

“Energy, Conservation and the Environment”

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“The older I get, the more I’m concerned about the future. And nowhere is the need for a longer-term view more apparent than in our environment. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. It’s critical. It should not be political.

Why do some (many of the Republicans in the House and Senate), and certainly President Bush and Vice President Cheney, think that we must choose between economic prosperity and environmental protection? Why don’t they understand that jobs and good environmental policies are not competing values? Why do they think that those who care about the environment don’t care about jobs? Why do we treat our planet as if it’s a business that’s being liquidated? Why do a number of Republicans and others that I know refer to environmentalists as ‘enviros’ in a most disparaging manner? Why did Dick Cheney, who headed the Energy Task Force a few years ago, state that conservation may be a personal virtue, but it does nothing to reduce our dependency on foreign oil?

Is it just ignorance or stupidity? Probably not. Is it a lack of understanding or a lack of vision or a lack of interest in the future? Probably, but in my view, it might be a result of huge contributions from those that care much more about the bottom line today than they do about the future.

As we have previously discussed, the administration and others are doing everything they can to create a sense of crisis surrounding Social Security. It’s the same administration that created a crisis regarding the imminent threat of weapons of mass destruction held by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Making mistakes in Social Security or tax policy, or even foreign policy, creates problems, but not irreversible ones. But in the environmental field, much of what is being done, we cannot correct, or at least not in our lifetimes. That’s where the real crisis lies, and it is for real. This planet is under stress, and we must address the problems with the full knowledge that the political atmosphere in which we live makes it difficult, but not impossible.

Let me give you an idea or two of what we are up against in battling the administration of George W. Bush and Richard Cheney, combined with the Republican

leaders in the House and Senate. The environment is under siege, and they hold a lot of the cards.

First and foremost, and especially for the future, President Bush's model for a Supreme Court Justice is Clarence Thomas. He has said that Congress should not have any jurisdiction over establishing environmental standards. Looking ahead, that is a problem of crisis proportions. The Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, James Inhofe of Oklahoma, has said that global warming is, in his own words, 'a hoax.' He, and many, believe that climate change is a myth, and sea levels aren't rising. But that flies in the face of science. I don't know a reputable or well-known scientist who does not hold the view that CO₂ (carbon dioxide) is a major contributing factor in creating a greenhouse effect in the earth's atmosphere that is warming this planet. James Watt, who was Interior Secretary in the '80s, said that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Many in the so-called Christian right believe this as well, and they are sincere, polite and serious. They believe the Messiah will return for the rapture and that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded, but some actually feel that it should be hastened as a sign of the coming of the apocalypse. Forty-five Senators and 186 House members earned 80-100% approval ratings from the top three Christian Rights advocacy groups.

Zell Miller, a mean-spirited, divisive Democratic Senator from Georgia who gave the keynote address at the Republican Convention last summer, received a 100% rating. And, ladies and gentlemen, not one single time has President Bush even mentioned the word 'environment' or 'conservation' in his State of the Union address (at least not in the last two). By the way, they were not mentioned at the Republican National Convention in New York. That's a fairly clear indication of where the administration stands on conservation and the environment.

Well, what can be done? Is it hopeless? I think not. Let me review with you some very specific facts and problems related to energy, conservation and the environment. I especially want to share with you several initiatives with which I am intimately involved.

First, we produce 5% of all the energy produced in the world, and we use 25% of all the energy that is used in the world. Our total oil and gas reserves in the United States are about 5% of the total in the world. That leads us to only one conclusion. We must

develop alternative sources of energy – hydroelectric, wind, solar, nuclear (some of my colleagues in the environmental field disagree with me about nuclear, but it is the cleanest form of energy). And we need conservation. We need to increase fuel economy standards, despite Mr. Cheney’s statement about conservation being only a personal virtue.

Although the facts and reason dictate otherwise, the administration seems obsessed with drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Over two decades ago, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act passed the House and Senate. Most of the action on that bill was in the House, and it passed, supported by a true bi-partisan coalition of Democrats and Republicans. That law, and especially the protection it afforded the fragile coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, is now being threatened by a Republican administration and a Republican-led Congress.

As a former Republican Congressman deeply involved in the passage of the Alaska Lands Act almost 25 years ago, I like to remind my Congressional colleagues that the Republican Party has a rich history of preserving the natural resources we have been so generously bequeathed. Teddy Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon all left legacies we can be proud of.

Apparently, the President and the Republican leadership in Congress fail to recognize that preservation is a conservative thing to do. The American people deserve the facts, and they, in turn, need to communicate with members of Congress that they should not make decisions based on myths.

Let me share with you some information about another initiative I’ve been working on for the last year. The Interior Appropriations bill calls for the American taxpayer to fund additional logging roads in the Tongas Forrest in Alaska. These funds end up in the pockets of large timber companies. We should clearly cut this type of corporate welfare that encourages more clear-cutting of timber. It is nonsensical. I believe we will be successful in eliminating this totally misguided move by the administration, and most importantly, it will be done by a coalition of Democrats and Republicans.

Let me give you some more facts that support my premise that this administration and this Congress must wake up, and they will only do so if people demonstrate that they care.

During the last four years, there has been a 50% reduction in enforcement actions against polluters, a 34% decline in criminal penalties and a 50% decline in civil penalties for environmental crimes. And ladies and gentlemen, I mentioned earlier that the president never mentioned the environment or conservation in any of his State of the Union addresses or at the Republican National Convention. Let me add that he did not mention global warming, clean air, clean water or pollution one time in any of his State of the Union addresses or at the Republican National Convention!

And that leads us to the Kyoto Accord. We use 25% of all the energy consumed in the world. We should work with others to reduce CO₂ emissions that cause global warming for many reasons, but especially since global warming affects this entire planet. The administration has dragged its feet and continues to say that the science is not clear. That's just not true. It is true that we would have to do more than other nations, but remember we are the biggest users of energy by far, and we are the strongest! I know the Kyoto Accords are not perfect, but we shouldn't walk away from them like a spoiled child who couldn't get everything he or she wanted. We should stay involved and play a leadership role. We are the only industrialized nation in the world that is not a part of Kyoto, and that is sad. Among other things, it certainly does not help us in our relations with other countries. And, my friends, we need to have, if not their friendship, at least their respect, and we'll address that issue in our lecture on April 20 (two weeks from today) on Foreign Policy and National Security.

We're just not doing a very good job in education. For example, how many of us, and that includes politicians who represent us, know much about the value of wetlands? They have been destroyed at a rapid clip, and we have not done a very good job of connecting the dots between wetlands and pollution control and flood control. Wetlands are like a sponge; they filter out pollution and they do a lot to prevent flooding. And without them, we don't have oystering and clamming and sport fishing or commercial fishing. They are spawning grounds for fish and shellfish and, clearly, they are habitat areas for all kinds of wildlife. They are an extremely valuable resource and critically important to our economy. We need to start educating our citizens at a very early age.

Some of this is happening, but because it has not always been a focus early on, the media in this country needs to help connect those dots and hold politicians accountable for their actions. A lot is riding on it.

Let me just cover a few more areas in which you may have an interest.

Clean air: we need to connect the dots here. Utilities that produce nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide, NOX and SOX it's called, do great damage to people's health. Utilities are also big contributors to global warming through carbon dioxide emissions. The administration tried unsuccessfully to rewrite the Clean Air Act and give utilities more time to comply with Clean Air Act standards. The law said that if you expanded your capacity significantly, you would have to use state-of-the-art emission controls. By the way, these emissions cause big problems with people who have asthma and other respiratory diseases that are greatly exacerbated by the soot and smog created by polluters. Incidentally, we should all bear in mind that there are costs to upgrade facilities, but there is a heavy price to pay in costs of healthcare if they are not upgraded. More people are hospitalized and lose time from work, and this clearly affects productivity. It's one of those hidden costs of pollution.

Since the bill the administration was pushing took away states' rights to sue other states, it failed in committee. All the Democrats, plus Lincoln Chafee on the Republican side, voted against it.

In one of the few environmental initiatives of this administration, the EPA issued a rule last month that implemented some controls over emissions of harmful pollutants. Unfortunately, it doesn't go into effect until the year 2015. But it's some progress. The rule also tries to cut the costs of cutting pollution by allowing power plants to buy and sell emission credits. As a result, the cost per month for customers in the dirtiest states will be less on average than \$1 per month, probably 60-70 cents. One of the most deadly pollutants is mercury that finds its way into rivers, bays and lakes, and yes, the ocean as well. The fish absorb it and people eat fish. That's just a part of the cycle, and I think that as far as mercury is concerned, because of its very nature, there should be no emission credits.

There are a number of lawsuits at the moment, including one in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The administration has reversed a Clinton

administration policy that permitted the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from motor vehicles. The administration's position is that the science is unclear about whether CO₂ (carbon dioxide) contributes to global warming. This particular lawsuit turns on whether Section 202 of the Clean Air Act applies. It states, "the EPA Administrator shall regulate any air pollutant from any new vehicles that may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare".

The number of blocked federal judges skyrocketed during the Clinton administration as partisanship increased. I bring this up to demonstrate the importance of appointments to the various federal courts. They are critical. Let's look quickly at the Clean Water Act, and here, I believe, the government has done a reasonable job of regulation from the standpoint of utilities and industrial plants. Where they have not done a good job is in what they call non-point source situations. Translated, that means runoff from agriculture, municipalities and others where the source of the pollution is a little more difficult to determine.

By the way, the oceans take up two thirds of the earth's surface, and there are limits to what they can assimilate. Ocean dumping, once thought to be the answer to the world's sludge and trash problem, highlights shortsightedness and expedience over prudent long-range planning.

Let's turn, for a moment, to contaminated industrial sites. They are not contained, and they leak. The Superfund program has slowed to a crawl. The financial resources in the Superfund Trust Fund have plummeted, starved by the expiration of a "polluter pays" tax on chemicals and oil products. The administration is looking for general tax revenues to finance clean-up on a pay-as-you-go basis. No longer do they want to use the "polluter pays" principle. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that out!

We need to be more creative in recycling, for example, and think of ways in which we might jump start the revitalization of our older communities by investing more in the clean-up of former manufacturing sites. Investing in our environment can go hand in hand with economic growth. And there should be planning for growth that is tied to the availability of water, and we must engage in long range transportation planning. We can assist local and state governments as they tackle the problem of sprawl. That's in part what the Coastal Barrier Resources Act was all about."

