



# CONSERVATIVES ARE THE REAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS

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I hate clean air and water. I don't care how much companies pollute rivers and streams. I don't even like trees. I just care about tax cuts. Who am I? Well, that's easy: I'm a conservative. Or at least, I'm a progressive caricature of a conservative.

But the caricature is absurd on its face. Conservatives breathe the same air and drink the same water environmentalists do. Conservatives love taking their kids to the same national parks environmentalists do. In fact, the whole idea of national parks was created by a Republican, Ulysses Grant. The park system was greatly expanded by another Republican, Teddy Roosevelt. And the Environmental Protection Agency was, yes, established by a Republican—Richard Nixon. He liked clean air, too.

Conservatives want to conserve things. It's right there in the name. And one of the things we want to conserve is our environment, because you can't have a healthy community without a healthy natural environment. That wasn't even hard for me to say. Because...I believe it.

Conservatives love the environment every bit as much as environmentalists do. The question is: What is the best way to protect it? And here's where we have big differences.

The environmentalists say the best way—the only way—is through massive federal, and even international, regulation. Conservatives say the best way to protect the environment is by protecting property rights and encouraging innovation. Safer, more efficient power—nuclear, geothermal, biomass—anything that generates energy at a price consumers want and can afford to pay.

To the extent that government gets involved in conservation—say, protecting wildlife—it should get involved at the most local level possible, since the farmer, forester or fisherman in Oregon knows a lot more about his environment than some bureaucrat in Washington, D.C. or Brussels.

So how can we tell which way works best?

Let's examine the historical record. Today and for the last century, the worst environmental offenders have been big, repressive, socialist governments. This was true in the last century, and it's true now.

China, for example, pumps roughly twice as much carbon into the air each year as the United States, even though the U.S. economy is almost 60% larger than China's. And how do those international agreements fare at protecting the environment? Not too well, it turns out.

When President Trump announced his intention to pull the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Accord, environmentalists warned of imminent disaster. Yet a year later, it turned out that the United States led the world in reducing carbon emissions. It did so without surrendering its national sovereignty.

Moreover, Canada, the EU, and China—all signatories to the Paris Accords—not only failed to live up to their commitments, but increased their annual carbon emissions. The EU released an additional 40 million tons of carbon dioxide into the air that year; China, a whopping 120 million additional tons—all while wagging their fingers at Uncle Sam.

Here's what you won't hear from your neighborhood Greenpeace volunteer: The left favors Big Government solutions not because it's better for the environment, but because it's better for leftism.

Take a look at the Green New Deal, an environmental proposal embraced by virtually every major progressive in America. Forget for a moment the impracticality of a plan that would outlaw most forms of American energy and cost \$93 trillion dollars. Much of the proposal has nothing to do with the environment: socialized medicine, reparations for historical wrongs, and a jobs-guarantee program are just a few of the items on its wish list.

What do socialized medicine and reparations for slavery have to do with the environment? Well, nothing. But for supporters of the Green New Deal, that's okay. Because their primary goal is increasing government power well beyond anything we've ever seen in America. They need this power, presumably, to save us from ourselves.

In contrast, conservatives are all about innovating our way to a cleaner environment without depriving anyone of their freedom. Take, for example, that monster of all green monsters: horizontal drilling for oil and gas, also known as fracking. The left demonizes fracking even though it actually makes the environment cleaner, the country richer, and, now, independent of Middle Eastern oil—something thought impossible a decade ago.

How does it make the environment cleaner? By releasing up to 50% less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than coal. And since it's also cheaper, people are happy to buy it—not because government forces them to, but because it saves them money. By the way, according to a Harvard study, fracking is safe, and improving all the time.

Yep, innovation that produces abundant, clean energy at a fair price without infringing on my freedom—that works for this conservative. You'd think it would work for anyone who cares about the environment and people.

So let me repeat: I love clean air and water. And I don't own even a single share of Exxon.

I'm Michael Knowles, host of The Michael Knowles Show, for Prager University.