

Republicans and the Environment: Dispelling Myths

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Thank you, it is a pleasure being here. It's fabulous to have a chance to come up here and talk to you about the environment. I'm not an expert on the environmental issues you address daily, but over the last thirty years this has been the most exciting and fascinating field in which to be involved. Your future careers will be driven by challenges faced by industry and government, as well as the politics that have dominated the environmental front. So, along those lines, I would like to share a few points of history.

REPUBLICAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Although Mr. Frank Luntz, the Republican pollster, advises Republicans not to talk about the past, I would like to start off with history. I'll spare you Ulysses S. Grant's founding of Yellowstone Park, William McKinley's Lacey Act, Gerald Ford's drinking water policies, and the Reagan/Bush years, but those experiences provide you with an idea of why Republicans feel that they have a history of environmental protection.

Recent history, beginning with the Congressional elections of 1994, provides an even clearer picture of Republican environmental commitments. Since the 104th Congress, there have been about 75 pro-environment measures passed by Congress.

These do not even include measures aimed at specific rivers, lakes, wilderness regions, or conservation areas. All of these measures are amazing. I will not list all of them, but they include the Water Resources Development Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the conservation title of the Farm Bill, the Everglades Protection Amendments, the Battery Recycling Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the completion of the Appalachian Trail, the Migratory Bird Treaty Reform Act, the Water Resources Development Act of 1999, and the establishment of Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where Walter Anderson became an artist. This list goes on and on and continues through this year with the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

I would also like to address Republican environmental progress on the international front. In this election year, I know you often hear the Democrats cite our lack of accomplishments. But I want to share with you the Republican standpoint on where we think the Bush administration and the rest of the Republican Party have made headway. This international focus expands well beyond the Kyoto Protocol, which Russia and China and many other countries do not support. First, the U.S. hosted the first Earth Observation Summit, in which thirty nations participated. This climate monitoring system will be able to accurately track climate change. Second, the U.S. will devote \$970 million over the next three years to support the Millennium Development Goals – this illustrates a clear focus on drinking water. Next, this administration has supported the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) Treaty. I remember growing up in the floods of '73-'74, when DDT was rampant in the Mississippi Delta. The areas where I fish have still not completely recovered, reinforcing the need to eliminate these POPs from the environment. Another key focus for this Administration is the decommissioning and dismantling of Russian nuclear submarines. We've worked with Great Britain to provide \$441 million to Russia this year alone to dismantle the fleets that are located in the Red Sea and risk severe contamination of coastal regions.

I will quickly run through how Republicans perceive the Bush administration's environmental performance on the domestic front. This EPA has proposed an off-road diesel rule, which will cut sulfur dioxide emissions from diesel engines used in agriculture and construction from 3,000 to 15 parts per million per day by 2010.

Emissions of soot will be reduced 95 percent, and nitrogen oxide emissions will be 90 percent lower than those of today's engines. The Administration believes that the rule will significantly help metropolitan areas reduce smog and ozone and enable them to reach EPA's attainment standards. I am sure that you are familiar with the Healthy Forests Initiative, which provides treatment for over 70 million acres of forests and rangelands that are at an extreme risk of catastrophic wildfires. The Initiative will protect 20 million acres annually, including pristine wildlife habitat. President Bush has requested \$760 million this year for wildlife fire management. He has also requested \$44.9 billion — a \$1.4 billion increase over last year — for conservation programs, management, maintenance, key forest grasslands, wetlands, and other habitats.

The Administration has proposed several initiatives related to clean air and climate change. First, the Administration has proposed the Clear Skies bill, which is still in the Senate. This proposal will cut sulfur dioxide emissions by 73 percent, nitrogen oxide emissions by 67 percent, and mercury emissions by 69 percent by 2018. In addition, the Climate Vision program will reduce greenhouse gas intensity by about 18 percent over the next ten years. This is the equivalent of taking 70 million cars off the road here in the U.S.

It also includes provisions to assist other nations in reducing their own emissions. Another fascinating initiative is the International Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum Charter, which was signed on June 25, 2003, by a wide range of countries including China, India, and Brazil.

President Bush has launched a \$1.7 billion proposal to develop environmentally friendly hydrogen fuel cells as power sources for vehicles. In fact, the *New York Times* ran a segment yesterday on all the new cars and other vehicles that are coming out. You'll be pleased to see that all the Ford Broncos are very environmentally sound. The Administration's hydrogen and Freedom Car proposals represent the first partnerships between government and private businesses to develop affordable hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Through the National Parks Legacy Project, the Administration has allocated \$2.8 billion to eliminate the maintenance backlog. The Administration requested an additional \$1.1 billion in the budget this year for the National Park Service.

Finally, on the topic of clean water, the Water 2025 program seeks to balance competing demands to provide the right amount of water in infrastructure systems. President Bush has requested \$21 million, a \$13.3 million increase for these programs.

THE POLITICS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

At this point, I'd like to talk just a little bit about the politics of the environment. Every Tuesday, Gallup publishes data on national trends and polling. Just this week, these Gallup numbers were released, which show how worried Americans are about the environment.

Despite the constant criticism of the Administration's environmental policies, Americans are less worried about the environment than in the years prior to September 11th. Six in ten Americans, approximately 62 percent, say they worry a great deal or a fair amount about the quality of the environment. These figures are down from 77 percent of people who worried this much in March 2001. Most of this drop, 11 out of 15 points, occurred between March 2001 and March 2002.

A Republican pollster, Bob Moore, of Oregon asked a question to groups in the Pacific Northwest, which gives you at least some sense of partisan attitudes towards environmental groups. When given the statement "environmental groups usually push for solutions which are too extreme for me," Republicans and Independents disagreed at 36 percent, Democratic men disagree 40 percent, Democratic women disagree 53 percent.

In March, Gallup asked Americans about their greatest concerns. The availability of a full bill of health care leads at 62 percent, then

crime and violence at 46 percent, drug use at 46 percent, the possibility of future terrorist attacks in the U.S. at 42 percent, the economy at 41 percent, illegal immigration at 37 percent, unemployment at 36 percent, hunger and homelessness at 35 percent, affordability of energy at 35 percent, the quality of the environment at 35 percent, and race relations at 19 percent. This same poll asked Americans whether President Bush was doing a good job or a poor job protecting the environment, and responses came back at 41 percent and 46 percent, respectively.

The environmental tactics used in this election are going to be fascinating to watch. In 2002, Democrats were surprised at the Republican gains, and they decided that they needed to change their tactics of relying on television to get their message out. So I think a lot of Democrats and environmental groups are going to focus on grassroots organizing rather than television. The League of Conservation Voters (LCV) is going to spend 75 percent of their funding on something called the Environmental Victory Project. It's going to focus on four states that were breathtakingly close but went Democratic, with the exception of Florida.

LCV and the Sierra Club are so focused on the presidential campaign that they have neglected the Senate and Congressional races. In doing so, they have lost their strategic focus. They claim to target electing environmental politicians, but, in recent years, they have almost exclusively supported Democrats.

Their endorsements in 1996 were 86 percent Democrats, in 1998, 82 percent, and in 2000, 80 percent. Their advertising contributions have been even more partisan: 99 percent of national PAC money and 100 percent of state money went to Democrats. LCV argues that Republicans have not been supportive of environmental issues and therefore are not positioned to receive contributions.

LCV tries to point to its own environmental scorecard as proof of its unbiased methodology, but they do not acknowledge that the scorecard leaves out consensus action. By doing so, they intentionally highlight the partisan issues. For instance, here are several examples of consensus actions that were not included in the LCV scorecard: the Safe Water Drinking Act, the National Marine Sanctuary Preservation Act, the African and Asian Elephant Conservation Acts, the Tropical Forests Restoration Act, the Estuaries and Clean Waters Act, the National Monument Act, and the Lower Chesapeake Bay Reauthorization Act. There are hundreds of others like these.

At the other extreme, the LCV scorecard includes partisan “litmus test” issues such as international family planning, regulatory reform, the nominations of two members of the Bush administration, and even campaign finance reform.

In addition to LCV and the Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife has reactivated its political branch. Defenders, which is best known for its campaign to reintroduce wolves into Yellowstone National Park, now plans to issue a Congressional report. Outside of the traditional environmental groups, several former Clinton administration environmental officials have formed Environment 2004.

These groups are all trying to influence what issues will be discussed in the election. Mercury certainly will be a significant topic. A story on the new rule ran in the *New York Times* yesterday, and this issue will continue to be in the headlines. This Administration prioritizes the proposed 70 percent mercury reductions, and we feel that no other Administration has adequately addressed the issue.

All of these issues are fascinating from a political perspective, even the proposed EPA budget cut of 8.9 percent overall in fiscal year 2005. Governor Leavitt pitched the “cuts” as a request for a \$133 million increase compared with the earmarks established in the last Congress. However, if you look deeper, you will see increased spending by \$35 million for cleanup of contaminated sediments in the Great Lakes.

That proposal will not be dismissed by Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, or other key states in 2004.

I'm going to close with the remarks Administrator Leavitt made at the National Association of Manufacturers when he first took office. He opened his comments by repeating the four questions that President Bush asked him when he joined the Cabinet: Is the air cleaner? Is the water more pure? Is the land better protected? And are we doing it in a way that keeps us competitive economically? Those are the four questions by which this Administration will be judged both internally and externally. Now I am curious about what is on the minds of the Yale community.

Q & A

Q: Most of us see a problem with just about everything we look at in the environment, it's our job. But from someone with a different perspective, what kinds of environmental issues really concern you the most?

A: I think personally, the difference lies in whether you consider yourself an environmentalist or a conservationist (i.e., do you fish and hunt?). I think that a lot of people personally who aren't scientists, who don't know anything from sulfur to mercury to carbon, have to feel that this is something that we have got to do. You can imagine what William Ruckelshaus, the first EPA administrator, had to face thirty years ago – business people, utility presidents were saying that this is just a fad, environment is just a fad. It's going to go away. Well thankfully it wasn't a fad.

Q: Many people have commented that the Bush administration is weakest on the environment. Do you think there is recognition in the administration that that's the case?

A: This may be a problem in a lot of swing areas. I think clearly in suburbs it's an issue that people like soccer moms care about. It used to be that Republicans had to be credible on education, and if they thought you were credible on education, they'd look at you a second time and move on to other issues. Now, it just very well may be the environment, since Republicans have now focused on No Child Left

Behind. You may very well see that the environment may become that type of an issue where people look at you first as a Republican, and then ask, how credible are you? In 1986 when I managed a Congressional race in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jim Broyhill of the family of furniture fame was running for U.S. Senate, and Terry Sanford had come back to run for the U.S. Senate. Sanford beat Broyhill clearly on the environment alone. To some extent you don't see that happen statewide. It's not to say that it couldn't emerge as a swing issue.

Q: On the issue of the environment, is your argument that there is no difference among Democrats and Republicans? If there is a difference, how would you distill philosophically the difference between Republicans and Democrats?

A: What I am arguing is that, since 1995 and the Congressional Republicans in the 104th Congress up until this White House and the re-election campaign, there has been huge bipartisan consensus. This environmental legislation could not have been passed without Democratic support and even Democratic origins, as you well know. It is an agenda that clearly we know we've been behind – the most meaningfully in domestic areas. This is why you've seen so much change. It's almost like these are social, not economic issues. It's almost turned into a social issue the way we've seen other social issues in the Republican Party. My point about the LCVs' scorecard is that you don't hear about consensus and, in fact, from our standpoint, we're having to fight to stay alive to focus in other areas on the environment where our accomplishments have been. So we have certainly no choice but to highlight consensus. We just wish – there's no such thing as wish in politics – but it would be a good new focus because if you just have a partisan difference, you eliminate a lot of the focus.

It's going to be fascinating to see where Clear Skies goes in the Senate. If it doesn't pass you'll see this Administration come back, look at it, focus on it. It may very well be like Social Security legislation. If Clear Skies doesn't pass it could very well be one of the key major points in the second Bush term. A lot of these issues will be the focus.

Q: How do you see yourself as different from the Democrats philosophically?

A: I think it's less about philosophy and more about more practical implementation in many respects. Republicans just can't stand silent on issues such as the environment, but frankly the issue really matters in the northeast and the far west where Republican nominees have a record on the environment.

Q: Some Republicans in the Senate are very staunch environmentalists. Do you think the Bush White House is out of sync with the Senate, and specifically these Republicans, on environmental issues?

A: I don't know. In fact, we've put a lot of pressure on the Senate to push the issue and push the agenda. I don't think out of sync as much as you'll see that legislation, such as the energy bill, was a disappointment and there may be some fallout from that. I know you'll see a focus on environment electorally and you may even see improvement on the George W. Bush website about the environment issue.