

Where to From Here:

**Reflections on the Global Environmental
Condition and the Presidential Election**

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Center for Environmental Studies**

Class of 1960 Lecture

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It is a pleasure to be here this evening and a special pleasure to be somewhere where “W” doesn’t mean “Dubya!!”

And what a treat to be introduced by the great George Wislocki, not only a wonderful friend of some 20 years but a mentor and role model as well. For 37 years George Wislocki led the effort to make the “Beautiful Berkshires” ever more beautiful – from pulling appliances out of the Housatonic to protecting the sacred land of Mt. Greylock, from providing the political impetus to bring GE to their knees in Pittsfield to saving dozens of family farms and thousand of acres of open space from the developers’ bulldozers, George has done it all. He is a true environmental hero. When he joined BNRC in the early 60’s there were only a handful of land trusts in the country; today there are hundreds, modeled and built on the success of BNRC. For that, all of the citizens of Berkshire County and indeed citizens across the country are eternally grateful. Thank you George.

I also want to acknowledge the presence of my friend Gige Darey of Lenox, the Chair of the Board of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife. He and George are the Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid of environmentalists in the Commonwealth. They are very good at what they do and they have a heckuva good time doing it. Thanks to you both.

You are an important group, more important than perhaps you may realize. What the environmental movement needs right now is passion – the kind of passion that comes from the conviction of knowing our cause is just; passion that is founded on knowledge, science and common sense, but passion that is fueled by a moral imperative: to leave this world a better place than it was left to us.

Not everyone cares about environmental issues. Very few think as much about them as you do. And fewer still have the knowledge and commitment and passion to do something about them. The health of our environment and the sustainability of our planet is in many ways the province of industrialists and politicians – those who pollute and those who regulate. It is the rare industrialist who looks beyond the next annual earnings statement. And it rarer still to find a politician who looks beyond the next election. But as environmentalists we recognize that we have both an opportunity and an obligation – especially the young people here – to look beyond the shouting present to the whispering future. And that is why

it is an honor to be asked to speak to you tonight for that is exactly what the Center of Environmental Studies has been doing here since 1967.

Carried forward by great leaders like Tom Jorling and Nan Jenks-Jay and now by Hank and Sarah; and demonstrated in full flower in the knowledge and enthusiasm of the students I had the pleasure of meeting with earlier today, you are indeed making an important and lasting contribution in your mission to prepare the next generation of leaders to do a better job than we have. Thank you for that and thank you for the invitation to speak to you.

I will speak tonight of two matters – one, the state of our environment here at home and globally and two, the state of our political condition. The two are inextricably linked and I am sad to say I believe each is in a very troubled and sorry state. I will conclude with some thoughts as to how we might improve upon the current situation.

The environmental movement is arguably the most successful political movement of our lifetime. It began in essence with the first Earth Day in 1970 when I was the age of the students in this room. In the time since, we have cut the 6 principal air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act by more than half. And for those who offer the false choice of economy or the environment it is worth noting that we have done this while our economy grew by 176%.

We banned leaded gasoline and now children have dramatically lower lead levels in their blood.

We passed the Endangered Species Act and the bald eagle and the Florida alligator and the gray wolf and brown pelican have rebounded.

In 1970 our waterways were so polluted Lake Erie was declared dead and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River was catching fire; the Clean Water Act cleaned them up.

The Safe Drinking Water Act has given us the safest drinking water in the industrialized world. Citizens took to the streets; courageous lawmakers passed laws; tough regulators enforced them. The work was not always done perfectly nor well but by and large citizens and lawmakers and regulators acted, and the world is a better place for it. We can take

great pride in that success. But it is cold comfort indeed when one faces the harsh reality of our current condition. Let's examine it.

Largely because of coal burning mid-western power plants that the Bush administration has excused from complying with the Clean Air Act, here in Berkshire County and in every county in every Northeastern state we cannot eat the fish caught in lakes and streams – too much mercury.

One in six American women have lead levels in their blood high enough to put their babies at risk.

More than 100,000 toxic waste sites in this country are going unattended, threatening the health and vitality of thousands of communities.

Here's just one story from just one of those sites. It is from last week's Washington Post. It tells us everything we need to know about the strangle-and-starve environmental policies of our nation's current political leadership. Dateline: Omaha. Site: The Omaha Lead Superfund Site. (Excerpts from Washington Post 11/25/04 – Juliet Eilperin.) That story is repeated every day in countless communities across the country.

Nowhere is the stark and threatening reality of the current state of our environment more pronounced and alarming than the global climate and its changing condition. Let me summarize the evidence:

- The 10 warmest years on record have all occurred in the last 13 years.
- The current climate change models suggest that by 2040 at least one year in two is likely to be even warmer still.
- The number of people affected by floods worldwide has risen from 7 million in the 1960's to 150 million today.
- And sea levels keep rising. The scientists forecast further rising over the rest of this century. If they are correct, 100 million more people from Bangladesh to South Florida will be environmental refugees.

The scientific community is unambiguous – the planet is warming; industrial activity is contributing to it; and we are fast approaching a point of no return. If they are right, then unabated it will result in catastrophic

consequences – catastrophic – for our world. I am not a doomsayer by nature. I am in fact an optimist. But there is no issue that requires more clear-eyed focus and urgent attention than climate change.

Virtually every day in some corner of the world we see the consequences of not doing so:

- In Europe more than 75,000 people lost their lives in the 2003 heat wave; 43% of all bird species are threatened - starlings, sparrows, buntings and warblers all declining at alarming rates.
- In London the number of times the dams are operated to control flooding from the Thames River is increasing exponentially.
- In Alaska where everything is built on permafrost across the state we now see buildings collapsing and pipelines buckling as the permafrost melts. Entire villages on the state's Northeastern coastline are being washed away by larger and more unpredictable ice-free sea.
- In Antarctica, where 95% of the world's fresh water is locked in ice, we now have pieces of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet the size of Rhode Island falling off all the time. Just last month NASA released data documenting the dramatic acceleration of this trend and the measurable impact it is having on sea levels.
- The scientific community was amazed two years ago when the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf – the largest in the Arctic – cracked in half. Now each year, with torrents of water rushing off of its glaciers, it is losing far more than it is gaining.
- For 40 years the Navy has been keeping records of the depth of the Arctic Ice Pack. In that time it has thinned by 40%; within 50 years they predict that in summertime it will be completely gone.

And the indisputable truth is that this process is accelerating. When the sun's rays hit ice, 90% of the energy bounces off. But when it hits water, 90% is absorbed, further accelerating the melting and the sea level rise and all that goes with it

And now just in the past few months consensus has formed in the scientific community that as global warming increases the ocean water temperature, wind velocity and moisture content go up as well. That's what happened in Florida this year. They are now finding that these more frequent storm events are more powerful as well - on average a half-step more powerful – than in the past. A Category 3 is now a 3.5; a Category 4, a 4.5.

Prime Minister Tony Blair summarized the emerging science well in remarks delivered earlier this fall: “Greenhouse gas emissions...are causing global warming at a rate that began as significant, has become alarming and is simply unsustainable in the long term. And by long-term I do not mean centuries,” Blair said. “I mean in the life-time of my children certainly; and possibly within my own.” “And by unsustainable,” he added, “I do not mean a phenomenon causing problems of adjustment. I mean a challenge so far-reaching in its impact and irreversible in its destructive power, that it alters radically human existence.”

This isn't some crackpot. This is the head of a major nation summarizing the consensus opinion of the world's foremost scientists. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the world's 1200 foremost climatologists and atmospheric scientists – are near unanimous in their prediction that absent dramatic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions we will experience a two to five degree increase in the earth's temperature over the next 50-100 years. When you reflect on the fact that at the time of the last Ice Age the earth's temperature was on average only 5 degrees colder than it is today you see how serious the problem is.

Let me ask you a question: How many of you or your parents own your own homes? Of those with your hands up put them down if those homes are insured against fire. Exactly. Everyone has fire insurance on his or her home. You have it not because you expect your house will burn down. You don't even think that is likely. But nevertheless, on the off chance that it might, you have a fire insurance policy to guard against the possibility of catastrophic consequence if it does.

Maybe the IPCC is wrong; maybe the world's foremost scientists on this matter are off the mark. But on the off-chance that they are right shouldn't we have the equivalent of a fire insurance policy for our planet – more ambitious energy conservation programs, accelerated R&D for clean

energy technologies, a tax system that creates incentives and rewards for renewable energy. It should be a no-brainer. But to date, at least in this country, our leaders choose to blindly ignore the potential doom that may lie ahead as events carry us dangerously close to a house afire.

Dealing with this issue politically is complicated by two factors. One, to avoid possible catastrophe we have to take steps now before the full effect of climate change is felt. Political action, of course, almost always comes after a problem is fully upon us, not in advance.

Further complicating political action on climate change is the belief of many that the earth is so big that we cannot possibly have any life altering effect on it. Al Gore illustrates the folly of this thinking well in his remarks on climate change when he references Mark Twain. “What gets us into trouble is not what we don’t know; it’s what we know for sure that just ain’t so,” Twain said. And as Vice President Gore and the IPCC and so many others who have studied this issue know it just “ain’t so” that our impacts on the earth are not felt. But public opinion has yet to catch up to scientific knowledge. That’s a political problem.

The second fundamental complication is that no one nation alone can resolve the problem alone. It requires international action – commonly agreed to, commonly complied with. This too is difficult to achieve.

Nevertheless much of the world community is responding:

- Blair’s Britain has cut greenhouse gas emissions by 15% since 1990 and has committed to slashing emissions a further 60% by 2050. The Prime Minister has made this issue the top agenda item for the G8 summit he will host next year.
- Holland has committed to an 80% cut over 40 years; Germany 50% over 50 years.
- Russia has now ratified the Kyoto Treaty and even China has adopted fuel economy standards that are significantly tougher than our own.

The political response here at home, of course, has been quite different. “Nature to be commanded, must be obeyed,” Francis Bacon said more than 400 years ago. But our leaders, rather than obeying nature, seem to flaunt it. You have heard Jerry Garcia’s refrain: “Denial ain’t just a river

in Egypt.” But denial is what we are getting. Our leaders, rather than accepting sound science choose to ignore it or repress it.

Our leaders, rather than taking steps to address the problem, are going 180 degrees in the opposite direction, acting in ways that will surely worsen it – isolating us in the world community by refusing to engage in meaningful international dialogue, let alone sign Kyoto; by backing away from agreements made by the first President Bush in 1992 as part of the Framework Agreement on Climate Change; by rejecting the 2003 UN Sustainable Development Agreement; and here at home not only failing to institute reductions in CO2 emissions but advancing an energy plan that, if allowed to stand, will actually increase emissions by 30% over 1990 levels.

This is an outrage. This is an unethical – deeply unethical – policy. This is an immoral – deeply immoral – abdication of responsibility for future generations. It is profoundly disturbing. And it is part of a pattern of a short-term, special interest oriented set of policies that this President and the Congressional majority have not confined to environmental matters.

- They’ve turned a \$2 trillion surplus into \$5 trillion of debt.
- Before the end of this administration the first of my generation - the baby boomers – will retire, beginning a demographic wave that threatens to overwhelm the nation’s finances. Social Security alone faces a \$5.2 trillion funding gap. And one of the President’s top legislative priorities for the new Congress is to allow younger workers to divert dollars that are intended for today’s retirees to their own accounts. The way to pay for it is what they call “transitional financing” which is a nice way of saying they are going to borrow another one to two trillion dollars.
- Medicare – the 60 year old program designed to make sure that you and your parents and grandparents have decent health care in the golden years – faces a staggering \$28 trillion deficit.
- Forty-five million Americans in this country count on an obscure but important Federal agency – the Pension Guaranty

Finance Board – to insure that their pensions will be there throughout their retirement. Employers pay insurance premiums to the agency and if an employer can no longer support its pension plan – think airlines, the agency takes over the assets and liabilities and pays promised benefits. At the end of September the Board announced that they face a \$23 Billion deficit, twice what it was just a year ago.

In virtually every measure of fiscal policy this administration has put tax cuts for the rich and short-term financial gain for the haves ahead of the long-term financial security of us all. Like J. Wellington Wimpy in the Popeye cartoons, they “will gladly pay you tomorrow for a hamburger today.” The young people in this hall and those who follow will pay a mighty price for those hamburgers. And you will pay a mighty price for the tomorrow-be-damned environmental policies of this administration as well.

I can say without fear of contradiction that George Bush has been the worst President for our environment in the history of our country – bar none. His agenda is not conservative; it is radical – truly radical; and as Vice President Gore has described it, it is “breathtakingly irresponsible in its willingness to ignore the future consequences of its actions.” One hardly knows where to begin to prove the point.

- According to the Natural Resources Defense Council there have been 430 major environmental rollbacks at EPA alone.
- Enforcement actions against polluters have dropped 58% since the Clinton administration; one in eight enforcement positions eliminated in the last 4 years.
- In only 3 years, one-tenth of the nation’s surface – 234 million acres – has been stripped of the environmental designations that protected these lands from exploitation.
- This is an administration that is the first in history to not voluntarily list a single species as endangered or threatened; that disbanded the Fish and Wildlife Department’s oldest scientific advisory committee in order to halt the protection of desert fish in Arizona and New Mexico that are headed for

extinction; that forced National Marine Fisheries scientists to alter findings on the amount of water required for the survival of salmon in Oregon's Klamath River so that large corporate farms could get a bigger share of river water.

- One of the bedrock principles of modern environmental law is the polluter pays principle. If you polluted it, you should pay to clean it up. For more than 20 years that has been the foundation of the Superfund program. Presidents Reagan, Bush the first, and Clinton all accepted this principle; in their budget proposals all extended the tax on polluters that funds Superfund. But not this administration and their lap dogs in the Congress. The oil and gas boys and the chemical companies found the tax burdensome. And so, while in 1995 average taxpayers paid only 18% of the cost of cleaning up abandoned toxic waste sites, this year the taxpayers will foot the entire bill for what little is left of the program.
- They're even making a mockery of the English language – "Healthy Forests" means more logging roads, sweeter subsidies to timber companies, less regulation of ecological impacts; "Clear Skies" means repealing and replacing health protections in the current law with standards that are, at best, incomplete and deferred.

There is no reason to think that things will change in a second term. EPA Administrator Levitt opined that the election was a "validation of our philosophy and our agenda." Hard to fathom given that the environment was barely on the national electoral screen.

We find no comfort in the Congress. They have initiated or endorsed every one of the retreats and rollbacks that I have cited and hundreds more.

Emboldened by their election success, in their first order of business after the election House Republicans changed the rules to allow Majority Leader Tom DeLay to keep his post even if, as is likely, he is indicted, as three of his political associates have been, for illegal use of campaign funds. Mr. DeLay – the man who once called the nation's most generous environmental philanthropist, Theresa Heinz Kerry, an "environmental communist" – was, as you may know, a rodent exterminator in his native

state of Texas before coming to Congress, proving yet again that fact is stranger than fiction.

And in the Senate the hope for bi-partisan support for environmental initiatives is distant at best. The most significant environmental legislation before them at this time is the energy bill. They've locked the Democrats out of the Committee rooms while majority staff and industry lobbyists deliberate and draft.

So here we are at the dawn of a new century. Enormous – unsustainable – debt is being laden on the backs of future generations. Our global climate is changing suddenly, abruptly, dramatically. And with that change the world's foremost scientists warn not of lifestyle inconvenience but of the very future of life on our planet. Our political leaders – beholden to special interests and their campaign contributions and those of their lobbyists – are, in a fundamental sense, corrupt.

I said at the outset that I was an optimist. But all of this does bring to mind Woody Allen's mournful lament. "Never has the world faced greater choices," Woody said. "We are at a fork in the road. Down one path is utter despair and hopelessness; down the other, total extinction. Let us choose wisely."

Choosing wisely is what I would like to turn to in my remaining time this evening. Let me put forth what I believe are the two most important things the environmental community can do to help right the ship and steer a safer, saner, more sustainable course.

The first is to become fully engaged in serious, meaningful efforts for campaign finance reform. The single most important **environmental** bill we could pass in this country is, without exception, campaign finance reform. Unless and until we limit the influence of special interest money in our elections the public interest and the environmental interest will lose out virtually every time.

It was no accident that within months of President Bush assuming office EPA dropped the Clinton administration's prosecution of air quality violations at 75 mostly coal-burning power plants. The industry had contributed more than \$50 million to the election campaign. That bought them access – their lobbyists, the former and then future Chairs of the

Republican party – pled their case with Vice President Cheney and, on seven separate occasions in six months, with the Deputy Secretary of Energy, himself a former energy industry official. And that bought them results – EPA got rolled, the suits were dropped, three senior enforcement officials resigned in protest, the industry saved hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars, and today the rest of us are breathing dirtier air.

That little boy in Omaha Nebraska from the Washington Post story, Elam Jacob, is one of tens of thousands of victims of the special interest influence. A few million in campaign contributions to the President and key members of Congress has saved the oil and chemical companies more than a billion dollars a year in Superfund taxes. Meanwhile, the program that is there to protect the Elam Jacobs of the country sputters and stalls.

Mercifully the administration’s energy bill before the Congress in this session did not pass. But it is likely to in the next. The Boston Globe has called it “a phonebook-sized symbol of modern Washington lawmaking.” The Globe’s analysis disclosed that “entities with a stated interest in energy policy spent \$387,830,286 lobbying Washington last year” alone – nearly \$400 million! And it is an investment that was amply rewarded in the bill. Two among dozens of examples:

- Southern Company spent \$800,000 on lobbying costs to relax regulations on the emissions of mercury. This provision made it into the bill and, if passed, will save the US power industry \$2.7 billion.
- The American Petroleum Industry met with Vice President Cheney’s Energy task force behind closed doors on at least six occasions and spent over \$3 million in lobbying. The result: billions in tax breaks for the industry found their way into the legislation.

And so I would suggest that being a leading voice for getting the special interest money out of our political system – or at the very least dramatically reducing it – is job #1 for the environmental community. Reform boils down to two basic elements:

- One, free air time for credible candidates; virtually all campaign contributions now go to TV advertising on **public**

airwaves, some \$3.8 Billion in this election alone. As a condition of licensure, the FCC should require each broadcaster to contribute free of charge a specified number of hours for candidate messages.

- Two, public financing of candidates who through signatures on nominating petitions and small contributions from individual donors demonstrate a reasonable and credible base of support. In Maine and Arizona and several states in between the sparks of this reform have been lit. We need to help spread them like a prairie fire across the country.

The second initiative I want to recommend for your consideration is equally obvious and even more difficult to achieve. It too is political in nature. It is the simple proposition that we need to reach beyond our traditional allies and build a far broader coalition of support for a progressive environmental agenda. Our “special interest” must become the “special interest” of those who do not necessarily think of themselves as environmentalists.

Our agenda is hugely popular with the electorate. Polling data consistently shows that the overwhelming majority of the American public cares deeply about the environment. 75% - Republicans and Democrats alike – want stricter environmental laws and they want them enforced. Only 7% think they should be weaker. The Republicans know this. In a March 2003 memo to Republican leadership pollster Frank Luntz wrote, “the environment is probably the single issue on which Republicans in general and President Bush in particular are most vulnerable. Not only do we risk losing the swing vote, but our suburban female base could abandon us as well.”

Progressive environmentalists have not capitalized on this opportunity. And one critical reason why is because we are so convinced of our wisdom and the morality of our positions that we have not sought to forge common cause with those outside our community. We spend too much time talking to ourselves and not enough time bringing other powerful constituencies into the fold. It should be noted that in this election we did a much better job of this than in the past, largely through the grass roots voter efforts of the Apollo Alliance, a coalition of 17 environmental and labor organizations – labor organizations that

understand that solar panels mean jobs for electricians and sheet metal workers; that clean coal technology is good for mine workers; that a healthier planet is a healthier planet for their members and their families as well. Labor unions that understand that it was an environmental **and** labor coalition that got fuel efficiency standards through the Congress in the first place but that until this election we had allowed that coalition to wither.

We need to build on the efforts of the Apollo Alliance, Environment 2004, the Sierra Club and others who sought to forge multi-constituent coalitions on behalf of the environment in this past election. There are many places to do so. Let me suggest four, on first blush, not-so-immediately-obvious places to start – accountants, insurers, business executives, and the religious right. None is considered part of the environmental community yet each can, and in their own self-interest, should be.

First, accountants – there are tens of thousands of them and they are all familiar with Regulation S-K, Item 103 of the SEC regulations. It requires disclosure of environmental matters material to the financial condition of public companies. The SEC has found a 74% underreporting rate. This is an obscure but important issue. Public disclosure inevitably leads to action – by customers, sometimes by regulators, and almost always by investors and shareholders. Thanks to the work of CERES, state treasurers from New York to California and many places in between – representing, along with their union allies, more than \$800 billion in pension fund assets – are pushing the SEC to enforce Regulation S-K. This is good for the accounting industry – it means more work and greater professional liability protection for them and it is good for us because disclosure of the financial risks associated with climate change and other potentially material environmental liabilities creates an important leverage point for action.

Secondly, insurers. No one is going to pay a steeper financial price if the estimates of global climate change impacts prove accurate – literally billions of dollars in losses. Swiss Re is starting to do something about it pressing companies to plan for the possible effects of warming. But few have followed their lead. 80% of CEO's in a Swiss Re survey thought climate change was a risk but only 40% were doing anything about it. And even that, I suspect, is high. As Swiss Re's Christopher Walker said "that's

not good news for insurers.” Indeed it isn’t but it does represent another self-interested ally to engage on our side in the battle.

Thirdly, business executives. Big ones, fat cats, rich daddies, titans – we need them all. A few are stepping from the shadows to lead, seeing smart, sustainable environmental and energy policies as business opportunities rather than regulatory chores. In what Dan Becker of the Sierra Club termed “a stunning change of direction,” Ford executives disclosed this summer that Chairman Bill Ford has set a goal of 80% improvement in fuel economy by 2030. The nation’s second largest automaker will take a step forward in its efforts this January when it starts national sales of the gasoline-electric hybrid the Escape SUV with production plans for 20,000 next year – all of which have been pre-sold to consumers looking for both performance and cleaner vehicles. Ford is seven years behind Toyota which introduced a gasoline- electric hybrid seven years ago and Honda which began hybrid sales two years later. Time will tell whether Ford is “built tough” on the environment, but it is a start. Dupont gets it; they’ve cut greenhouse gas emissions to 65% below 1990 levels. Lord Browne, the chair of BP, the world’s second largest oil company, gets it. He saw the light in 1997 when he adopted the Kyoto reduction targets for his own company. BP met its target eight years ahead of schedule. Here’s what most impressed Lord Browne: “We met it at no net cost because the savings from reduced energy inputs and efficiencies outweighed the expenditures.”

I am not naive. I recognize that profit invariably comes before principle for too many executives. Today is the 20th anniversary of the explosion of Union Carbide’s pesticides plant in Bhopal, India. Families woke up in the middle of the night with their eyes and lungs burning and fled their homes. Before it was over five thousand were dead and half a million were injured. Today, twenty years later, the factory site, now owned by Dow Chemical, remains essentially the same as the day the citizens of Bhopal ran for their lives. “Sacks of unused pesticides lie strewn in storerooms,” Gary Cohen of the Environmental Health Fund writes. “Toxic waste litters the grounds and leaks into the neighborhood water supply.” So I am not naïve about our need to keep the heat on. But I believe we also need to make a greater effort to not simply vilify the bad guys but to join forces with the good ones. Their voices – in chorus with our own – can do much to influence decisions from corporate boardrooms to Congressional hearing rooms.

Finally, the religious right. I personally find much of their agenda abhorrent. But if ever there were a constituency who ought to not only care about our agenda but to champion it, it is the religious right. Here too I do not believe I am naïve. To be sure much of the so-called “religious right” is more “right” than “religious,” more political than moral. At its best their agenda can be described as narrowly limited to social conservatism; at its worst it is a broad denial of fundamental civil rights. The devotees of Tim LeHaye’s apocalyptic “Left Behind” series, which the theologian Barbara Rossing has said “invites a selfish non-concern for the world,” are not likely to be our allies anytime soon. But in truth there are thousands of other religious organizations in this country who not only advance a progressive and tolerant agenda for social service but who are also working at the grass roots, community level to advance the material and social justice interests and dreams of tens of millions of Americans. These are organizations that are politically engaged. But few of them are engaged in advancing a progressive environmental agenda founded on moral values of respect and care for the natural world created by a Higher Being.

Is there any greater moral obligation than to pass a safe and healthy world on to our children and their children’s children and all who follow? “Open, O Lord, the eyes of the people to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they may honor thee with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty.” That passage is from the Prayers of the People in the Episcopal service. But the moral imperative of stewardship forms a bedrock in all religions. The Torah teaches us the lesson of the inviolability of nature. The Buddhist doctrines of karma and rebirth going back over 2500 years reject the dominance of humans over nature and are founded on empathy for all forms of life.

When fundamentalist Christians attend Sunday services they are as likely to hear their pastor quote Genesis – “the earth is the Lord’s... and the Eternal placed the human being here to till and guard it” - as they are to open their hymnals and in full voice sing, “All things bright and beautiful; all creatures great and small; the Lord God made them all.” It is a special Sunday for me when we have the good fortune in church to open our hymnals and sing Katherine Lee Bates’s wonderful anthem written in 1893 as she stood atop Pikes Peak: “O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain. America! America! God shed his grace on thee.” Sunday after

Sunday Christians hear through scripture and hymn that the Lord's beauty flows in every stream and that in every breeze his spirit blows the breath of life; that "the God of Nature and of Grace in all his Work appears."

For all of us – whether we choose to worship a Higher Being or not; whether through organized religion or spiritual reflection – we know in our hearts that what we as a society are doing to America the Beautiful and the lives of future generations is in fundamental and profound ways immoral. And the so-called "Moral Majority" is a constituency that should understand that.

Imagine the force of tens of thousands of letters and e-mails flooding the Congress from a newly engaged religion-based constituency in support of increased fuel efficiency standards or sane energy policy. Imagine the impact of the Christian Coalition adding an environmental litmus test for candidate endorsements based on their positions on climate change or mercury reduction or any of a host of other issues where there is both an environmental and moral imperative for action. There is common cause there. We need to seize it.

So that is my prescription for what ails us – get the money out of environmental politics and get the accountants and business leaders and insurers and investors... and God – or the Higher Being of your choice – into it. I tried to summarize the case for why I believe these are tough times for American democracy and for our financial stability and environmental security. Nevertheless I remain optimistic. I think there will be a backlash against the corruption and rampant irresponsibility that pervades Washington. I think those constituencies can be won over – leader by leader, company by company, house of worship by house of worship.

There were even some silver linings in the election last month. Virtually in every case when voters had a chance to vote on environmental matters they did the right thing. In Colorado, advancing renewable energy; in Montana, in the face of heavy industry lobbying, tightening pollution standards on the mining industry; and in Red States and Blue States alike voters appropriated \$2.5 billion dollars – money out of their own pockets – to protect land and open space.

I see reason for optimism in the life work of George Wislocki and George Darey and other leaders of this movement who have achieved so much.

I see cause for hope in the bright and able and eager students here at Williams and on campuses across New England that I have the privilege to visit.

A little ray of optimism and hope came to me and many others, I am sure, courtesy of the New York Times on October 9th of this year when we saw a headline that had never been written before: Nobel Peace Prize Goes To Environmentalist. In bestowing the prize to Wangari Maathai who across Africa has built a powerful women's movement through tree planting programs, Nobel Prize Committee Chairman Ole Danbolt Mjoes said, "With this award we have expanded the term 'peace' to encompass environmental questions related to our beloved earth. Peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment." For the first time in the 103-year history of the prize, peace and the environment were joined. Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt program in 1977 to organize poor women to work planting millions of trees to combat deforestation and replenish the source of fuel for cooking fires in villages. She saw that poor people were the victims not the cause of deforestation. They had no choice but to cut down the trees to farm their land and fuel their cooking fires.

It started in her backyard with a few seedlings – "seeds of peace" she called them. And it has not been an easy road. She's been clubbed by police, denounced as a subversive, jailed and worse. But she persevered. "Like a tree – steady and unbowed" is how her friends describe her. And steady and unbowed she and the Green Brigade have taken the program from her backyard across a continent, planting more than 30 million trees, building hundreds of nurseries and giving hope and purpose to the lives of thousands of women.

Dr. Maathai's work has gone beyond trees. She is now a Member of Parliament and Kenya's Assistant Minister of the Environment. I hope some of you here will go on to be elected officials and assistant ministers. That in great ways and small you will be part of this larger struggle for a healthier, more just world. And I hope and trust that as you do so you will go forth, as she has, "steady and unbowed."

