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Today, 214,000 acres of land was cleared, 50,000 acres of trees were destroyed, and 137 different species went extinct. Tomorrow, one of these 137 species will be that of a plant that lives deep in the confines of the Amazon Jungle. It's a plant so special, so extraordinary that it could have saved my uncle: it's embedded with chemicals that have the potential to cure cancer. But tomorrow, it's gone, and all we're left with is ash, debris, a pile of wood, and the memory of a life taken too soon.

Today, over 20 million metric tons of carbon dioxide was released into the atmosphere. Tomorrow, 30,000 Americans will suffer an asthma attack, 1,000 of these individuals will be admitted into the hospital, and 11 will die, including a young girl living in the outskirts of a big city. The world will never have gotten to see her smile, experience her talents, or witness her contributions to society. Because tomorrow, we'll just be peering through the smoke, the soot, and the toxic particles, and be imagining all great things the girl would have accomplished if given the chance to live.

Today, the U.S. government overspent the federal budget by \$3.97 billion. Tomorrow, future generations of Americans will have to pay the \$1.2 trillion national debt back. Because a group of politicians can't work on a compromise now, our children will have a decreased standard of living in the future. They will pay for the mistakes of the past – for all the unnecessary wars, for all the pork projects put on legislation – and receive none of the benefits in return.

Sometimes, we forget Newton's third law of motion: for every action, there's an opposite and equal reaction. We often act in our own self-interest, make decisions based on what benefits us in the short-run, and never factor in the long-term consequences – the opposite reaction, if you will. While clearing land in South America might make room for pastures for livestock today, it also results in the extinction of plants that could save millions of lives tomorrow. Therefore, our actions are, inevitably, restricting possibilities for future growth and for the freedom of opportunity.

A Native American saying goes, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children." The word borrow implies that we cannot take things away from future generations without giving them something back in return. Less than 10 percent of the world's forest remains intact; in some places, breathing the air is equivalent to smoking 40 packs of cigarettes; and it's predicted that the national debt will double in two years. But tomorrow has not come yet. While we cannot change the past, we can make efforts to try to reverse our actions today. We still have a chance to alter what we leave behind for our children.

Because as another proverb says, "The only thing you take with you when you're gone is what you leave behind."