

July 20, 2022

Re: How Republicans Lost the Environment as Public Policy Leaders

Over the last century and a quarter, the United States has experienced two great spasms of conservation leadership. The first was during President Teddy Roosevelt's presidency when he built on President Benjamin Harrison's forest reserves and appointed Gifford Pinchot as his Chief Forester; and created the U.S Forest Service. Roosevelt /Pinchot together orchestrated the greatest expansion of federal conservation lands included National Forests, which quadrupled in size throughout western states, National Parks (Grand Canyon, Crater Lake, Mesa Verde) and some 50 National Wildlife Refuges, beginning with the designation of Pelican Island NWR in Florida to preserve a colony of colonial nesting shorebirds.

The second spasm of environmental leadership, which is barely acknowledged in today's demented environmental colloquies, occurred during the Nixon/Ford administrations which laid the foundation for virtually all our major environmental statutes, both institutional-read bureaucracies-and legal infrastructure. These Republican administrations passed the Clean Air, Clean Water Acts, the Endangered Species Act, and established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and laid the foundations for the Alaska National Interest Lands Act (ANILCA) the greatest modern expansion of federal conservation lands. Significantly, all the Nixon/Ford environmental legislative initiatives were strictly bi-partisan by design with both Republican and Democratic co-sponsors. Nixon anticipated Democratic challenges from Senators Scoop Jackson and Ed Muskie and deliberately sought to coopt Democratic participation to preempt Democratic capture of the environment as a national issue.

That banner of leadership and creative energy is barely acknowledged today; WHY? How did the Republican brand of conservation leadership slip below the waters like a disappearing titanic?

A sequence of events simulating a Chaplinesque fall down a staircase ensued. First, the Carter administration assumed the mantle and implementation of the Nixon/Ford accomplishments, establishing a Democratic stranglehold on the environmental movement, which flocked to the Democratic parade, and has never left. It took the Carter administration four years to finally pass ANILCA. Second, the Carter administration initiated a trend followed by every subsequent Democratic administration, of appointing environmentalists to key policy positions: Frank Gregg and Robert Herbst at Interior, Rupert Cutler at USDA, who proved to be bumblingly inept at both policy and administration. These appointments, in turn created two important follow ons of political consequence. First, their maladroit leadership spawned the Sage Brush rebellion, which Reagan opportunistically championed, and second, it made national environmental leadership slaves beholden to the Democratic Party. Blandishments through the appointment process capture constituent groups, a trend which the Biden administration has perfected to an art form.

The next step down, a lurching fall, occurred in the Reagan administration with the appointment of a three horse environmental apocalypse of James Watt as Secretary of Interior, Anne G. Burford as head

of EPA, and David Stockman as Director of OMB. Environmental leaders from the Nixon/Ford administrations made an ineffectual push back, and after a year of failed engagement essentially jumped overboard and abandoned the Republican ship of state. This included Russ Train former administration of EPA, Nathaniel Reed, former Assistant Secretary of Interior, and a host of lesser lights. The sole exception was William Ruckelshaus who stepped back into the fray after Burford's resignation to right the balance at EPA. With David Stockman's scalping of environmental budgets, Watt's sundering of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the Republican brand for environmental leadership was in free fall. The Reagan administration inaugurated a strenuous commitment to reduce the environmental movements' bureaucratic empire building and excessive handcuffing of the private sector. This focus proved a long term handicap as it prevented the roll-out of Republican alternatives as solutions for environmental problems and this trend persisted in successive Republican administrations. By the end of Reagan's presidency every national environmental organization was firmly ensconced, lock, stock, and barrel as an appendage of the Democratic party.

Bush 41 campaigned as a conservationist and there was a glimmer of promise at the onset of his administration, but then he appointed Manny Lujan as Secretary of Interior wherein Lujan lowered the bar for environmental leadership to the bottom bar, as exemplified by his querying the difference between a grey squirrel and a red squirrel-the latter proposed as an endangered species. Following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Bush was completely distracted by the Iraq war and a retrograde economy with the result that domestic initiatives, especially on the environmental front, faltered to unmentionable status. Bush did restore many of Reagan's budget cuts for conservation programs and he did critical amendments enhancing the Clean Air Act, both of these initiatives were shepherded by Bob Grady at OMB.

The Clinton years only cemented the remora-like and symbiotic affiliation of national environmental organizations to the Democratic Party. For example, my Senator, Susan Collins, who has the best environmental record in the Senate, is opposed for re-election by Maine League of Conservation Voters - not once but thrice!

Bush 43 engages in the second Iraq war, and domestic policy initiatives, including the environment get short shrift of attention and initiative. And the administration played defense on Hurricane Katrina. Bush 43 established the REPI program (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration) at DOD, one of the most successful conservation programs in the country helping to surround all our military bases with green peripheries of conservation lands.

The Obama administration arrives wearing the cloak of approval of virtually every national environmental organization and the President waves his presidential wand to protect a good portion of the North Pacific Ocean, and launches the global warming lemming parade behind chief rhodent John Kerry.

President Trump loathed by every environmental organization in America, appointed one of the most capable Secretaries of Interior, David Bernhardt, and passed the Great American Outdoors Act diverting \$1.5 billion a year to address the \$35 billion maintenance backlog of our federal land conservation agencies (NPS, USFWS, BLM, and USFS) which successive Democratic administrations ignored for four decades.

Might there be a resurrection of Republican leadership on the horizon? There is a glimmer of hope. Two republican philanthropists Trammell Crow and Andy Sabin are supporting Conserve America and The Roosevelt Conservation Caucus two Congressional organizations promoting Republican leadership on environmental issues. The next Chair of House Resources Committee is likely to be Congressman Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, the only forester in the House and a graduate of Yale Forestry School. Governor Ron DeSantis in Florida has made the environment a pillar of his administration in Florida and addressed Everglades restoration on his first day in office. DeSantis provides an exemplary model of environmental sanity and governance.

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