

**"A Report to the People on the Three Mile Island Incident": major statement by Governor Thornburgh following the ten harrowing days of the accident and stating that women and children will be able to safely return home, April 6, 1979 (10:30)**

>> Thornburgh: My fellow Pennsylvanians, very soon now I hope to have the pleasure of telling a brave and tired group of women and children that they can indeed go home again. I shall treasure that moment for as long as I live, for I believe it will mark the end of the most dangerous days of decision any governor has had to face in this century. The hours of tension those innocent people have had to endure never should have happened in our commonwealth. They never should have happened in America. They never should have happened in this world today. The remainder of my term as governor will be dedicated from this moment to the proposition that it must not happen again.

Like most of you, I always looked upon nuclear power as one of many ways to conserve and expand upon our energy resources here in Pennsylvania. Like most of you, I always tempered my hopes with an obvious concern about the safety of this awesome power we have placed within our communities. Like most of you, I now have doubts, deep and serious doubts, about opening the plant on Three Mile Island again, about expanding nuclear power in Pennsylvania again, and about assuming that we can't go back to safer things again -- things like coal, which we have in abundance in Pennsylvania, things like wood, which we have in abundance in Pennsylvania, things like sunshine, which we all have in abundance, and most of all, things like reason and courage, which we have in particular abundance in Pennsylvania.

It will take much of our reasoning and most of our courage to turn the tide of uncertainty in our commonwealth in the difficult days ahead. I told the reporters who flocked into Harrisburg last week that we'd be struggling with the residue of this episode long after they have left us. Most of them are gone now, and the struggle has begun. It's a struggle on many fronts and in several theaters of operation. It's a struggle to preserve our health, to protect our environment, to revive our economy, and to maintain our pride and reputation as a place and as a people. It's a struggle, in fact, for our future as a workable commonwealth and as a productive society. And it must begin with a long and critical look at that crippled reactor that continues to dominate our thoughts from the middle of the Susquehanna River. Nuclear opponents, who would shut down every reactor in the country

tonight, simply are not in touch with our needs for tomorrow. But nuclear advocates who would pretend that nothing was changed by our vigil at Three Mile Island simply are out of touch with reality. There is much that has changed and much that remains the same. What has changed is both obvious and unknown. We sustained and continue to absorb psychological and financial injuries, the extent of which may never be fully identified. They're the kinds of injuries that will live with us for years, perhaps for generations. It's not easy for a childbearing young woman to pack up her belongings in a rush of fear and move to the floor of a stadium during the most anxious month of her life. Not all the comfort in the world can erase that memory from this woman's consciousness nor, perhaps, even that of her unborn son or daughter. It's not easy for a dairy farmer to watch generations of good and honorable service to his community drain away before unthinking signs that read "We don't sell Pennsylvania milk." Not all the safety assurances in the world, true as they are, will erase the crisis of confidence thrown upon this man through no fault of his own. It's not easy for a small town struggling to survive the loss of its sons and daughters to the cities to watch those who remain behind face a choice of living in doubt or leaving. Not all the celebrity in the world can erase the awareness of these good people. But something out there is powerful and strange and not entirely under control.

It's not easy for a state already struggling to protect its great name as the cradle of our democracy to combat the rumors, the tall tales, and the gross exaggerations that continue to spring from the earth on that island. Not all the promotion in the world can erase memories of central Pennsylvania as the place where the worst fear of modern man almost came to pass. And finally, it's not easy for ordinary people to assume that the power company is protecting their interests, only to find that government standards of efficiency and expertise have been ignored or loosely enforced. Not all the public relations and congressional testimony in the world will erase the frightening impression that there's something wrong with a system that allowed Three Mile Island to become a symbol of danger around the globe. No, indeed. Our struggle will not be an easy one. It will not be a glamorous one. It will not be a dramatic one. But it will be done beginning tonight.

Based on the reports I am now receiving from the plant, my first concern in this crisis has been averted. The safety of the people around Three Mile Island is more secure now than at any time since that fateful morning 10 days ago. We survive with a minimum of disruption and without the psychic and physical dangers a mass evacuation might have entailed. But now we must turn to the

future. We must begin the great task of restoring confidence in our environment, in our economy, in our security, and in our posterity. As your governor, I am taking several steps in that direction. I am asking President Carter, who was so helpful in the first chapter of this crisis, to stand by our side in chapters yet to come. I intend to seek from the president all appropriate assistance -- financial, technical, or otherwise -- in putting us back on the road to recovery. I am also asking the federal government to inspect without delay every nuclear reactor located within the borders of Pennsylvania, to report to me on its findings, and to assure me, if it can, that the accident on Three Mile Island simply cannot and shall not be repeated. I am appointing a central Pennsylvania recovery committee to be chaired by my fine lieutenant governor, Bill Scranton, to review the role of nuclear power in meeting our energy needs in Pennsylvania, to monitor the long-term health effects of this accident, to assess the economic consequences, and to coordinate the implementation of assistance and relief to our people. I have directed my state office of planning and development to conduct a deeper study into the effect this crisis has had on our social fabric as well as our economy. I have directed the attorney general to coordinate all legal implications of this incident, including such matters as insurance claims, future utility-rate structures, and other matters of importance to the commonwealth. Finally, I will recommend to the White House and to the congress that they review present regulatory standards with an eye toward the licensing of utility-company executives and operators, to guarantee the presence of 'round-the-clock expertise at every nuclear facility in America. I'm sure that there is more, much more, to be said in this area and that there are plenty of people willing to say it. For now, however, I am reminded of Abraham Lincoln's best advice. "We must not promise what we ought not," he said, "lest we be called upon to perform what we cannot."

There is much that we as Pennsylvanians can do now to see that our children never live through the tension and the strain from which a half a million of our people are now recovering. We begin by coming together -- coal miner and farmer, steelworker and doctor, trucker and lawyer, Republican and Democrat, westerner and easterner, and everything beyond and between, from Lake Erie to Delaware, and from the Allegheny Mountains to Independence Hall. We continue by realizing that any struggle against forces over which we have no control begins with knowledge of ourselves. What has remained the same throughout these days of crisis is that we know ourselves. We know ourselves to be a people who have been forged and tempered, like the steel from our foundries, from the richest ores of humanity the world has had to offer. We can

sacrifice more. We can work harder. We can help one another. And we can stay calm in the face of the storm. And we not only can endure. We can prevail. Thank you. God bless you. And good night.