

**Remarks by Shelton Miles
upon acceptance of the
2013 Erchul Environmental Leadership Award
10 April 2013
Virginia Military Institute**

Before I begin my formal remarks, on behalf of my fellow Virginia cattlemen, let me thank whoever prepared the menu for making beef the entrée tonight.

When I received the call asking me if I could be present to receive this award tonight, I was stunned into a state of speechlessness. (I know David Paylor, other DEQ Staff, and all my former board members find that difficult to believe, that I would ever be at a loss for words, but I was It passed.)

I have been blessed—given better than I deserve. I took the time to survey the condensed accomplishments of my fellow nominees & I was both impressed and grateful for the good work they have done and are doing.

I was blessed with a father who died too young, but who for 28 years taught me that our family has only survived on the same land for 200 years because we have seen it as a trust and have honored the symbiotic relationship between farm & farmer. He taught me about “sustainable agriculture” before it became a buzzword.

I have been blessed to have pastored two wonderful Baptist congregations, one currently and one formerly, who understood that our Bible teaches us that our Heavenly Father has both a creative and redemptive love not only for mankind, but for all of His creation, and who earnestly believed that lending their pastor’s time to public service for environmental good was God’s work too.

I was blessed to have begun my environmental career (if I may call 26 years as a volunteer a career) among my people down in Southside Virginia along the Staunton River; they are a people who care passionately about natural resources and who routinely generate the largest attendance at DEQ’s public hearings of any place in Virginia, 300, 400, 500, and on one notable occasion over 2,000 strong.

I was blessed early on to deal with two men, one a highly placed executive with a major utility in Roanoke and the other a venture capitalist from Martinsville, who were supposed to be my adversaries but turned out to be my allies in doing environmental good.

I have been blessed to have formed wonderful relationships with so many people in this room tonight--business leaders, civil servants, environmental activists, political leaders--who have shared a common vision for preserving, protecting, and every chance we got, improving Virginia’s environment. (I salute all those Governor’s

Environmental Excellence Award winners recognized tonight for going above and beyond minimum requirements to make this a better Commonwealth.)

And so I see this award tonight not so much as a personal affirmation, but more as an affirmation of a philosophy:

1. That “the best way to destroy your enemies is to make friends out of them.” Abraham Lincoln said this about 150 years ago, but it still works today.
2. That “I have never met a man so uneducated that he couldn’t teach me something, and I have never met a man so learned that I couldn’t teach him something.” (My father, Wyatt S. Miles, Jr.)
3. That everybody deserves the courtesy and respect of an attentive hearing, and that most people can live with not getting their way if they believe that they were heard and the process was fair.
4. That the only solutions that stick—that really last—are the ones that are fair and equitable and that improve the situation.
5. That facts matter, even the ones inconvenient to our argument.
6. That if you’re really willing to invest the time to look for win-win solutions, you can often find them.
7. That you can find environmentalists in every walk of life, in every vocation, sometimes in the most surprising places.
8. That in this era of slash & burn ideological posturing, compromise is not a dirty word. If we can effect a solution and make environmental progress, that is a good and honorable day’s work.
9. That partisanship, gamesmanship & dishonest dealing always come back to bite you, that our “yes should be yes, and our no should be no.” (James the brother of Jesus).

And finally, I have been blessed with a wife who has endured much as I pursued environmental activities, often as a foot soldier, always as a guardian of the home fires and the cow pastures while I was away.

A couple of days ago former award winner and my friend Cindy Berndt called me to tell me that she would be present in spirit tonight. So now I feel the spirit of Cindy Berndt hovering over me, whispering in my ear, “Mr. *Former* Chairman, this is not your meeting. Your 5 minutes are up.” So I thank you for your hearing, for your friendship, and for this award.