulate Pace University for its far-sighted initiative to develop a program in the vitally important area of environmental law.

The fact that some of you have chosen to study environmental law is evidence of your concern for something greater than yourselves or your own careers. And others of you, who will practice in all different areas of the law, I feel are also bright enough to see that these problems touch our lives, in one way or another.

Just look at the problem of the environment for a moment. Who can forget the radioactive plume over Chernobyl that poisoned milk a thousand miles away or the oceans last summer, vomiting up our waste, littering the beaches our children walk on [with] syringes and broken glass? Most recently, oil spilled in Alaska, suffocating sea otters and other marine life in Prince William Sound And every day, while species face extinction in what were tropical South American rain forests, greenhouse gases build up in the atmosphere, threatening to heat up the planet, to melt the ice caps and turn our breadbaskets into deserts.

So long as the intelligence, and processes that put this miraculous universe together, elude our perfect understanding, we cannot say for sure what will be fifty or one hundred years from now. But it seems increasingly likely that a century or so from now, historians will look back on this era as one when global and biosphere changes of an order of magnitude never before experienced, perceptibly threatened the bal-

* Governor Mario M. Cuomo delivered this address at the Pace University School of Law, 1989 Commencement Ceremony for J.D. and LL.M. Candidates on June 11, 1989.

ances that sustain life on this planet.

The history those historians write will depend largely on how you and your generation choose to respond to this global challenge. This is a challenge not just for those of you who have concentrated in environmental law. It is a collective challenge that we all inherit.

This particular program at Pace, and the general growing awareness of the current threat to our environment, gives me hope that we are smart enough to avert avoidable environmental disasters in the future. That, though, will require that we open our minds to the frightening prospects that all our current environmental hazards now present, from acid rain to toxic waste, so that we can marshal the energy and the strength to change our laws, and our ways, so as to avoid their potential consequences.”