I am honored to deliver this year's Fairfield Osborn Memorial Lecture in Environmental Science. I believe I'm the first banker ever to be selected for this honor, which has traditionally been accorded to distinguished conservationists.

Fairfield Osborn himself, however, was a businessman—an investment broker, who was concerned both about short-term economic development and also about its long-term sustainability.

As founder and then president of the Conservation Foundation, a co-sponsor of this memorial lecture, Osborn worked until his death in 1969 to arouse the concern of people everywhere to the "...accumulated velocity with which (man) is destroying his own life sources".

In his book, Our Plundered Planet, which appeared in 1948, Osborn wrote:

"We are rushing forward unthinkingly through days of incredible accomplishment... and we have forgotten the earth, forgotten it in the sense that we are failing to regard it as the source of our life."

Fairfield Osborn insisted that the only kind of development that makes sense is development that can be sustained.

Beginning, then, from this basic premise, I'll make three main points tonight:

1. That if our goal is sustainable development, our perspective must be global;
2. That human development must allow for continued economic growth, especially in the Third World, if it is to be sustainable; and
3. That sustainable development requires vigorous attention to resource management and the environment.

My first main point is that if our goal is sustainable development, then our perspective must be global.

The conservation movement began in the industrial countries. But the industrial countries are linked together with the developing countries—more than is usually recognized.

In other fora, I've made the point that the industrial countries are linked to the developing countries economically. But they are also linked environmentally.

This is obvious in the case of energy. The prospect of running down fossil fuel reserves has become a major world issue, with certain Third World countries crucial in deciding its outcome.

Other mineral resources are finite, too. And, again developing countries—as major suppliers of many of the key minerals used by industrial countries—will have a say in determining how these resources are managed.

Sustainable population growth is a fundamental environmental concern. By the year 2000, the world's population is likely to exceed 6 billion, with nearly 5 billion people just in the developing countries and over half of them crowded into cities.
Many of the environmental problems we tend to associate with industrial countries are also prevalent in developing countries. Urban air pollution, for example, is often worse in countries that can’t yet afford even minimal controls.

But some environmental problems of world interest are concentrated in the developing countries—deforestation, for example. Primarily because of the growing need for firewood, Third World forests are being cut down ten times faster than new ones are being planted. As a result, planet earth has lost about a quarter of its closed-canopy forests over the last 20 years.

The industrial countries are linked to the developing countries economically. But they are also linked environmentally.

The developing world also has soil problems. Deforestation has contributed to severe erosion in some parts of the developing world. In tropical areas, soils tend to be especially fragile and can quickly be rendered almost useless by improper agricultural practices.

Environmental spoliation is an international cancer. It respects no boundaries. It erodes hard-won economic gains and thus the hopes of the poor.

Finally, sound development worldwide contributes to peace. And the world’s conservation, in the most literal sense, may depend on peace.

In the early 1970s, when environmental concerns were approaching a peak in the industrial countries, these same concerns were met with considerable skepticism in the Third World.

Intense aspirations for development are widespread in the Third World. In many nations, economic growth is a matter of life or death for thousands of people on the margin of subsistence. Third World leaders were concerned that environmental measures do not keep their peoples from fully realizing the benefits of economic growth.

Since the industrial countries consume most of the world’s natural resources, concern in the rich countries about population growth in poorer countries seemed misplaced—even sinister—to some leaders in the developing countries.

Nevertheless, many of the world’s environmental problems increasingly depend on Third World cooperation for their solution. Success on the environmental front must involve the cooperation of all sectors of the international community.

Over the last decade, the World Bank has supported the goal of achieving sustainable development on a global scale. Owned by 141 member nations, the Bank lends to Third World countries in support of their long-term development objectives. It is entirely appropriate that we not only continue but expand our efforts to insure that improvements achieved in human living conditions today are improvements that can last until we reach the tomorrows.

My second main point—that to be sustainable human development must also include economic growth—follows from the global perspective on environmental concerns.

Even in wealthy countries, environmental protection has, to some extent, been crowded aside by priority attention to economic difficulties. Yet the world’s recent economic troubles have also been particularly severe for developing countries—and the need for economic growth in these countries is overwhelmingly compelling.

Third World leaders are absolutely right to point out that poverty is the very worst pollution that faces us on earth today.

Only about a quarter of the people who live in developing countries, for example, have access to clean water.

In the Third World, disease typically takes up a tenth of a person’s potentially productive time. Disease causes suffering, dampens initiative, disrupts education, and stunts physical and mental development.

Poverty also puts severe—and often irreversible—strains on the natural environment. At survival levels, people are sometimes compelled to exploit their environment too intensively. Poverty has often resulted in long years of mismanagement of our natural resources, evidencing itself in overgrazing, erosion, denuded forests, and surface water pollution.

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Our experience at the World Bank seems to indicate that it’s much easier to deal with the negative environmental effects of development than with the negative environmental effects of pervasive and persistent poverty.

The developing regions of the world aren’t all characterized by severe poverty, of course. But aspirations for a better life—i.e., more schooling, economic opportunity, and freedom of choice—