

**ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING** Peter Schwartzman**Who is the environmental Prez?**

With so much else going on in the world today, it is hard to find a place for environmental concerns. Unfortunately, when the public neglects to protect the environment in which we live, those who recklessly take from it do so with greater vigor and disregard. Thus, if we want basic environmental rights—such as, access to clear air, clean water, healthy rivers, and vital forests—it is imperative that we regularly look into the environmental records of our present (and future) leaders. Recent president debates were noteworthy for many things, among them a very limited focus on environmental concerns; in the first debate, the term “environment” wasn’t even used, in the second debate, only one question addressed the topic, and in the third debate, Senator Kerry briefly referred to it once. Therefore, we must dig deeper in order to find out what the next president really thinks about important environmental problems.

Before I start digging, let it be known that I am not a huge fan of Senator Kerry nor President Bush, though I do acknowledge Kerry’s recognition of the necessity of multilateral dialogue. My inability to be a fan of either of these presidential candidates stems from their unwavering support of Israel and their acceptance of the Doctrine of Preemptive War, both positions that I believe are responsible for our current state of isolation and disregard in the world today. Having said this, I am still very interested in determining if either is worthy of the title “Environmental Prez.”

So who is the more environmentally-minded candidate, and can either President Bush or Senator Kerry properly be called “environmental” leaders? In my attempt to assess this, I will look at the following: (a) what they have to say about the environment; (b) what their voting record on environmental initiatives and laws has been; and, finally, (c) what leaders in the political, environmental and scientific communities have to say about these candidates. While this coverage will in no way be comprehensive, it will hopefully serve to enlighten would-be voters about this important dimension of the election and, consequently, our future as well.

First, let’s look at what President Bush and Senator Kerry themselves have to say about the environment. One of the more public and easily accessible places to find out about their platforms is their Internet campaign websites; [www.georgewbush.com](http://www.georgewbush.com) and [www.johnkerry.com](http://www.johnkerry.com), respectively. At President Bush’s website, it states the following: “Over the last four years, the air has become cleaner, our water more pure, and we have reversed the net loss of wetlands. In addition, our parks are better managed, better funded, and better protected.” This website goes on to describe what President Bush would do if elected to a second term: “work to secure passage of the following environmental policies” including, (a) a Clear Skies Initiative which will “reduce power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury by 70% and help states meet tougher new air quality standards”; (b) a Clean Air Interstate Rule which will “require the steepest emissions cuts in over a decade”; (c) environmentally safe exploration which will “promote environmentally sound domestic oil production in just 1% of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge”; and, (d) encouraged use of efficient technologies which will “provide incentives for deployment of efficient technologies for storage and transmission of energy...” Thus, it appears the President has a plan for environmental protection if

granted a second term.

At Senator Kerry’s campaign website, we observe the following sentiments: “As Americans, we have the right to breathe unpolluted air, drink safe water, eat uncontaminated food, live in clean communities and enjoy natural treasures.”; and, “John Kerry and John Edwards will set a new standard of environmental excellence for America. They will honor our national treasures and pay tribute to our natural wonders, while renewing our nation’s promise of clean air, clean water and a bountiful landscape for all. They recognize that we owe it to our families, our communities, and our planet to defend our environmental values and protect our environmental rights.” Among the more specific elements that Senator Kerry will promote, if elected to the Presidency, include: (a) a Conservation Covenant which will “ensure balanced protection for our public lands and adequate resources to enhance our national parks”; (b) reducing dangerous air emissions by reversing “Bush-Cheney rollbacks to our Clean Air Act, plug loopholes in the law, take aggressive action to stop acid rain, and use innovative, job-creating programs to reduce mercury emissions and other emissions that contribute to global warming”; and, (c) restoring America’s waters through an “integrated approach” that will “restore damaged watersheds, protect wetlands, invest in our waterfronts and coastal communities, and protect our oceans.” From these comments, it also appears that Senator Kerry has an environmental plan.

Another source for their position on the environment is their comments, albeit brief, offered during the second presidential debate. During this debate, one of the audience members asked President Bush how he would rate himself as an environmentalist and what had he done to improve the nation’s air and water. Bush’s response began and continued as follows, “Off-road diesel engines—we have reached an agreement to reduce pollution from off-road diesel engines by 90 percent. I’ve got a plan to increase the wetlands by 3 million. We’ve got an aggressive brown field program to refurbish inner-city sore spots to useful pieces of property. I proposed to the United States Congress a Clear Skies Initiative to reduce sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury by 70 percent. I have—was fought for a very strong title in the farm bill for the conservation reserve program to set aside millions of acres of land to help improve wildlife and the habitat. We proposed and passed a healthy forest bill which was essential to working with—particularly in Western states—to make sure that our forests were protected. What happens in those forests, because of lousy federal policy, is they grow to be—they are not—they’re not harvested. They’re not taken care of. And as a result, they’re like tinderboxes. And over the last summers I’ve flown over there. And so, this is a reasonable policy to protect old stands of trees and at the same time make sure our forests aren’t vulnerable to the forest fires that have destroyed acres after acres in the West. We’ve got a good, common-sense policy. Now, I’m going to tell you what I really think is going to happen over time is technology is going to change the way we live for the good for the environment. That’s why I proposed a hydrogen automobile—hydrogen-generated automobile. We’re spending \$1 billion to come up with the technologies to do that. That’s why I’m a big proponent of clean coal technology, to make sure we can use coal but in a clean way. I guess you’d

say I’m a good steward of the land. The quality of the air’s cleaner since I’ve been the president. Fewer water complaints since I’ve been the president. More land being restored since I’ve been the president. Thank you for your question.”

Here we begin to see a bit of confusion in Bush’s plan. He wants hydrogen for transportation but he is very favorable to coal as well. (It turns out coal and nuclear are the means by which the President will generate hydrogen in the first place.) I also find “clean coal” to be an oxymoron. The numbers of people that have died over the past hundred years because of this fossil fuel would have a hard time considering it clean; many energy researchers wonder why we are still so eager to use a 19<sup>th</sup> Century technology in the 21<sup>st</sup>. We also get a feeling from President Bush that trees needs to be cut so that they won’t catch on fire. That sounds a bit ridiculous, doesn’t it?

Senator Kerry’s ninety second response continued, “Boy, to listen to that—the president, I don’t think, is living in a world of reality with respect to the environment. Now, if you’re a Red Sox fan, that’s okay. But if you’re a president, it’s not. Let me just say to you, number one, don’t throw the labels around. Labels don’t mean anything. I supported welfare reform. I led the fight to put 100,000 cops on the streets of America. I’ve been for faith-based initiatives helping to intervene in the lives of young children for years. I was—broke with my party in 1985, one of the first three Democrats to fight for a balanced budget when it was heresy. Labels don’t fit, ladies and gentlemen. Now, when it comes to the issue of the environment, this is one of the worst administrations in modern history. The Clear Skies bill that he just talked about, it’s one of those Orwellian names you pull out of the sky, slap it onto something, like ‘No Child Left Behind’ but you leave millions of children behind. Here they’re leaving the skies and the environment behind. If they just left the Clean Air Act all alone the way it is today, no change, the air would be cleaner that it is if you pass the Clear Skies Act. We’re going backwards. In fact, his environmental enforcement chief air-quality person at the EPA resigned in protest over what they’re doing to what are calling the new source performance standards for air quality. They’re going backwards on the definition for wetlands. They’re going backwards on the water quality. They pulled out of the global warming, declared it dead, didn’t even accept the science. I’m going to be a president who believes in science” (Debate 2).

There isn’t much here to critique, which may be the point of the sound bite format sponsored by The Commission on Presidential Debates, but it seems that Senator Kerry would bring the U.S. back to the world table to discuss the Kyoto Protocol. Unfortunately, it may be a little late for the U.S. to save its face on this one. If you haven’t heard, it seems very likely that Russia will soon ratify the Protocol which will give it enough international support to make it international law. The phrase “better late than never comes to mind.” Kerry also recognizes that the Clear Skies Act is just that, an “act.” Many environmental experts note that it will allow much more mercury to be emitted into the atmosphere than allowed currently by the current Clean Air Act. So much for “clean skies.”

Okay, enough of the rhetoric. More important than words are actions. So what are the environmental records of the candidates? The most comprehensive look at congressional and presidential records on the environment is compiled



by the League of Conservation Voters (LCV, [www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org)), a non-partisan organization that has been producing detailed analyses of this kind since the 1970s. Recent LCV reports have much to contribute to any evaluation of the candidates. President Bush received a D- from the LCV after his first year in office and an F after three years of his administration. This F was the first given by LCV to a president. According to the LCV, Bush’s F in environment is deserved because his administration “demonstrates a clear bias toward interests of the oil industry, the utility industry and other corporate contributors at the expense of the health and safety of the public.” The 2003 LCV report goes on to say, “In contrast to the frontal assault on environmental laws and regulations waged by anti-environmental predecessors such as President Reagan, President George W. Bush and his administration have waged a subtler, broader and more ominous campaign using deceptive rhetoric, arcane procedural methods, and funding cuts to carry out an anti-environment, pro-corporate agenda. This ‘starve-and-strangle’ approach had administration officials gradually and steadily slashing budgets for key environmental programs. At the same time, deceptively named proposals such as the ‘Healthy Forests’ initiative and the ‘Clear Skies’ proposal would allow logging companies and electric utilities to increase their profits at the expense of environmental protection and the public’s health” (LCV 2003). (The LCV also produced an extremely informative 82 page 2004 Presidential Candidate Profiles Report that reviews in depth most of the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. It is downloadable at LCV’s website.)

So what about John Kerry’s environmental record? According to the LCV, Kerry’s voting record was consistent with environmental protection and safety 96% of the time during his 20 years of senatorial service. This 96% evaluation is also the highest rating of the nine major Democratic presidential candidates. (John Edwards, Kerry’s Vice Presidential running mate has a lifetime LCV rating of 76%, although he has slipped some, as has Kerry, in the most recent congressional session.) LCV has the following to say about Kerry’s environmental record, “Senator Kerry is one of America’s premier environmental leaders. . . . he has taken a leadership role in promoting higher fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks, combating attempts to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and in overturning efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act. . . . His record on international issues is equally distinguished: he sponsored legislation to incorporate environmental protections into trade negotiations and has participated in international climate

change negotiations."

Given the stark contrast in remarks of the LCV, it is essential to look elsewhere for feedback on the candidates' records on the environment. However, when we do, we hear much of the same from most of the leading environmental organizations. The National Resource Defense Fund (NRDC; www.nrdc.org) produced a report entitled, "The Bush Record," which outlines policies that have been suggested or passed during President G.W. Bush's tenure. Among the hundreds of items mentioned, we find out that: (1) the Superfund program has been underfunded by more than \$300 million per year since 2001; (2) The EPA "quietly reversed a long-standing environmental safeguard by lifting a 25-year old ban on the sale of land contaminated with cancer-causing PCBs"; (3) The "Healthy Forests" Initiative, that President Bush praises so highly, is really an exploitation of "people's fear of fire to promote commercial logging in backcountry forest—which may even promote fire—rather than 'thinning' trees and clearing brush around peoples homes, as experts recommend"; and, (4) The Farm Bill that President Bush speaks of will only use \$9 billion of its \$40 billion to "address conservation, with the rest funding environmentally damaging policies and subsidizing polluting corporate factory farms." Lawyers of EarthRights International, a human rights and environmental organization, note that, "The [Bush] Administration has previously argued in court that those who aid and abet terrorists can be sued. But to protect narrow business interests, they now say that those that aid and abet crimes against humanity [here referring to Unocal for its involvement in the use of workers in slave-like conditions to build a pipeline in Burma] should be immune" (ER). On rare occasion, on the other hand, we find environmental organizations praising the president. Such was the case when, in 2003, The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org) applauded President Bush for his support of The Forest Legacy projects whose main focus is conservation of land.

Both the President and Political Committee Chair of one of the most influential environmental organizations, the Sierra Club, recently had this to say about Senator Kerry, "On basically every issue John Kerry has long been in agreement with the Club. By any objective evaluation of the issues, Senator Kerry has been with us, and with the environment, more than 95% of the time over his long career. His is a long, consistent record of environmental advocacy. In fact, John Kerry has the highest lifetime rating of any nominee every from a major party—it is not even close" (Fahn & Taylor). The American Lands Alliance has offered similar comments about Kerry's environmental record.

What are people saying about these two candidates and their dedication to the environment? Russell Train, a Republican and former EPA chief under presidents Nixon and Ford, is "deeply disturbed" by President Bush, saying, "It's almost as if the motto of the administration in power today in Washington is not environmental protection but polluter protection." Train continues, calling the Bush record "appalling, with very, very few exceptions," and additionally referring to the Bush's policies as "geared to rolling back environmental protections" (in Stetson). In 2002, Senator James Jeffords, an Independent and chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said the following in reaction to Bush's policies on the environment, "President Bush insists on moving us backward, undoing his father's legacy and weakening our nation's environmental laws" (CNN). Jeffords goes on to point out that the Bush Administration had "woefully

underfunded" the Superfund program and that the newly formed Homeland Security Department would "make it more difficult for the public to get information about dangerous chemicals that may exist near their homes" (CNN). And perhaps most critical, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., senior attorney for the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) recently wrote, "George W. Bush and his court are treating our country as a grab bag for the robber barons, doling out the commons to giant polluters. Together they are cashing in our air, water, aquifers, wildlife, and public lands and divvying up the loot" (Kennedy). Yet perhaps the most revealing commentary about the Bush Administration came from none other than the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, one of the U.S.'s main supporters of the Iraqi Invasion. Just last month, Mr. Blair said, "Unchecked climate change has the potential to be catastrophic in both human and economic terms." He also said, "This [climate change] is a serious issue and it is going to get worse . . . because every year we are piling more greenhouse gases in to the atmosphere . . . There are whole communities that are going to be affected. The time to act is now" (PM). These sentiments are very much at odds with the Bush Administration's unwillingness to enter into international negotiations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Prime Minister Blair has suggested that the will must be found to take a firm stance on this matter. One can, thus, safely conclude that one of the U.S.'s strongest allies has a very different take than President Bush on one of the more pressing environmental matters of our time.

With regard to Senator Kerry's environmental record, it was difficult to find commentary from specific individuals, others than the ones attached to the various organizations mentioned above. I think this is largely a function of the media's emphasis on other issues—national defense & security, health care, and the economy. An attempt to find criticisms of Kerry's positions on the environment came up empty except for specific members of the Bush administration. One such commentary is particularly revealing in its deviation from the evidence already presented. According to Christine Todd Whitman, President Bush's first EPA administrator, states, "I question where John Kerry has been in recent years when environment issues have been debated. Kerry's silence was notable when the Clinton administration failed to act on mercury emissions from power plants. . . . Kerry calls the environment a top priority, yet he missed the vote on Healthy Forests legislation. Kerry also blocked the president's Energy Bill" (Chen & Rainey). Clearly, differences exist between the candidates as it relates to their environmental platforms.

In the end, readers should use this presentation as a guide and not a final word on the environmental history, and anticipated future, of President Bush and Senator Kerry. A more informed citizenry is essential to the maintenance of a true democracy. Please get out and vote next week.

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Peter Schwartzman is chair of the Environmental Studies Program and associate professor at Knox College. He is a research climatologist with peer-reviewed publications in the area of climate change and human population growth. He is currently writing two books which will attempt to communicate environmental understanding to a broad audience.

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## GENERAL ELECTION

Notice is hereby given that a GENERAL ELECTION will be held at the regularly established polling places from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the City of Galesburg, County of Knox on Tuesday, November 2, 2004:

#### Precinct

- 1..... Hawthorne Center Gym, 2265 Veterans Dr.
- 2..... First Church of God, 1080 Harrison St.
- 3..... First Church of God, 1080 Harrison St.
- 4..... First Church of God, 1080 Harrison St.
- 5..... Hawthorne Center Gym, 2265 Veterans Dr.
- 6..... O.A.K.S. (Farnham School), 176 N. Farnham St.
- 7..... C.U.S.D. #205 Board of Education Offices, 285 S. Farnham St.
- 8..... O.A.K.S. (Farnham School), 176 N. Farnham St.
- 9..... C.U.S.D. #205 Board of Education Offices, 285 S. Farnham St.
- 10..... Faith United Methodist Church, Knox & Day Sts.
- 11..... VFW Veterans Center, 1001 Michigan Ave.
- 12..... Faith United Methodist Church, Knox & Day Sts.
- 13..... VFW Veterans Center, 1001 Michigan Ave.
- 14..... Corpus Christi Center, 273 S. Prairie St.
- 15..... Corpus Christi Center, 273 S. Prairie St.
- 16..... United Steel Workers Hall, 679 W. Second St.
- 17..... United Steel Workers Hall, 679 W. Second St.
- 18..... Corpus Christi Center, 273 S. Prairie St.
- 19..... Illinois National Guard Armory, 149 N. Broad St.
- 20..... Illinois National Guard Armory, 149 N. Broad St.
- 21..... Bethel Baptist Church, 1196 N. Academy St.
- 22..... Emmanuel Methodist Church, 746 Hawkinson Ave.
- 23..... Knox County Health Department, 1361 W. Fremont St.
- 24..... Community of Christ Church, 405 N. Pleasant Ave.
- 25..... Emmanuel Methodist Church, 746 Hawkinson Ave.
- 26..... Community of Christ Church, 405 N. Pleasant Ave.
- 27..... Bethel Baptist Church, 1196 N. Academy St.
- 28..... Costa Primary School Gym, 2401 N. Broad St.
- 29..... Knox County Health Department, 1361 W. Fremont St.
- 30..... Bethel Baptist Church, 1196 N. Academy St.
- 31..... Costa Primary School Gym, 2401 N. Broad St.

Dated at Galesburg, Illinois  
 this 28th day of October, 2004  
 Kathryn Bradford, Executive Director  
 Galesburg Board of Election Commissioners