

The Environment as Part of Democratic Political Strategy

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Good afternoon. Let me start by telling you a little bit about how I got involved in politics and the environment.

I started my career in the law after I finished at Georgetown as a budding environmental lawyer. At that time, I thought I really wanted to practice environmental law. My first job was with what was then called the Land and Natural Resources Division – now the Environmental Division – of the U.S. Justice Department.

This was at the end of the Ford, the beginning of the Carter administration. The Republican Assistant Attorney General at the time looked at my résumé and saw the many Democratic campaigns I'd already worked in by 1976 and quickly assigned me to the condemnation section of the Land and Natural Resources Division. So I spent a little over a year condemning land for the Army Corps of Engineers in eastern Kentucky. This was not exactly my idea of how one should go about being an environmentalist in this country, but it did give rise to my long-term interest in the environment.

I understand that you recently heard from Jim DiPeso of REP America, the Republicans for Environmental Protection. Of course, whenever I meet a Republican environmentalist, it's hard not to ask if they're listed under the Endangered Species Act. After all (and Jim probably told you this) REP America named Jim Jeffords, a great senator from Vermont, as Environmental Legislator of the Year in 2000, and five months later Senator Jeffords left the Republican Party. I think that speaks volumes about the politics of the environment today. Because while, to some extent, the conservation movement traces its roots in this country to Teddy Roosevelt – and even though environmental protection was still a bipartisan affair when I started on Capitol Hill in the 1970s – environmentalism as a *movement* today

seems to reside solely on the Democratic side of the 50-50 political fault line now running through the country.

PARTISAN DIVIDE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

I think you might be surprised to hear me say what I'm about to say if you know anything about my biography. I'm generally viewed as a fierce partisan. But I think it's a tragedy that environmentalism has become the partisan issue that it is today. You'll hear next week from Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT), who's an example of the dwindling group of Republicans on Capitol Hill still working to forge some bipartisan compromise. I think the American people deserve better. They deserve more. They deserve a Congress that can rise above partisanship and craft common-sense solutions to environmental problems. I think it's fair to say that that's not exactly what we have today.

After I left the White House, I joined the board of the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), a bipartisan organization. LCV endorsed Chris Shays, for example. It endorses Republicans as well as Democrats.

Most of my Democratic friends thought I was nuts to join the board of LCV, a bipartisan organization. But I think it's important – in fact, one of the great challenges in this country – to see if we can rebuild a moderate wing in the Republican Party.

I think it is fair to say that this polarization, or partisan divide, didn't happen overnight. In fact, it took almost three decades to emerge. My friend and colleague at Georgetown Law School, Richard J. Lazarus, has written extensively on this issue, including several law review articles tracking the votes of Republicans and Democrats by region in the country to demonstrate this widening gulf between the voting records of Democrats and Republicans.¹ In the early 1970s, the environmental record of Congressional members tended to be based on region rather than party. That's changed substantially over the last 30 years.

In reflecting on some of the reasons for this widening gap, I think on the Democratic side, it reflects the growing influence of what has come to be known as the new class of college-educated professional

¹ See Lazarus, Richard J. 2003. "A Different Kind of 'Republican Moment' in Environmental Law," *Minnesota Law Review* 87 (4).

technical workers. These types of suburban voters were the people President Clinton, in particular, appealed to. It also reflects, to some extent, the decline of the more traditional smokestack industries, which were the heart and soul of the Democratic Party as I was growing up in Chicago. Unions and the industries that produce pollution, if you will, represent a smaller portion of what we call “the Democratic base.”

It’s also fair to say that with passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970, union members in particular – because they are organized and educated by their unions – have become more conscious of how they themselves and their families are at risk of exposure to chemicals and other pollutants on the job. And if you think about it, some of the bluest of the blue-collar unions, like the United Steelworkers of America, have been some of the strongest advocates for change in the environmental arena.

So you saw the Democratic Party’s base becoming more and more pro-environment and aligning itself with environmental issues. On the Republican side, the trend went in the opposite direction. I think that stems, in good measure, from the shift in the center of gravity of leadership away from northeastern moderates and toward more reflexively anti-government conservatives in the South and in the West. These leaders, supporting causes like the “Sagebrush Rebellion,” which organized resistance against federal land policies in the West, really began an anti-environmental sentiment in the 1970s that continues to this day.

The Republican Party’s ties to extractive industries, such as the oil, coal and gas industries, and a lingering unease about the counter-cultural veneer of environmentalism at the root of the environmental movement, play a role as well. All of these factors conspired to push Republicans like Jim Jeffords first out of the policy-making loop and eventually out of the party entirely. They were replaced by Republicans who approached environmental policy concerns less with natural science and more with political science. Instead of depending on facts to define their agenda, they insisted on using their agenda, quite frankly, to define the facts. I think the current Bush administration is a pretty good example of that.

A SHIFT IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

When I started working in the Senate, the Republican leaders on environmental issues were guys like Bob Stafford, senior member from the state of Vermont who worked with Ed Muskie (R-ME) to pass the Clean Air Act; John Chafee, father of Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), who was a great environmental leader; Jacob Javitz (R-NY), and Lowell Weicker (R-CT). These leaders have been replaced with the likes of James Inhofe (R-OK) and Frank Murkowski, who's now the governor of Alaska, but was head of the Senate Energy Committee for years.

The leadership also moved. Republicans leaders in the Senate, such as Senator Lott of Mississippi, Senator Nickles of Oklahoma, and Senator Frist of Tennessee, represent a much more conservative brand of Republican than a previous Republican majority leader from the state of Tennessee – Howard Baker – who was really much more moderate on some of these issues. Even Senator Dole, who was a more traditional Republican conservative, was more moderate than the current leadership.

In the House we see the same effect, with the likes of Tom Delay (R-TX) really driving policy. Billy Tauzin from Louisiana, who had jurisdiction over much of the Clean Air Act and energy policy in this country, will soon be off making millions as a Washington lobbyist. He's been replaced by Joe Barton, another oil-patch Republican from the state of Texas. Don Young, from Alaska, who controls much of what is going on in the natural resources arena, is now putting together the transportation bill. So I think it's safe to say there's no square inch of America that will be safe from concrete as long as he's in charge.

The result of all of this is that the Republican Party of Teddy Roosevelt – the president who established the Forest Service, enacted the 1906 Antiquities Act (which we used to great effect in the Clinton Administration), and created five national parks, 15 national wildlife refuges and 150 national forests – has really morphed into the party of Ronald Reagan, a president who once suggested that trees were the principal source of air pollution.

And it was Mr. Reagan who put people like James Watt, Anne Gorsuch, and Rita Lavelle, a less-than stellar group of environmentalists, in charge of the agencies that are supposed to act as stewards of the environment and natural resources. I don't know if these names mean anything to you today, but they certainly made headlines when they were appointed – and then when most of them were indicted back in the early 1980s.

THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION

The leader of the Reagan Republican Party, I think, is indeed President George W. Bush, in contrast to his father. Maybe his father retained a little bit of those Connecticut-Maine roots that he had. I think that the current President Bush does everything he can to shake that image and pretend that he's never set foot up here in the Northeast. I have to tell you that if you look at President George W. Bush's policies, they remind you of John Kenneth Galbraith's observation: "It is a far, far better thing to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled seas of thought." I think that is, to some extent, characteristic of the way the president approaches the entire issue of the environment.

I'm not going to go through President George W. Bush's entire track record on the environment, but I would like to just hit a few of the highlights. For example, his decision to shift the cost of Superfund cleanup from polluters to taxpayers. His decision to let power plants increase SO₂ emissions by 50 percent and to increase mercury emissions by a factor of three. His 35 percent increase in taxpayer subsidies for timber companies to buy trees in the national forests. His administration's cheerleading on behalf of mountaintop removal by coal companies in Appalachia. His drive to exempt one-fifth of the nation's wetlands from federal protection.

I would also note that in this administration, Mike Leavitt, the former Governor of Utah and current EPA Administrator, measures success by just saying they're not going to do the things they said they were going to do. So he's taking great credit for the fact that they've at least stalled this approach on wetlands. It's under reconsideration and that is viewed as environmental progress today! Of course, there's the President's decision, early on, to trash the Kyoto Protocol, breaking his commitment to regulating CO₂ from coal-fired power plants. The list goes on. I don't have to dwell on it.

I think, though, what's actually more shameful than any of those policies that I've just mentioned has been the President's effort to portray his assault on the environment as opening up just one more front in the war on terrorism.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

I was reminded of that last Sunday. I don't know how many of you watched "Meet The Press" and saw the president being interviewed by Tim Russert. In this interview Bush said, trying to frame the election, "I'm a war president. I make decisions here in the Oval Office on foreign policy matters with war on my mind." And I think it's that same persona – that person he's trying to project – that is being employed now to push the president's environmental agenda. So, of course, drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is repackaged as a piece, an important piece, of the war on terrorism, notwithstanding that it was being pursued as part of the Vice President's energy policy well in advance of 9/11.

Under the guise of thwarting terrorists, and in spite of advice from Governor Tom Ridge, who was then serving as homeland security czar in the White House, President Bush moved to gut the right-to-know standards that help communities protect themselves from toxic chemicals.

Both Governor Ridge and Governor Whitman, the EPA Administrator, suggested that the way to deal with chemical plants and the dangers they pose (which are quite substantial) from a security perspective was to regulate, to do risk reduction at those plants, to limit the amount of chemicals that were stored, and to administer just-in-time manufacturing. Despite that advice from his EPA Administrator and from his homeland security czar, the White House chose a different path, which was to simply remove any information about chemical plants from the public domain. In that way, communities wouldn't know what the risk was, they couldn't demand further action, and at least the problem was swept under the rug.

My favorite example of this strategy to put environmentalism into the terrorism loop is the link between national security and endangered species. It's called the Readiness and Range Preservation Initiative. It is intended to give the Department of Defense immunity – not only from the Endangered Species Act, but also from the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the Superfund Law, the Clean Air Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

During my tenure in the White House as Chief of Staff, I served on the National Security Council. We put a lot of time into improving military readiness and I believe we got a lot of results. I think the war in Afghanistan and, indeed, the initial days of the war in Iraq, indicate that this was an armed forces and an army that was built up, really, in the late 1990s. But I have to confess that as I sat in the Situation Room and we discussed these matters I can't recall anyone out of any of the branches of the armed services – certainly not the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – warning us that we had to do something about “those damn whales”!

Not only is this administration getting away with proposing these kind of initiatives – they're often enacting them. Some of those provisions I've just mentioned have already been passed into law. How can that be? After all, I think Americans do believe in a clean environment. And as a rule, we don't really like oil companies digging in wildlife refuges. We believe that people do have the right to know about the chemicals they're being exposed to. We're more inclined as Americans to say, “Can't we just leave those whales alone?”

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Last fall I saw a Harris poll on global warming. It said that 54 percent of Americans who have heard of global warming and the Kyoto and Bonn agreements believe that supporting agreements to limit greenhouse gases is the right thing to do. Only 30 percent disagree. So I think environmentalists like the NRDC, the League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, or people who are actively engaged in the

political work of the environmental movement can say, “The public is with us.” You can feel pretty good about that. And I think we should. I think there’s been a kind of sea change in the public attitude over the last 30 years concerning protection of the environment.

But we sometimes make the mistake of confusing support that’s extensive with support that’s intensive. Do Americans want a clean environment? I think the answer to that is clearly yes, but perhaps we want a country that’s safe from terrorism even more. And it’s not just concern about national security. We worry about clean air and clean water, but if you talk to a working mom here in New Haven who’s just lost her job, she’s probably more likely to have other priorities than voting on who’s got a better plan to clean the air.

Right now there are 15 million Americans who don’t have jobs. We’ve had the worst job performance record in the last three years any time since World War II and the Great Depression. Last year, 26 percent of Americans lacked the money they need to pay for their family’s health care needs. It’s not that people don’t agree with what the environmental movement has to say. It’s just that sometimes what environmentalists are saying isn’t very important in exercising the vote.

I assume that some of you may have taken an introductory psychology class at some point in your undergraduate career. I was a psychology student, so you’ll excuse me for a second. When I was in school, we studied something called Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs. In 1943, the psychologist Abraham Maslow published a theory of human motivation. In it he argued that people follow a fairly rigid sequence of satisfying their needs. He said we’re first concerned with our basic physiological needs, like having enough food to eat, being sheltered, and being warm.

Once those kinds of needs are addressed, we look to fulfill a need for safety and stability. Afterwards, people move on to a sense of love or belonging, and a sense of community. Once we achieve *that*, we move up the ladder to addressing our need for self-esteem and

recognition from others. (I think, having worked with a lot of politicians, that the need for recognition is really above or below, depending on your ranking, the need to get food and shelter!) But Maslow had a slightly different conceptualization of this. Only after we've done all that, Maslow would say, are individuals ready to address their need for self-actualization (his term). Self-actualization includes the fight for world peace or finding God or pursuing the arts or protecting the natural order.

Well, I think, to a great extent, Americans follow Maslow's sequence in how they decide to vote. During a period of war, a period of recession or a period when real wages are stagnant, when jobs aren't being created, things seem more pressing, perhaps, than protecting the environment.

That's not to say that there aren't voters who put a good deal of importance on this. Particularly some independent swing voters and younger voters – both men and women, by the way. I think that younger voters pay a higher-order attention to politicians' platforms and votes on the environment.

And the environment can be even more important to voters when it's perceived as a question of health – especially children's health. A particularly interesting phenomenon now is that the environment is a very driving issue in the Hispanic community and one that groups like the NRDC and Sierra Club and others have latched onto in terms of their public education campaigns and environmental justice.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The Bush administration has also figured out that these issues of health and environment can affect people's lives. Let me give you an example. Today the EPA is proposing a cap-and-trade approach to cutting mercury emissions from oil and coal-fired power plants. They claim that since it worked in reducing sulfur dioxide emissions, it'll do the same for mercury. Just this week, EPA released a new report in conjunction with FDA finding that mercury tends to concentrate in

the umbilical cords of developing fetuses. So it's a particular problem with regard to this issue of children's health.

But this notion of cap-and-trading and viewing mercury in the same way that has been effective with sulfur dioxide is a problem. Mercury *isn't* sulfur dioxide. That's why Carol Browner, during the waning days of the Clinton administration, designated mercury as a dangerous pollutant and set a December 2003 deadline for power plants to install the technology to achieve real cuts in mercury emissions. It doesn't do you much good if you're in Chicago and your kids are eating fish that are caught in Lake Michigan to know that there have been reductions in Montana and maybe the trout are safer out there. Mercury is a toxic that's a persistent pollutant. It accumulates in the food chain and that was the reason that Administrator Browner took the approach that she did.

But the real issue ends up being "who controls the megaphone." If you only hear from the Administration, from the President, that we want to reduce mercury, that we want to improve children's health, and we want to do it in the most cost-effective way, it sounds pretty good. It sounds like "healthy forests" and "clear skies" and all the other language that the president has used.

In contrast, if people think about how mercury, lead, and nitrous oxide emissions are causing asthma attacks in their children, sending people to emergency rooms, and causing thousands of premature deaths, people are going to stand up and say, "We've got to do something about this, and we ought to do it now." And they may actually start saying something else, which is "We could do something about this by changing the administration . . . overturning policies to care for our kids instead of the electric power utilities."

LANGUAGE VS. ACTION

This question of who you're listening to and what story you're hearing is one in which the issue begins to transcend the environment, even public health. The question begins to be "Whose side are you on?" and "Whose side is this administration on?" And I tell you, that worries the administration. It's why they spent so much time, at least in the 2003 State of the Union, talking about these issues.

Just a year ago Republican pollster Frank Luntz told GOP leaders, "[T]he environment is probably the single issue on which Republicans

in general – and President Bush in particular – are most vulnerable.”² Why? Because the public already thinks Republicans are “in the pockets of corporate fat cats who rub their hands together and chuckle maniacally as they plot to pollute America for fun and profit.” That’s his quote – not mine.

I think Mr. Luntz actually understands the same thing we do on the progressive side, and that is that, on environmental questions, the contrast between President Bush’s words and his deeds is really quite stark. The gulf is so enormous that it raises fundamental doubts about who he is, what he really believes in . . . and when he closes the door in the Oval Office, who he’s fighting for.

The President evoked the image of the Oval Office so powerfully in his interview with Tim Russert when he spoke about his decision to sit behind the desk that John Kennedy and Bill Clinton sat behind, and to wear the mantle of responsibility and make those decisions when the doors are closed. But I think if people begin to think about who he’s fighting for, who he’s listening to, and who gets to go behind those doors, it’s a very different equation and a different matter in the election.

I think the President and his advisors know this. That’s why he keeps insisting he’s cutting air pollution from power plants by 70 percent, even though he delayed implementation of the current requirements in the Clean Air Act. He’s also saying that, because of his leadership, Americans will have healthier forests, lakes and estuaries, acid rain will be virtually eliminated, and smog will be dramatically reduced, protecting Americans from respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Remember? . . . Remember the “healthy forests,” and “clear skies.” It’s the language that matters.

I keep coming back to that 2003 State of the Union address. I think it’s very interesting if you look at the polling before and after. The President spent about the same amount of time speaking about the economy as he spent talking about the environment. Despite this, he had almost no impact on his job approval ratings on the economy. They didn’t budge at all. In my view, that’s because people feel it, know it, and under-

² Luntz, Frank. “Straight Talk – The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America.” The Luntz Research Company, pp.131-146.

stand that issue. You can't b.s. them on the economy. If they don't have a job, if they don't have money in their pocket, they know what their real wages are. On the environment, it all sounded good and he seemed like he really cared about it all. And his job approval numbers on the environment jumped more than on any other single indicator as a result.

It's interesting. This year the president chose a different course in his 2004 State of the Union address. He didn't talk about the environment at all. It was a very partisan speech. It was a very hot, heavy partisan speech that had almost nothing to say about the environment or the economy. In contrast to recent States of the Union (*most* recent States of the Union), his job approval actually tanked after the speech. I think that was the beginning of a kind of slide that he's had on the economy, the Kay report on the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and a budget that doesn't add up. This is part of a slide that the president's been having on credibility and trust.

A 2004 ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

You might ask, "Is all that environmentalists have to do is help voters connect the dots?" That's what the leaders of the League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, and other environmental organizations have to do.

I think both the environmental movement and the Democratic candidate have to do more than just connect the dots between the President's credibility gap and his record on his use of power in office. You can't only offer a critique of what George W. Bush is doing on the environment. You've got to offer a positive, more compelling vision to let voters know that to us – people who believe in environmental protection, protecting public health, and sound stewardship of the envi-

ronment – it isn't just campaign rhetoric. It's fundamental to who we are. I think the candidate has to project this as part of his core belief.

I think you can point to history. I say this as a Democrat and someone who's very proud of President Clinton's environmental record. You can go back to President Carter and the protection of the Alaska wilderness, which was a tremendous use of executive power that led to passage of ANILCA that protected so much of Alaska. I think if you come back to the Clinton administration, what we did on clean water, the protection of roadless areas, and the use of the Antiquities Act to create monuments around the country illustrates the use of this executive power. President Clinton set aside more land than Teddy Roosevelt or any other President since Teddy Roosevelt (depending on how you calculate what we did in Hawaii). The improvement in both automobile emissions through the so-called Tier II standards and the clean diesel initiative illustrate what the Clinton administration did to protect the environment. Having blocked the diesel regulations, the Bush administration takes credit for deciding to unblock them and letting them go into effect, not exactly a bold initiative. It's interesting . . . but I guess we all do that a little bit.

But campaigns are really not about the past. They're ultimately about the future. And so I think that the campaign is likely to be run from an environment perspective, largely on an energy platform. And that's where the President is really quite vulnerable and where the Democratic campaign is likely to go.

ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Today the U.S. imports 51 percent of its oil. Two and a half million barrels come from the Persian Gulf. We're using 25 percent of the world's oil production, yet we have only three percent of the world's oil reserves. That's why – notwithstanding two wars in Iraq in the last 15

years, the oil shocks of the 1970s, and a global war against terrorism, which obviously has its roots in the Middle East – the Persian Gulf’s leverage on the U.S. is actually rising today. Eighty-five percent of the increase in oil production between 2010 and 2020 is likely to come from the Middle East and that skews our foreign policy. Tom Friedman, the New York Times columnist, has said that “We view the entire region as one giant gas station.”

I think that’s really inhibited us from refusing to take stands that we should have in the past: on behalf of women’s rights, on behalf of free speech, and on behalf of the right of workers to organize in that area of the world, just to name a few. Democratic as well as Republican administrations bear this burden. We’ve had a dishonest relationship with the regimes in the Middle East.

And if you think about other places we go to get oil – the Caspian Basin, Nigeria, Angola, Venezuela – the picture’s not particularly any prettier in the rest of the world. The Bush administration has reacted by promoting drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge and by trying to provide tremendous subsidies – \$31 billion in the energy bill that’s currently stalled in the Senate – to the oil and gas industry.

But the truth is, and I think everybody here that’s studied the issue understands, you can’t drill your way out of this energy problem. There’s not enough oil in the United States, and there’s not enough oil in friendly places in the world to do that.

I think this administration is largely just moving the whole energy debate and energy policy in the wrong direction. And it’s understandable why, in the spring of 2001, when the president first came into office, he put his vice president in charge. He was the CEO of a company you may have heard of recently called Halliburton. I won’t go into Halliburton. But I think it’s no accident that when the vice president’s energy task force met with environmental organizations on the energy report, they had 13 meetings – but 12 of those meetings occurred on the day after the report was printed and before it was released. One meeting was held with a consumer organization and 158 meetings were held with energy companies. So I think we got what we paid for . . . or what we bargained for.

A NEW VISION

But, again, I think that this year we can't talk only about the shortcomings of the president's energy policy and the administration's ties to the oil industry. We have to do something more, something more visionary. Actually, Senator Kerry has offered a fairly compelling vision. During this campaign, Senator Kerry has made it a centerpiece of what he's talked about. It is a vision that invests in American technology, that invests in jobs here, that creates a real kind of pathway toward better conservation, and deals, finally, with the issue of global warming. I think that's why he's earned the support of the League of Conservation Voters, which endorsed him for the New Hampshire primary. We've got to use our energy resources more wisely, and I think that if you do it in a way that makes the right kind of investments and creates a more robust, sustainable electric grid, you can actually create jobs in this country.

I think if you had lost your job at a plant and had to go to work at a convenience store, that might be a pretty compelling vision: a cleaner environment, a more prosperous economy, and less sending of our sons and daughters overseas. I think that's a vision to which millions of people can subscribe.

Let me close by reflecting on the fact that I think that this vision is one that marries better with our values as Americans. I think it actually marries up with, and is grounded more in, the faith that we display as Americans.

You know, over the last dozen years or so, the idea that the worlds of faith and politics have something to say to each other in this country has gotten a bit of a bad rap. After all, the religious leaders who always seemed to get the widest attention always seemed to be the ones with the narrowest minds. You know: Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Dobson.

But there's a tradition of faith in public life that predates any of those people. It was the tradition of social reformer and Presbyterian minister Norman Thomas, the tradition of a fierce advocate for the

poor named Thomas Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, a tireless voice for social justice named Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and one that was shared by his good friend, a Baptist minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. That's the religious tradition with which I identify. I'm sure many of you probably do, too.

It's a tradition that not only calls on each of us to stand up for the dignity of others, but to act as responsible stewards of the Earth. We were taught in the Bible to love your neighbor as yourself. At a time when global warming threatens so many of the world's people with droughts, floods, disease, and hunger, can there be any doubt that loving our neighbors requires us to make sure our country contributes not to ravaging the world, but to renewing it?

Governor Howard Dean – I don't want to take a shot at Governor Dean, he's probably had enough shots taken at him – was famous for talking about the Book of Job (and getting it in the wrong testament). There's actually a wonderful passage I'd like to close by reading. In the book of Job, it says, "Ask the beasts, they will teach you, the birds of the sky and they will tell you. Or speak to the earth, it will teach you, the fish of the sea, they will inform you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the eternal has done this?"

That's why I think environmental politics is not just about TV spots, direct mail, and opinion polls. In the final analysis, it's about who we are as a people, what America's all about, our values, our faith, and our sense of responsibility for each other and to this world.

I'm convinced that Americans want a president who's willing to talk about these responsibilities, who's not afraid to protect our natural resources for our children and our grandchildren. Americans want a president who's willing to fight for the public's health. I'm convinced that if environmentalists stay true to who we are, by this time next year, we might have a new occupant at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Q & A

Q: How can environmentalists better focus in on our priorities, and how can we then use them in the elections?

A: Most voters end up approaching issues that are closer to home, so from a national perspective it's difficult to prioritize because if you do polling in Michigan it's going to be different than if you're polling in Los Angeles or New Mexico. The one thing that ties a good deal of this together, though, is energy policy and its relationship to air emissions and thinking of CO₂ as a pollutant. I think the public is sketchy on this – the last couple of years have reduced their resolve to take specific actions on climate change. That's the issue that needs to be communicated because it ties together job creation, environmental protection, economic development, stewardship, and most importantly, it has the security dimension.

Q: How can Democrats and environmentalists better empathize with our opponents?

A: It's particularly challenging because of the President himself and his team at the White House. The breaking point was after 9/11 when I think that the Democrats really wanted to come together in support of the President and the country, and they felt used by that process. It's very hard to rebuild a level of trust. So, their reaction is maybe not tactically smart, but they feel burned by someone for whom they wanted to find common ground.

Maybe there's such a cultural divide, or an ideological divide, that you just can't communicate with the third of the country that's driving us in a much more radically conservative direction. There are, however, plenty of people of goodwill who think the President is a person they can personally relate to – they like his competency, they like his plainness. These are things that people in the center find quite appealing. I think that the question for liberals is: how do you reach those people in a dialogue that respects their values and opens up to the way they view America?

I don't think it's a hard sell on this particular set of issues because I think there's a pretty broad swath of the country that essentially agrees about the fact that government has a role to play on the environment, that corporations are not likely to do the right thing, and that mandatory controls have proven effective. Maybe environment is an issue

that actually does bridge that divide and even opens up and begins a dialogue that can lead to more common ground, in at least that pink section of the country.

Q: What are your impressions of the 2000 election and how does that play into the elections this year?

A: From a political perspective, I don't think there's a real question that Ralph Nader cost Al Gore the Electoral College vote. You can debate whether or not that was the case in different areas of the country, but in Florida Nader clearly cost Gore the election.

The Green Party should have been a critical wake-up call for the Democrats and if we don't listen to what people are saying who are passionate about the Green Party, I think that would be a mistake. Nader, however, is a particular phenomenon of his own, almost independent of the Green Party.

I think the judgment that there wasn't a bit of difference between Gore and Bush has historically proven to be suspect. I think the passion of people who feel disenfranchised by both the Democratic and Republican parties is more intense now against the President. So I think the chances of Nader getting the vote he got last time are slim. I can't imagine that Nader could mount that sort of challenge as an independent this time around.

Al Gore's campaign made a calculation to de-emphasize the environment because it didn't seem to appeal to swing voters and they were worried about states like West Virginia and Tennessee, which he ultimately lost, where they thought the environmental message hurt him. I think that his advisors were telling him, "Look, I know you really care about this, but don't talk about it very much." They took something away from him on that calculation. They took his passion away from him by telling him to stick to the lock box, the patient's bill of rights, etc. They really took his passion out of him, and that meant that the Republican attacks on him began to stick, and it was really unfair. Al Gore has a core and this is at the center of that core. The campaign's failure to project that was a critical tactical mistake in the 2000 election.