

## **“Substantive Accomplishments”: Richard Nixon, High School Student Environmentalists, and the President’s Environmental Merit Awards Program**

Neil Philip Buffett



President Nixon and William Ruckelshaus, October 1971, presentation of PEMAP informational packet.

**O**n a spring morning in 1972, senior student Daniel “Red” Goldstein from Paschal High School in Fort Worth, Texas, skipped his English class to study for an exam in the library. Never having cut class before, Goldstein was taken aback when he heard his name called through the building loudspeaker with a summons to report to the principal’s office. Thinking that he had been caught his first and only time, Goldstein crossed the hall, reported for the meeting, and awaited what any high schooler in the early 1970s would have interpreted as his impending doom. Much to his surprise, however, Goldstein quickly learned that his summons was due to a telephone call the school had received on his behalf from the Nixon administration in Washington, DC. The school administrator assured him that he was not in trouble. Rather, he was only there to be congratulated because the president wanted him to go to the White House to accept an award for which he, without his knowledge, had been nominated. While he had never heard of the President’s Environmental Merit Awards Program, he, along with student leaders from 43 area high schools and middle schools, was to receive a merit certificate for a citywide paper-recycling drive they had organized the semester before. For this,

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he was invited to Washington to accept his environmental award in a Rose Garden ceremony that April.<sup>1</sup>

Known generally as PEMAP, the President's Environmental Merit Awards Program was established by the Nixon administration in October 1971 as a means of recognizing the contributions of high school students in the early 1970s environmental movement. Organized and administered by staff at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), PEMAP was intended to both congratulate American youth for their nature-related pursuits and to serve as inspiration to others who had yet to become environmentally active. For those who either applied to the program or were nominated by faculty, an award certificate implied that President Richard Nixon and his staff both supported high school environmental activism and were proud of the local contributions students had made. For members of the Nixon administration, however, the noncompetitive nature of the program allowed the White House to ingratiate the president with young people by linking him to an issue that, by the early 1970s, had come to be of the utmost importance to them. With the ratification of the 26th Amendment in July 1971, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, the administration viewed PEMAP as a possible vehicle for attracting future, would-be Nixon voters in the lead-up to the 1972 presidential election.<sup>2</sup> To maximize this possibility, the administration created PEMAP as a program in which all nominees would receive commendation for environmental activity. While students certainly needed to engage in some form of ecological activity to earn a nomination, the Nixon administration recognized universal distribution of awards as a means of increasing Nixon's appeal to school-aged youth and their voting parents.

Despite the political benefits that Nixon's team hoped to gain from PEMAP, wide distribution of citations did not detract from the significance of high school environmental activism in the years following the first Earth Day in 1970. By this point, many young people who became environmentally active in the early 1970s had, like their adult contemporaries, lived through an age of social and political unrest in which millions of Americans had called for substantive change and

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<sup>1</sup> Author interview with Daniel "Red" Goldstein, September 4, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed analysis of Nixon's youth strategy, see Seth Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority: Young Voters and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1968–1980* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2018). For studies on the 26th Amendment, see, among others, Jenny Diamond Cheng, "Uncovering the 26th Amendment" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008), and Wendell W. Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992).

demanded governmental action in response. These students had undoubtedly read and watched news media accounts of environmental disasters like the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill in California and the 1969 Cuyahoga River Fire in Cleveland, as well as the looming threat of smog in coastal cities such as Los Angeles and New York. At the same time, they had most certainly discussed and debated the efficacy of the American military presence in Southeast Asia while similarly taking lessons from those who marched before (or alongside) them in the myriad social movements that came to define the later years of the postwar era.<sup>3</sup> They, like many of their elder brethren, found inspiration in the Earth Day celebrations of 1970 and 1971 and, in many cases, were drawn to environmental action as students in high school science programs taught by charismatic, environmentally motivated faculty members.<sup>4</sup> Moved by events and people such as these, young activists worked to better their local and regional environments and, in so doing, made the contributions that would ultimately prompt the Nixon administration to reward them through programs like PEMAP.

To this end, environmentally conscious teenagers across the United States routinely established in-school and extracurricular ecology clubs and direct-action organizations as a means of provoking ecological awareness and promoting environmental change. For some, involvement in the burgeoning movement was limited to recognition of annual Earth Day celebrations. For others, participation was geared toward planning and hosting eco-friendly programming and colloquia, volunteering time to clean littered beaches and neglected public parks, and establishing school or community-based recycling programs. In some instances, student environmentalists conducted scientific field research, took part in letter-writing campaigns, utilized local and regional media outlets, and worked closely with government officials as a means of preserving fragile ecosystems in and around their home communities. At times, such efforts proved significant to environmental-related public policy debates, led to local and statewide legislative

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<sup>3</sup> See Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), in which the author highlights how teenagers in the 1960s participated in the same social movement activities as adults, both in high schools and in their wider communities. For discussion of the “influence of national events” and the impact of media portrayals, see pages 24–29. For more on the 1960s as “seedtime” for later environmental action, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement 1962–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), Ch. 2. See also, Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998), Ch. 4.

<sup>4</sup> For information on the impact of Earth Day, see Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013). For how, in its wake, Earth Day inspired environmental education programs in high schools, see Rome, 234–39.

changes, and ultimately resulted in the successful protection of endangered flora and fauna. While much of this was done under the auspices of science faculty or with guidance from other adult figures, in many instances young people took on such programs on their own in extracurricular time either in school or elsewhere within their communities.<sup>5</sup>

While youth participation in ecological activities was not limited to only those who received merit awards, the number of young people who participated in PEMAP in its first six years does provide a partial answer to how many were environmentally active throughout this period. As noted in the October 1977 edition of the *EPA Journal*, “more than 300,000 children . . . received awards for their service to the environment since the President’s program began.” At the same time, EPA officials estimated that since 1971, due to the program more than “five million youngsters [had] been exposed to ecologically-oriented activities through teachers or other youth group leaders.”<sup>6</sup> Such estimates had similarly been quoted three years earlier, in December 1974, during the Ford administration. Noting PEMAP as a “remarkable little program,” EPA staff reported that, in its first three years, “over five million students throughout the 50 states have taken part in PEMAP” from “some 15,000 elementary, junior and senior high schools.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite these numbers, however, neither high school environmental activism nor PEMAP have been fully examined by history professionals.<sup>8</sup> While youth

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Philip Buffett, “Black, White and Green: High School Student Civil Rights and Environmental Activism in New York City and on Long Island, 1968–1975,” (Ph.D. diss., Stony Brook University, 2011); Neil Philip Buffett, “‘We Were Pretty Gung-Ho, We Were Going to Save the World’: High School Student Activism in Defense of Long Island’s Nissequogue River, 1970–1979,” *Long Island History Journal* (Online) Vol. 21-1 (2009), <https://lihj.cc.stonybrook.edu/2009vol21-1/>. For more on faculty involvement, see Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 105–9, 121–26. For an in-depth, case study example of late 1990s high school environmental justice activism in Los Angeles, California, see Karen Brodtkin, *Power Politics: Environmental Activism in South Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> “Youth Awards,” *EPA Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (October 1977), 18–19.

<sup>7</sup> Marlin Fitzwater to Jack Flynn, Memorandum, December 10, 1974, MA 2-53, Folder: President’s Environmental Merit Awards, White House Central Files, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan (hereinafter GFPL).

<sup>8</sup> Graham’s *Young Activists* is the pre-eminent work on high school student involvement in the postwar social and political movements in the United States. Due in large part to the author’s focus on movements of the 1960s, Earth Day and Environmentalism are only mentioned in passing. See pages, 7, 97, 160, 174, 198, 205–6. For detailed analysis of specific case study material on youth environmentalism in the 1970s, see Buffett, “‘We Were Pretty Gung-Ho’”; Buffett, “Black, White and Green.”

environmentalists have, from time to time, been noted in histories of the postwar environmental movement, their contributions have typically been highlighted as an aside to the achievements of their adult contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> The most expansive treatments of environmentalist youth to date have been Karen Brodtkin's 2009 case analysis of high school student environmental justice activism in south Los Angeles and Adam Rome's 2013 study of the nation's first Earth Day celebration. Brodtkin's monograph analyzes how, in the late 1990s, students from South Gate High School in California successfully halted the construction of a power plant in their local community. Rome's *The Genius of Earth Day* includes discussion of school-aged children and teenagers as two, among many, sectors of American society that participated in the nation's first environmental holiday.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Rome's account also provides readers a glimpse of the various environmental education programs and school-based, environmental organizations that were either formed by students or created by faculty in the months and years after April 1970.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, however, studies such as these, as well as those on the Nixon administration's handling of the environment, have neither highlighted nor mentioned the PEMAP initiative, even though it has presented awards in one form or another from 1971 to the present.<sup>12</sup>

While this relatively unknown youth project has yet to be acknowledged by practitioners in the field, the Nixon administration's strategies for attracting young voters in the lead-up to the 1972 election have. Most prominently, the

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<sup>9</sup> For brief mention of high school-aged activism, see Christopher Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature & the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 280–84; For brief mention of youth environmental justice advocates and anti-toxics campaigns, see Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 53, 77, 87, 173–74; and Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 181, 184, 197, 219; Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993), 267. See also, Dawson Barrett, *Teenage Rebels: Successful High School Activists from the Little Rock 9 to the Class of Tomorrow* (Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2015), 62, in which the author lists high school student activities by year from post-World War II to the present. Only one school on Earth Day 1970 is noted.

<sup>10</sup> Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 105–9, 121–26. While Rome notes youth involvement in Earth Day and the eventual emergence of high school environmental organizations, his study does not include mention of PEMAP.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 234–39; Karen Brodtkin, *Power Politics*.

<sup>12</sup> For analyses of the Nixon administration's handling of the environment, see J. Brooks Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2000). See also, John C. Whitaker, *Striking a Balance: Environment and Natural Resources Policy in the Nixon and Ford Years* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1976). These studies do not highlight or mention the PEMAP initiative.



Student awardees tour the White House and Oval Office, April 1972.

work of historian Seth Blumenthal has highlighted the multilayered approach the president's advisors took to sell their candidate to young Americans aged 18–30. In *Children of the Silent Majority*, Blumenthal carefully details how passage of the 26th Amendment necessitated Nixon's purposeful outreach to newly enfranchised Americans in his administration's quest to both win youth votes in 1972 and, in the years that followed, draw them into an ever-expanding Republican coalition. In particular, this outreach was directed at youth believed to be conservative, moderate, politically unaligned, or those who had joined the workforce rather than attend college or university.<sup>13</sup> As Blumenthal notes, the environment was one of several issues through which the Nixon team believed youth could be enticed.<sup>14</sup> As this article highlights, PEMAP was envisioned as a possible vehicle through which such enticement could win votes from high school youth and/or their parents.

What follows is a history of PEMAP's first eight years as an environmental youth initiative, from its conception during the Nixon presidency through its restructuring by the Carter administration in the late 1970s. It highlights young people's environmental pursuits during that period and also documents the Nixon

<sup>13</sup> Seth Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority*. For Blumenthal's discussion of the Nixon administration's focus on environmental issues, see pages 72–76. While the work does not note PEMAP or high school student environmentalists, it does show that Nixon and his team knew the environment was an issue that youth were committed to and that he needed to focus on in the lead-up to the 1972 election. For more on Nixon and the 1972 presidential election, see Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> See Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority*, 72–76.

White House's political motivations that led to creation of a program for awarding young environmentalists. Now that more than 50 years have passed since the program's creation—and in light of the recent success of Greta Thunberg's teen-led School Strike for Climate Movement—analysis of the history surrounding high school student environmental activism, the President's Environmental Merit Awards Program, and the executive-level intrigue surrounding both has never been timelier.

### Beginnings

Despite PEMA's designation as a presidential initiative, the president himself had little to do with its founding and overall development as a program. As Nixon's Chief Domestic Policy Advisor John Ehrlichman noted in his 1982 memoir, *Witness to Power*, it was rather uncommon for the president to be directly involved with environmental issues—he “preferred to stay away” from them. Rather than dealing with such issues himself, he typically delegated them “to others to look after.”<sup>15</sup> This was most certainly the case with the PEMA initiative, which was ultimately left to lower-level staff to both conceptualize and bring to fruition. This included representatives from the EPA; the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the National Center for Voluntary Action. In the summer and early fall of 1971, staff from all three worked alongside James W. McLane, Nixon's “point man on youth,”<sup>16</sup> to establish “an ecology corps” for high school youth. As McLane noted in an August 30 memorandum to his program committee, Nixon was “deeply committed to the participation of American youth in self-help, self-education, [and] constructive efforts to alleviate problems of national concern, such as ecological destruction, pollution, and neighborhood improvement.” The administration, he continued, was “anxious to show that government [could] provide enlightened leadership and that the American public [could] and should participate in its activities.” To this end, he asked committee members to formulate a “recommended plan of attack” to “implement these objectives.”<sup>17</sup>

While committee members brainstormed possible program proposals, it was the director of the EPA's Environmental Education Task Force, Bernard Lukco, who ultimately suggested the creation of a high school-based environmental award

<sup>15</sup> John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 208. For more on Nixon's ambivalence to environmental issues and the “political expediency” they signified and political opportunity they provided, see Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment*.

<sup>16</sup> McLane is referenced as such by Blumenthal in *Children of the Silent Majority*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> James W. McLane to Allan Kulakow et al., August 30, 1971, Folder: Environment 1970–1972, 1 of 3, box 4, Papers of James W. McLane (hereinafter PJM), Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, California (hereinafter RNPL).

program. Lukco envisioned a program that differed from the annual science and engineering fairs that already recognized youth for individual, in-school science-related projects. He explained that, while his proposed program could be coordinated with such events, “the present Science and Engineering Fairs do not . . . reward group projects nor do they reward out-of-school projects such as the type ecology clubs or summer out-of-school programs would conduct.” A separate initiative targeted at students aged 13–18, he noted, could grant awards for environmental involvement within a variety of categories. This could include in-school, individual projects; extracurricular, individual activity; secondary school group or class-wide projects; summertime environmental activism; and, in-school, club-based activities.<sup>18</sup> As for how this could be implemented, McLane and his staff looked to the example set by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, which recognized exemplary youth with the Presidential Physical Fitness Award (PPFA).

Originally established in 1966 by the Johnson administration, the Physical Fitness Award Program targeted young people between the ages of 10 and 17 and was therefore promoted in nearly all the nation’s approximately 100,000 elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. As White House Intern William Olsen noted in a memo to McLane on September 9, 1971, promotional materials for the PPFA were sent annually to all athletic directors and physical education instructors nationwide. These informational packets included posters to advertise the program, letters of introduction signed by council administrators, detailed pamphlets that explained program protocols, and return postcards for school officials to request additional materials. While the fitness council’s award initiative included three recognition levels—Presidential, Gold, and Silver—typically only 10 percent of the total number of recipients were granted the highest distinction, and only 10 percent of all applicants received any recognition at all. This meant, for example, that when an estimated 2.8 million youth set out to compete for the PPFA in the 1970–1971 school year, only about 276,000 young people successfully completed the program and won an award. The task for McLane, Olsen, and the committee members working to establish PEMAP was how to effectively replicate the fitness award program. From Olsen’s perspective, doing so created four major problems that would need resolution before the program could be launched. This included issues related to who would prepare the necessary informational material; to whom and how would said information be distributed; from where would

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<sup>18</sup> Allan Kulakow to Richard Fairbanks, September 10, 1971, Attachment to memo, “Student Environmental Projects Awards Program,” Folder: Environment 1970–1972, 1 of 3, box 4, PJM, RNPL.

funding be allocated and to whom; and, by extension, which federal agency would be responsible for program logistics and its long-term operational management.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, committee members also needed to establish guidelines by which students would ultimately qualify and be deemed worthy of recognition. In a memo to White House Advisor Richard Fairbanks, Alvin Alm, from the Council on Environmental Quality, laid out a series of suggested pathways by which interested youth could receive acknowledgement for environmental activity. This could include, he explained, a variety of student-led “clean-up campaigns” within the inner city or in “natural area[s]” such as littered parks or stream-banks within or beyond city limits. Other options included youth participation in beautification projects such as tree or flower planting; “program[s] of relevant information gathering for State and local environmental officials,” after which youth could present and/or publish their findings locally; and “seminars on environmental problems as part of student and adult education programs.” In addition, high school youth could organize and lead “field trips for inner city youngsters to enjoy nearby environmental amenities”; “review local master plan[s]” in urban and suburban settings to “analyze whether its projections for growth seem orderly and desirable”; and offer their services to local officials by “survey[ing] the number and location . . . of abandoned automobiles, and public places such as downtown parks where litter receptacles appear inadequate or do not exist.” Finally, Alm noted, young people could also choose to “participate in a wildlife survey with a conservation group” and, again, publish their findings or present them to the public.<sup>20</sup>

While such intricate tasks may now seem far beyond the scope of what one would expect from high schoolers, in the early 1970s, many young Americans routinely took on projects such as those noted in Alm’s memorandum. On Long Island, for example, students at Saint Anthony’s High School in Smithtown, New York, organized the Nissequogue Environmental Committee in 1970 to test the water quality of the local Nissequogue River. Throughout the decade, from 1970 to at least 1979, interested students conducted field research along the waterway and published their findings on multiple occasions. Ultimately, this student-driven, extracurricular activity resulted in the river’s inclusion under New York State’s Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act.<sup>21</sup> At Bellport High School just

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from William Ruckelshaus to School Principals, October 25, 1971, PEMAP Informational Packet Insert, Folder: President’s Environmental Merit Awards, Executive File, box 21, MA2-53, RNPL.

<sup>20</sup> Alvin Alm to Richard Fairbanks, September 9, 1971, Draft Memorandum, “Presidential Awards for Youth for Environmental Action,” Folder: Environment 1970–1972, 1 of 3, box 4, PJM, RNPL.

<sup>21</sup> See Buffett, “We Were Pretty Gung-Ho.”

25 miles away, students similarly spent time testing the water quality of local riverine systems as members of their school's environmental action organization. Organized as Students for Environmental Quality, teenaged participants not only played a vital role in securing protection for another nearby river, their activism was also instrumental in securing passage of New York's 1972 Marine Mammals Protection Act and, later, returnable bottle legislation in Suffolk County and New York State, generally.<sup>22</sup> The same can be said of students in the Marine Biology Club at Brooklyn's John Dewey High School, who, after spending Earth Day 1970 cleaning a local beachfront park, spent the first half of the 1970s testing waters along the urban coastline, cataloging local flora and fauna, and presenting their findings at public forums as a means of preventing commercial and residential development.<sup>23</sup> By the time Nixon's team had begun laying the groundwork for PEMAP, successful youth participation in activities such as these had already been proven possible.

Just 12 months prior—at the beginning of the 1970–1971 academic year—*Seventeen Magazine* had launched an environmental competition called Seventeen Acts for a Viable Environment (SAVE). Through this program, interested youth were able to conduct local projects and “alleviate some of the physical and human environmental problems” in their own communities. Like the possible tasks Alm's memo had highlighted, SAVE administrators encouraged youth to participate in projects related to recycling, conservation, outdoor clean-up campaigns, and those “dealing with helping the human environment.” In order to win one of five cash awards, participants' submissions were “judged by a panel of four authorities in the ecological field,” after which award money could be donated or utilized by winners to continue their activism.<sup>24</sup> In its inaugural year, SAVE yielded a variety of projects for which youth were recognized, including some that received awards for establishing a bottle recycling program in Modesto, California; supporting local legislation that

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<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Gill, “Think Globally, Act Locally: Student Environmentalists Get Important Legislation Passed,” *Youth Magazine* (Summer 1983), 13–16; Arnold Rubin, “How to Save a River,” *Senior Scholastic* (January 16, 1975), 4–7; “A Student Litter Drive That Everyone Can Join,” *Newsday*, May 14, 1980, 64; “What Albany Needs is an Anti-Litter Lobby,” *Newsday*, October 30, 1980, 84; Amanda Harris, “Cohalan Signs Bottle Bill: Purcell Supports a Bottle Bill,” *Newsday* April 14, 1981, 1, 7; Buffett, “Black, White and Green,” Ch. Two, 101–31.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth P. Nolan, “Proposed Seawall Along Coney Peninsula Kicks Up Storm,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1972, A1; James Robertson and John Lewallen, eds., *The Grass Roots Primer* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1975), 54–63; “Water Study Shows High Bacteria Count,” *Daily News*, May 29, 1971; “Brooklyn Brigade,” *National Wildlife*, Vol. 13, No. 6, October–November 1975, 44–45; Joyce White, “Kids Warn: Don't Go Near the Water,” *Sunday News*, February 23, 1975, 3B; Buffett, “Black, White and Green,” Ch. Four, 195–246.

<sup>24</sup> Seventeen Acts for a Viable Environment, Informational Pamphlet, 1971, Folder: Environment 1970–1972, 1 of 3, box 4, PJM, RNPL.

banned nonreturnable drink containers in Des Moines, Iowa; spreading awareness, distributing information, and hosting educational forums on air pollution in Omaha, Nebraska, and Houston, Texas; raising money for a leprosy colony in Taipei, Taiwan; and finally, for the refurbishment of a “skating rink in a ghetto area” of Hartford, Connecticut.<sup>25</sup> Laudable examples such as these were certainly reason for optimism within the Nixon camp as the 1971–1972 school year began.

Through a volley of back-and-forth memoranda and a host of planning sessions in September and October 1971, McLane’s assigned task quickly morphed into a program reality that could feasibly be launched by that Halloween. By mid-September, McLane’s committee had decided to have the EPA take responsibility for both coordinating the initiative and drafting the preliminary procedures for its operation. This included compiling information for a promotional packet that contained “‘how to’ material on clean-up campaigns, recycling projects, survey projects, seminars on environmental education, etcetera,” with a primary focus on projects that high school students could complete. In addition, EPA officials were asked to draft a letter of introduction, lay out the standards for receiving the award, and develop a “list of public and private ecology-oriented organizations” from which participants could receive assistance if the need arose. The committee also hammered out issues related to who would receive awards and what type of actual awards students would be given when chosen.<sup>26</sup> While the group decided that high school principals would be the best judge of student projects, the question remained whether PEMAP would mirror the PPFA model with multiple award levels or if the new program would grant all winners the same presidential citation. As McLane relayed to James Barnes of the EPA, a variety of award types would be “too complicated” and would ultimately “be an administrative nightmare.” Rather than granting general environmental service awards *and* a more prestigious presidential award for student excellence, McLane urged the EPA to “keep it simple with an individual certificate relating to the President’s Environmental Service Award” with an “option for winners to buy [PEMAP] patches through their school.”<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of McLane’s feeling on the matter, however, by the time the program proposal was in the hands of top-level officials such as White House Counsel Charles “Chuck” Colson and White House Chief of Staff H. R. “Bob” Haldeman, the plan for a two-tiered award initiative had been revived and was ultimately implemented. At the same time, once PEMAP had made its way up

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> James W. McLane to James Barnes, PEMAP Memorandum, September 15, 1971, in *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> James W. McLane to James Barnes, PEMAP Memorandum, September 21, 1971, in *ibid.*

the administrative chain, Colson, to whom McLane reported, became the White House staff member responsible for drafting schedule proposals and briefing the president on matters related to PEMAP's launch.<sup>28</sup> This included not only bringing Nixon up to speed on the program itself, but also sharing with him the perceived electoral benefits the initiative could proffer in the lead-up to the 1972 presidential election. This was done in a series of executive schedule proposals that Colson drafted for review in the last week of October 1971.

In one such proposal, Colson explained that PEMAP was intended as “a youth activity, not an environmental effort.” Stressing this point, he proclaimed, “we don't give a damn about substantive accomplishments.” Rather, he continued, PEMAP was “designed as a political appeal to young people, to show that the President is concerned with an issue of interest to them and to get Presidential certificates widely distributed to youth who participate.”<sup>29</sup> Referencing the recent passage of the 26th Amendment, an earlier draft of Colson's schedule proposal went even further in linking the creation of PEMAP to the upcoming presidential election. As the president's lawyer explained, the new program would “personally identify [Nixon] with the most popular issue with high school youth—ecology/pollution control.” The goal, he again noted, was to “distribute as many award certificates as possible to high school students—many of whom will be voting for the first time in 1972 and all of whom have voting parents.” To hide the administration's hope that PEMAP certificates would garner votes, Colson believed the White House would “need to make this whole project appear [as] non-political” as possible.<sup>30</sup> Despite this need, however, the program was, in fact political, as “the potential power of the new environmentalism sweeping the country” in the early 1970s was not lost on either the president or his advisors.<sup>31</sup> Still, PEMAP's extremely loose structure would ultimately lead many to question what was behind its figurative curtain.

### **Launch, Advisory Committee, and PEMAP Awardees**

In his letter to school principals introducing PEMAP in October 1971, EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus invited school administrators to support the

<sup>28</sup> By August 1971, McLane was working on youth-related projects for Colson. See Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, Memorandum “Jamie McLane/Youth Project,” August 10, 1971, [http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/contested/contested\\_box\\_03/Contested-03-07.pdf](http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/contested/contested_box_03/Contested-03-07.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Charles Colson to the President via David Parker, Schedule Proposal, October 26, 1971, Executive File, MA2-53, PR 7-1, FG 298, box 21, RNPL. In the same document, Haldeman circled Colson's “substantive” comment, sardonically noting it was “a brilliant line to write in a memo.” For mention of youth concern with the environment, see Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Colson to the President via David Parker, Schedule Proposal, October 25, 1971, in *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment*, 9.

program within their schools, encourage pupils to participate, and choose faculty to oversee projects on the local level. This program, he argued, was not simply a byproduct of policy discussions in the White House, rather it was the president's response to the myriad requests he had received from American youth for guidance on how they could help the environment. According to Ruckelshaus, his own agency had, since its founding, been "literally . . . swamped with letters from high school students who want to 'do something'" for the environment. Similarly, the president's official statement on the program parroted this theme, noting that he and his staff were impressed by the thousands of letters they had "received from young people who want[ed] to join [the] national effort to reclaim, protect and preserve" their "natural inheritance." It was for this purpose, to give students that opportunity, the EPA administrator explained, that "the President . . . initiated his Merit Awards Program." At the same time, as Nixon's statement highlighted, his team had "purposely made the program flexible so that every student [would] be encouraged to participate and so that those who [did would] receive recognition for their constructive and responsible contributions." With PEMAP based upon the universally relatable theme of "Life—Pass It On," White House officials were hopeful that American youth, their teachers, and school administrators would welcome the opportunity to participate.<sup>32</sup>

While a significant number of principals sought to have their students take part in the program's inaugural year, the final tally of youth awarded in spring 1972 was rather disappointing. As White House Staff Assistant Howard Cohen reported in a July 7, 1972, draft memorandum on PEMAP's impact and future, informational program packets had been sent to nearly 25,000 high schools in the previous fall term, and only 2,800 schools had responded with interest. The number of awards distributed to students at these schools, he explained, totaled only about 4,600, which proved to be far below the 25,000 Colson had originally projected.<sup>33</sup> Hoping to draw in more youth participants, the EPA expanded the PEMAP initiative to also include summer camps as of March 10, 1972. In addition, the program was further expanded roughly five weeks later in April with the announcement that projects conducted by

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from William D. Ruckelshaus to High School Principals, October 25, 1971, Executive File, MA 2-53, FG 346 Folder: President's Environmental Merit Awards, box 21, RNPL; Statement by the President, PEMAP Packet Insert, October 29, 1971, in *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> For Colson's projection, see Charles Colson to President Nixon via David Parker, Schedule Proposal, October 26, 1971, *ibid.* According to EPA estimates, nearly 10,000 youths received awards in the "first year" of the program. It is assumed that this estimate includes youth from the expanded program, which allowed grade-school youth, junior high school students, and summer camp programs to receive awards. Their inclusion followed the initial high school-based outreach noted in Cohen's file. See "Youth Awards," *EPA Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 9, (October 1977), 18-19.

youth from elementary and junior high schools would similarly be considered for presidential recognition. From Cohen's standpoint, "the media coverage of PEMAP from its conception in October has been sparse" due to "poor media management and planning." While blame for this lack of management was ultimately edited out of the completed memo, Cohen's original draft had placed the blame for the program's low "visibility" with the EPA. In his final analysis, Cohen noted that since "public visibility of the President's environmental concern is a vital part of his whole image," the merit award program needed to be "effectively and efficiently operated," and to that end it needed an "increased budget and more staff."<sup>34</sup>

By the time of Cohen's assessment, however, PEMAP had already been expanded to include youth from lower grades and was—at least in theory—given an additional layer of oversight with the creation of the President's Advisory Committee on Environmental Merit Awards (PAC). Established in April 1972, the committee—whose honorary chairperson was to be Nixon's youngest daughter, Julie Eisenhower—was designed to advise the White House "on ways in which the President's Merit Award Program . . . [could] be further expanded and enhanced." Specifically, the committee was to "select individuals or groups of individuals who deserve special recognition for their local environmental accomplishments and confer appropriate Environmental Merit Awards upon them on behalf of the President." In theory, this latter task would have entrusted committee members with the responsibility of both recommending specific youth for top-tier awards and, at times, presenting those awards to young people around the country. Along with Julie Eisenhower, 13 others between the ages of 18 and 38—hailing from a variety of academic, professional, and celebrity circles—were invited to serve and work with the administration on advancing the program. This included, among others, former Olympians, professional athletes, college and university athletic coaches, and members of environmental action organizations, as well as select university students from across the nation.<sup>35</sup> Still, almost as soon as the committee had been put together its overall worth and viability quickly came under suspicion.

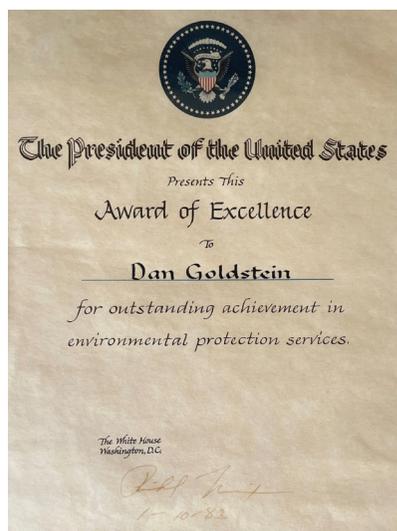
In a letter to President Nixon dated August 5, 1973, 19-year-old committee member Lance King laid out a series of concerns regarding PEMAP's long-term credibility.

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<sup>34</sup> Howard Cohen to Dick Howard, Draft Memorandum, July 7, 1972, Folder: PEMAP Environment 1972, box 4, Papers of Howard A. Cohen (hereinafter PHC), RNPL.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Nixon, Executive Order 11667, April 19, 1972, The American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=106722> (accessed October 16, 2016); Tom Jones, Memo for the Press Office, Announcing Executive Order 11667, April 19, 1972, Executive File, MA 2-53, FG 346, Folder: Presidents Environmental Merit Award, box 21, RNPL.

According to the undergraduate from UC Santa Cruz, in the 16 months since the committee had been established it had never met, and “all contact with the program” had “been initiated” by him alone. To that end, he explained, “I am not convinced that the talents available among the Members of the Advisory Committee are being utilized.” “This,” King noted, was “only important insofar as the program fails now to set any meaningful criteria for the awards.” To this point, he explained, PEMAP needed “meaningful standards” and to eliminate “wholesale distribution of the awards.” Otherwise, the award initiative would be “compromise[d] . . . in the eyes of both students and their teachers.” Ideally, he concluded, “the committee should be meaningfully involved in . . . the Environmental Merit Award Program” or it “should be abolished.”<sup>36</sup>



Daniel “Red” Goldstein’s 1972 PEMAP certificate signed by President Nixon 10 years after it was conferred. See faded signature at bottom.

While it is unclear if King’s colleagues similarly questioned the legitimacy of their roles, it didn’t take long for youth participants, their parents, and faculty mentors to begin questioning the president’s commitment to the PEMAP initiative. For example, when the first youth awards were distributed in spring 1972, none of the certificates bore the president’s signature. Rather, student awardees received impersonal White House citations upon which they, or their faculty mentors, were to write the recipient’s name. These generalized certificates were then closed, not with a signature, but rather a generic imprint that stated it had come from “The White House.” This rather detached nature of the award led many to wonder if this was due to an administrative mistake—a question that led some to reach out directly to elected representatives in Washington. In a May 1972 letter to Congressman Alvin O’Konski, science teacher Jack Walsh explained how he and his students had “received a number of award certificates . . . with nothing on them” and strongly suggested they “be at least signed by someone from the ‘White House,’” preferably “Mr. Nixon.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly enough, the same thought

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Lance M. King to President Richard Nixon, August 5, 1973, in *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Alvin O’Konski from Jack Walsh, May 18, 1972, in *ibid.*

prompted Daniel Goldstein, who received his unsigned award at the White House in 1972, to contact Nixon's New York office 10 years after to finally secure the ex-President's missing signature. Ostensibly, this made Goldstein's certificate the only one to be personally signed by Richard Nixon.<sup>38</sup>

Carolyn Adams, whose child won an award along with several of his classmates, also questioned the administration's impersonal certificate protocol. In her communication with Ohio Congressman Clarence E. Miller's office, Adams asked why the president would grant awards if they were not signed by him. As with all merit awards given by the Nixon White House at this time, David Adams's citation was not signed by anyone from the administration.<sup>39</sup> When pressed by congressional representatives for answers, White House aides Richard K. Cook and William Timmons explained that, "because of the excellent response to PEMAP "and the resulting large number of presentations" required, it was "not possible for the President to sign the certificates individually." Highlighting how the missing signature was not a clerical error, Cook admitted that certificates had been "worded in such a manner that [Nixon's] signature would not be necessary."<sup>40</sup> Missing from the explanation, of course, was any hint of the political motivations Colson had intimated the previous October that had originally fueled universal distribution of PEMAP awards. As Lou Siegel, who taught Marine Biology at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn, explained, "in the beginning it was thought of as being very prestigious," but it quickly became obvious that PEMAP was really a "proforma type of program." The impression given, he noted, was "that everyone who applied got the awards." However, regardless of PEMAP's proforma nature, he concluded, the awards his classes received had always "meant a lot to the kids."<sup>41</sup>

While some may have questioned the administration's methodology or the program's overall logistics, such concerns did not stop American youth from engaging in environmental activities. Nor did they stop teachers or school administrators from nominating students for PEMAP recognition. In the program's inaugural year, approximately 4,600 students participated from urban, suburban, and rural locations throughout the country. At Oak Park and River

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<sup>38</sup> Goldstein interview, author; According to Goldstein, after contacting Nixon's office, the ex-president invited him to send the unsigned document to New York, promising that it would be returned with his signature.

<sup>39</sup> Internal Office Memo for Clarence E. Miller noting letter received from Carolyn Adams, May 17, 1972, Executive File, MA 2-53, Folder - President's Environmental Merit Awards, box 21, RNPL.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Alvin O'Konski from Richard K. Cook, June 2, 1972, in *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Facebook Post from Lou Siegel to author, January 25, 2017; Email communication from Lou Siegel to author, March 24, 2017.



First PEMAP Rose Garden Ceremony, April 1972, Washington, DC.

Forest High School in Oak Park, Illinois, 36 students were granted awards for developing a series of environmental education programs for their school and the surrounding community. In Fort Worth, Texas, students, including Daniel Goldstein, were awarded merit citations for collecting paper and establishing a series of recycling programs, while students from Lewiston, Pennsylvania, received certificates for initiating a 20,000-tree “county-wide, low cost planting project.” The same can be said of students from Long Beach, California, who were recognized “for an ambitious and highly successful program of recycling, tree planting and environmental education at the elementary level, involving [roughly 170] students from five Long Beach High Schools.” Student representatives from all four locations visited the White House on April 19, 1972, for a Rose Garden ceremony at which they received PEMAP citations from Nixon’s daughter, Julie Eisenhower.<sup>42</sup> Rather than participate, President Nixon instead spent the day meeting with staff and taking calls in the Old Executive Office Building next door to the White House.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to awarding in-school, group projects with PEMAP citations, the administration also cited extracurricular activities conducted by individual students and those who conducted extracurricular projects through community-

<sup>42</sup> David Parker to Julie Eisenhower, Memorandum, “Environmental Merit Awards Ceremony,” April 18, 1972, with attached event “talking points” and prepared remarks, found in Executive File, MA 2-53, PP5-3, Folder: President’s Environmental Merit Awards, box 21, RNPL; See also, Transcript of Environmental Awards (Julie Eisenhower), April 18, 1972, Folder: PEMAP Environment 1972, box 4, PHC, RNPL.

<sup>43</sup> President Richard M. Nixon, Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, Nixon Tapes Conv. Tape No. 331, April 19, 1972, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes/331> (accessed October 31, 2020).

based organizations. One of the most accomplished individual students to have won presidential recognition was Irving Fallon from Southington High School in Hartford County, Connecticut. An 11th-grade student when nominated, Fallon had, despite his age, amassed an impressive environmental resume that could have easily rivaled those of his adult contemporaries. At the time of his nomination, Fallon was the youngest member of the Southington Conservation Commission. He had been appointed to this municipal post at the age of 15 after having “distinguished himself on a number of environmental research projects” from the age of 13 onward. This body of work included “three papers dealing with Gypsy Moth Control and one concerning the Elm Spanworm,” all of which were published for public consumption. It also included one that, in 1972, had been assigned to students in the Biology Department at Western Connecticut State College. At the same time, Fallon had volunteered his time conducting research and working on projects alongside administrators and scientists from Connecticut’s Department of Environmental Protection, and Southington Town’s Planning and Zoning Commission, including its engineering department. Fallon had also served as chair of several conservation commission subcommittees, including those that dealt with, among others, “water and related resources; biological experimentation; air pollution; inland wetlands; [the] Quinnipiac River study; [the] Town Council; planning and zoning; and, [the] Department of Environmental Protection.” For these and other duties and accomplishments, Fallon was awarded the President’s Merit Award for Excellence in spring 1972.<sup>44</sup>

Extracurricular, community-based groups also received PEMAP recognition in the early 1970s. One of the more impressive nominations of this kind hailed from Zelienople, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. Beginning in summer 1971, young people between the ages of 8 and 18 organized a local chapter of Group for Recycling in Pennsylvania (GRIP). Led by adult volunteers Wesley Hamilton and Susan Weyman, members of Zelienople’s GRIP chapter donated their time twice a month at the local, drive-in recycling center. As Weyman noted in her letter of nomination, “weekends and entire summer vacations were sacrificed by these kids to become involved in the improvement of the community and the future of its natural resources.” The work conducted at these times required youth to “remove the materials from the cars . . . that came through the center and separate the materials into glass, tin cans, paper and cardboard.” These materials were delivered

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<sup>44</sup> Letter to Stephen Ells, U.S. EPA from John J. Gasecki, Principal, Southington High School, May 10, 1972, Executive File, 1, MA2-53, PR 14-8, FG 298, RNPL; Memo to Virginia Savalle and Gladys O’Donnell, Public Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency from Stephen Ellis, Intergovernmental Affairs, Region One, Environmental Protection Agency, May 21, 1972, in *ibid*.

every other week and then shipped off to Pittsburgh for recycling. In addition to volunteering their time at the drop-off center, the “young ‘grippers’” took it upon themselves to construct a “natural park, with picnic facilities, nature and bike trails, a fishing dock, and [a] foot bridge.” After having been given a parcel of land near a local industrial site and various donations from local businesses, GRIP members successfully “transformed [the land] from a rat-infested area of debris to a beautiful park” in which “thousands of shrubs and seedlings were planted, trails and a parking lot were cut and wood-chipped, and a drinking fountain was installed.” At the same time, GRIP’s youth membership in Zelienople sponsored environmental seminars, distributed literature to community residents on eliminating waste and limiting pollution at home, attended local and regional municipal meetings related to environmental affairs, and spent considerable time working to see a complete recycling center constructed in their home community. In recognition of this work, GRIP volunteers were given PEMAP awards in spring 1973.<sup>45</sup>

By fall 1974, youth from the schools and communities like those noted above could be counted as a fraction of the over five million who reportedly took part in the program between PEMAP’s founding in 1971 and Nixon’s political demise three years later.<sup>46</sup> While it is unknown if the merit awards conferred during this period translated into actual votes for the Republican Party, it is clear that the administration’s desire, and perceived need, to attract future high school voters ultimately proved an overreach. This is especially true considering the president’s landslide re-election victory in which he won the electoral vote of 49 states. This included 52 percent of popular votes cast by those between the ages of 18 and 30.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of the Nixon team’s apparent disinterest in young people’s tangible contributions, American youth continued to participate in the program and pursue environmental activities just as they had prior to PEMAP’s conception. Similarly, in the months and years following Nixon’s return to suburban San Clemente, successive presidential administrations, along with staff at the EPA, kept the spirit of PEMAP alive and true to its publicly stated goals.

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<sup>45</sup> Letter and fact sheet from Susan Weyman to Richard M. Nixon, February 18, 1973, Executive File, box 21, MA2-53 (1/1/73-9/12/73), RNPL; Memo from Andrea E. Paleologos to Michael B. Smith, April 18, 1973, in *ibid.*; Letter from Roland L. Elliott to Susan Weyman, April 23, 1973, in *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Marlin Fitzwater to Jack Flynn, Memorandum, December 10, 1974, MA 2-53, Folder: President’s Environmental Merit Awards, White House Central Files, GFPL.

<sup>47</sup> For election results by age group, in which Nixon’s count was a majority of all stated age groups, see “1972 Presidential Election, Vote by Groups,” *Election Polls—Presidential Vote by Groups*, Gallup Historical Trends, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/139880/election-polls-presidential-vote-groups.aspx> (accessed December 6, 2016); Despite this overall youth tally, Nixon won 48% of the votes cast by those between the ages of 18 and 24, as noted in Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority*, 109.

### **Conclusion: From PEMAP to PEYA**

In the years following Nixon's departure from Washington in 1974, PEMAP quickly benefitted from a new sense of program credibility and a newfound faith in presidential integrity. At least one example of this was noted in a letter Barbara Jones from Newton, New Jersey, penned to her local congressperson's office in October 1974. Hoping to see her students retroactively receive a PEMAP certificate for projects they had completed before Gerald Ford became president, Jones explained that under Nixon "a Presidential citation would not have meant much." However, "now . . . with the name of President Ford on it," she concluded, "it would really mean something" to the students.<sup>48</sup> Surely, such sentiments were shared by many throughout the United States, both young and old alike, who had become disenchanted with executive-level politics under Nixon.

This sense of restored honor to which Jones referred was only enhanced when Jimmy Carter won the presidency in 1976. Unlike his predecessors, the new president quickly took on a much more active role in the program. This included not only the president changing the name of the program to the President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA), but also scheduling time to personally host annual award ceremonies at which select participants were invited to the White House to receive their certificates. The first of these Rose Garden ceremonies took place on April 27, 1978, at which 15 of that year's nearly 70,000 PEYA winners received their award from the president. The projects awarded included, among others, a two-year water quality study in Breese, Illinois, a year-long impact analysis of solid waste disposal in Fall River, Massachusetts, and the creation of the first "permanent recycling collection center [for] aluminum" in nation's capital.<sup>49</sup>

In November 1979, Carter once again met with student awardees, personally congratulated them, and spoke glowingly of their ecological contributions. The students' undertakings, he explained, "pay rich dividends as they are conducted and concluded" and "lay a groundwork for advanced scientists" and government officials "to see how [they] can . . . have a better way of preserving our precious heritage and environmental quality." When a young person "takes on a project,"

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Barbara A. Jones to Congressman Joseph J. Maraziti, October 8, 1974, MA - 2-53, Folder: President's Environmental Merit Awards, White House General Files, GFPL.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Costanza to President Carter, Draft Schedule Proposal for April 27, 1978, "Meeting with Environmental Youth Award Winners," April 26, 1978, Folder 4/27/78, Container 73, Office of Staff Secretary, Series, Presidential Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Atlanta, Georgia (hereinafter JCPL) [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital\\_library/sso/148878/137/SSO\\_148878\\_137\\_12.pdf](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/sso/148878/137/SSO_148878_137_12.pdf) (Page 22-3 of pdf).



President Carter gives remarks at the Rose Garden PEYA ceremony, November 1979, White House.

he continued, “sometimes they can add a sense of innovation and a freshness of thought that a more senior American would never contribute.” In turn, this not only benefits the world around them, but also “lay[s] the groundwork for themselves, in their own lives, to contribute this work in the years ahead.”<sup>50</sup> To be sure, many who participated in the program and were environmentally active in their teenage years went on to both study the sciences in college or university and later seek employment in related fields.<sup>51</sup>

Even though the environmental award program had originally been conceived by the Nixon administration as a possible boon to the president’s 1972 prospects, EPA officials, program participants, and successive presidential administrations managed to keep the program true to its publicly stated goals. This has allowed the program to thrive for nearly 50 years, surviving both Democratic and Republican, liberal and conservative administrations. This longevity, however, has stemmed in

<sup>50</sup> President Jimmy Carter, “President’s Environmental Youth Awards Remarks on Presenting the Awards,” November 1, 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31632> (accessed September 2, 2016); For info on some of projects personally awarded by Carter in 1979, see Anne Wexler, Schedule, “Meeting with Environmental Youth Award Winners,” November 1, 1979, JCLP (Digital Library), [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital\\_library/sso/148878/137/SSO\\_148878\\_137\\_12.pdf](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/sso/148878/137/SSO_148878_137_12.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> For more on this, see: Buffett, “We Were Pretty Gung Ho.”; Buffett, “Black, White and Green.” Chs. 2 and 4; See also: Rome’s Epilogue in *The Genius of Earth Day*, 259–72, in which the author highlights specific youth (primarily college youth) who went on to environmental careers.

large part from PEYA's inclusion in the 1990 National Environmental Education Act. Prior to this legislative feat, the program's life had been prolonged through executive order by the various administrations that came to power between 1971 and 1990. Encoded in law for the past 32 years, PEYA has stood the test of time, and it is still administered and awarded irrespective of the political inclinations of those occupying the White House.<sup>52</sup> Throughout this same period, American youth have continued to engage in social and political activities—as they have from the 1960s onward—including involvement in movements for peace, civil rights, the alleviation of poverty, gun control, gender equality, the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and, more recent environmental concerns such as climate change activism.<sup>53</sup>

As this article has highlighted, high school student environmental activism was part and parcel of the mainstream environmental movement of the 1970s and beyond. Throughout the United States, its young participants contributed greatly to the myriad projects they either initiated or enthusiastically participated in. While the Nixon administration largely regarded the value of these projects from a political standpoint, the youth who engaged in these endeavors fully expected leaders on the local, state and federal levels to consider legislative changes that would improve the environment. For the Nixon White House, attracting new, first-time voters was a paramount reason for establishing PEMAP as an executive-level program in the lead-up to the 1972 election. Regardless of whether students' substantive accomplishments were dismissed or truly appreciated, the history of PEMAP and the young people it served is a testament to those achievements both big and small.

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*Picture credits:* Nixon and Ruckelshaus, students in White House and Rose Garden, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum; certificate, courtesy of Daniel Goldstein; President Carter, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.

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<sup>52</sup> National Environmental Education Act, November 16, 1990, <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/nea.pdf>. For some time now, the EPA has annually selected two PEYA Excellence Award Winners from each of its 10 regions, while all participants receive a certificate of participation for their local contributions.

<sup>53</sup> For more on youth activism in the 1960s, see Graham, *Young Activists*.