

Foreword

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At the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies we seek to inspire the next generation of environmental leaders by introducing students to all the scientific and policy complexity of modern environmental issues and, in so doing, to empower them to facilitate change. One of the most pressing issues we face today is how to address these concerns while other issues, such as terrorism, dominate the political stage. The environment has become too low a priority in the United States, and our political discourse on the environment has become impoverished.

So it was especially heartening to see two students at our school, Heather Kaplan and Kathleen Campbell, move swiftly into these troubled waters by initiating a graduate-level course and lecture series to address the critical issue of the role of the environment in our national politics, especially during this election year. The course, conducted with faculty collaborators Jim Lyons and Fred Strebeigh, brought an extraordinary series of guest lecturers to the school during the spring of 2004. Their presentations are skillfully edited here and make compelling, timely reading.

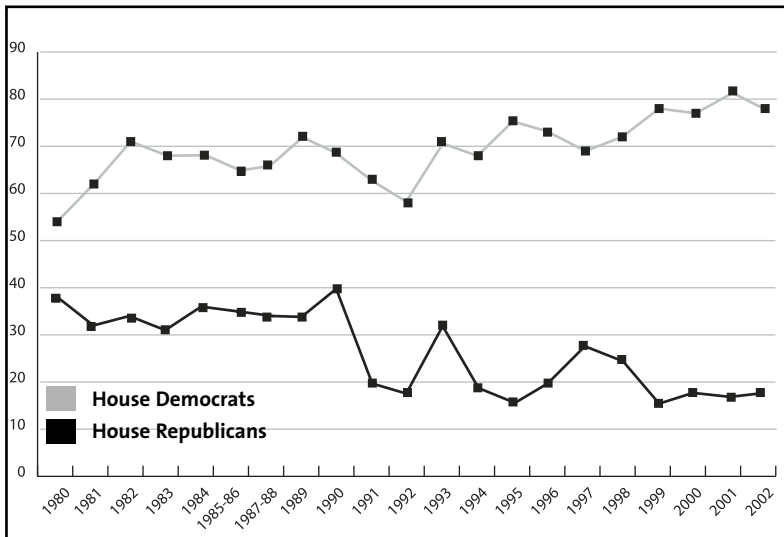
Many of the authors in this book – Republicans and Democrats – explain that the environmental community needs to take a new approach in communicating its issues to the general public. Voters will start to respond, they say, if they can understand how local and regional environmental issues tie into national and even global agendas. Global climate change, for example, occurs in local places. Groups like the League of Conservation Voters are now taking this strategy seriously, sending activists to swing states all over the country to talk to voters about these connections.

To my way of thinking, we have got to close two gaps. One is the growing gap between Republicans and Democrats on these issues. The other is the gap between the public's demand for more environmental

protection and the failure of our politics to deliver it. Clearly, these gaps are related.

When one looks at the voting record of the two parties in Congress, the divide between the parties on the environment could hardly be wider (See Figure 1). This is not a healthy situation, however it came about.

Figure 1 Average LCV Environmental Ratings



It wasn't always this way. The halcyon days of American environmentalism were the 1970s. Beginning with the enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act under President Nixon and culminating in President Carter's protection of Alaskan lands, it was a bipartisan era, with Democrats such as Ed Muskie joining with Republicans such as Howard Baker to compile an unmatched record of tough environmental legislation.

Within a short span of a few years in the early 1970s — with a Republican president and Republican leaders such as Russell Train, Bill Ruckelshaus, and Russell Peterson — the Environmental Protection Agency and the Council of Environmental Quality were created, and a handful of major laws such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act began to take effect.

It is a fact of profound importance that America's period of maximum progress on the environment was a period of bipartisanship.

The second gap comes out clearly in a recent poll of American public opinion sponsored by our school. Conducted in May 2004 by a leading polling firm, the poll found that:

- Nearly three out of five Americans (59 percent) rate the quality of the country's environment overall as "only fair" or "poor," while just 3 percent say America's environment is "excellent."
- Just 16 percent say that the quality of the environment in the U.S. is getting better, while 50 percent say it is getting worse.
- Three-fourths rank global conditions as "only fair" or "poor," and 63 percent say conditions are getting worse.
- Two-thirds (67 percent) of Americans say the U.S. government does not do enough about the environment and should do more.
- Eighty-four percent believe the U.S. should enact stricter standards for business and industry. This reflects substantial majorities of Democrats (92 percent), Independents (90 percent) and Republicans (68 percent).

Further, a majority of Americans want more discussion of the environment in the ongoing presidential campaign and say that the environment will be a factor in their votes. Clearly there is a gap between what American citizens want on the environment and what our political system is delivering.

In many ways, these two gaps are linked, for surely the partisan divide is undermining major progress in addressing environmental threats. How then do we close them? Read on, for the chapters that follow contribute very usefully to the answer.