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## Crimes Against Nature

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# CRIMES AGAINST NATURE

ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

*This speech was presented on February 2, 2006, at St. Thomas University School of Law, as part of the Distinguished Speaker Series program.*

It is a pleasure for me to be here at St. Thomas and to see so many great legal heroes ensconced in this university, including the president and so many others. As I was signing some copies of my book *Crimes Against Nature*, it occurred to me that the word “environment” does not appear in the book. I thought I would talk about that today. To me, the environment is the most critical battle because it is the most critical issue in our democracy. Democracy, really all government, is about how we distribute the goods of the land. The best measure of how democracy functions is to assess if we distribute these goods fairly. Do we make sure that the public trust assets, the air, the water, the wandering animals, the wildlife, the public lands, which are the primary pulse for most people in our society, are maintained in the hands of all people? Or do we allow them to be consolidated by corporate power or by other power centers in our society that have political clout or covenant?

All environmental issues really are about a struggle, about the continuing ownership of the commonwealth, our public trust assets and about how those things are distributed. My book, *Crimes Against Nature*, is not so much about the environment as about the corrosive impact of excessive corporate power in a democracy. It is a critique of President Bush and his administration; but it is not a partisan book. I am not criticizing President Bush because I am a Democrat or he is a Republican. If he were a Democrat, I would still have written the same book. I have been disciplined for over twenty-two years as an environmental advocate about being bi-partisan or non-partisan in my approach to these issues. I do not think there is any such thing as Republican children or Democrat children. I think the worst thing that could happen to the environment is that it becomes the province of a single political party. However, try to honestly talk about the environment in any context today without speaking politically of this administration. This is the worst environmental White House we have had in American history. Bar none.

If you look at the National Resource Defense Council’s (“NRDC”) website – one of the groups with which I work – you will see over four-hundred major environmental rogue acts listed there. They have been

promoted or implemented by this administration over the past four years as part of a deliberate, concerted effort to eviscerate thirty years of environmental law. It is a stealth attack. The White House has really used ingenious imaginations to conceal this radical agenda from the American people, including Orwellian rhetoric. When they want to destroy the forests, they call it the "Healthy Forest Act." When they want to destroy the air, they call it the "Clear Skies Bill." Most insidiously, they put the polluters in charge of virtually all the agencies that are supposed to be protecting Americans from pollution. The head of the Forest Service is a timber industry lobbyist, Mark Rey – probably the most rapacious in our history. The head of Public Lands is a mining industry lobbyist, Steven Griles, who believes that public lands are unconstitutional. The head of the Air Division of the EPA is a utility lobbyist Jeffery Holmstead, who has represented the worst air polluters in our country during his entire career. The head of Superfund is a woman whose last job was teaching corporate polluters how to evade Superfund. The second in command at the EPA is a Monsanto lobbyist. You go on and on through all the departments of government that are relevant to the environment – the Department of Commerce, which regulates fisheries, the Department of Agriculture, Energy, Interior, even the government division of the Justice Department – and you will find the same thing. It is the polluters, the worst of the worst of these industries, who are running the agencies that are supposed to be protecting the rest of us. There is nothing wrong with having business people in government; it is a good thing if your objective is to recruit competence and expertise. But, in all of these situations, as I show in my book, these particular individuals have entered government service, not to serve the public interest, but rather to subvert the very orders that they are now charged with enforcing. They propose dramatic diminution in the quality of life of the people in our country.

Most Americans do not know about it. They do not make the connections for a couple of reasons; one is the White House's efforts to conceal the impact of these changes. Also, we have a negligent and invalid press in this country that has absolutely let down American democracy, particularly in recent years. People talk all the time about a liberal press. There is no such thing. That is the big lie. That is what Joseph Goebbels used to call the "Big Lie." There is no such thing as a liberal press in this country. There is a right wing press. Most Americans now are getting their news disproportionately from those factors. According to the Pew Foundation, thirty percent of Americans now say talk radio is their primary news source. Twenty-two percent of Americans say that their primary news source is one of three cable networks (Fox News, MSNBC, CSNBC).

Ten percent of America's primary news source is Sinclair Network, which is the largest television network in this country and it is the most right wing of all. Sinclair Network is run by a former pornographer who requires all seventy-five of his local affiliate stations to take a pledge that they will not report critically of this President. The rest of Americans are getting their news primarily from the corporate homie. They have no knowledge but of their own pocketbooks, which too often coincides with the party and power and particularly with the Republican Party.

So, we are not getting critical news. I can give you many examples from my own experience. Last year, we created an automobile advertisement that was beautifully produced, a million-dollar production, about seven million dollars to put it on TV. We went to ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN and none of them would air the ad. We were not asking for free time; we were going to pay to put it on TV. Les Moonves, the head of NBC, laughed me out of the room, saying, "you know, we have three buying offices. One is in New York, one is in L.A., and one is in Detroit. We are not going to put something on our network that is going to criticize our biggest advertiser." That ending process is taking place all the time on network news.

Most importantly, the networks no longer have any obligation to serve the public interest. That was removed by Ronald Reagan in 1988. We used to have a law in this country called the Fairness Doctrine. The Fairness Doctrine had three central requirements; one, that the networks acknowledge that the airways belong to the American people, that the broadcasters use them but only with the proviso that they use them to promote public interest and to advance American democracy. They had to, for example, air issues of public importance; this is the reason why all the networks had the six o'clock news. They did not want to put six o'clock news on because the news departments lose money for it. They would rather put entertainment in that slot. However, they were forced to do that because of the Fairness Doctrine. If they did not air that news, anybody in this country could petition the FCC to end their license. So, if they did not air important issues on the environment, like global warming or something, we could petition the FCC for their license. They lived in terror of that kind of thing. So, they put real news on TV and they put real resources into their news divisions. Last year, according to Sims News Service, only four percent of the fifteen thousand minutes of network news were devoted to the environment. Most of those stories were human-interest stories, like whales caught at sea or a tiger escapes from the zoo. They were not the kind of issues that we need to understand to make national decisions for our democracy.

The second requirement of the Fairness Doctrine was that they tell both sides of the story. You could not have Rush Limbaugh twenty-four hours a day and his ilk on the same station. That did not mean you could not have Rush. You could put him on, but they would have to put someone else on to counterbalance him.

The third requirement of the Fairness Doctrine was that they had to have local control and diversity of control to avoid corporate consolidation. Congress wanted to make sure that the people in Kansas could get crop reports, people in North Dakota could get tornado warnings, people in the South could get country music and that you were not having programming and content dictated by a couple of corporate epicenters. Well, what happened is that in 1988, Ronald Reagan abolished the Fairness Doctrine as a favor to the Christian Right that was already plotting to take over talk radio. And the big studio has not helped, as they wanted to take over all our media outlets.

As a result of that, today, there are five giant multinational corporations which own all six thousand TV stations in America, all fourteen thousand radio stations in America, eighty percent of our newspapers, all of our billboards, and most of our large Internet content providers. So there are five guys who are deciding what the rest of us hear as news. Also, the news departments have become corporate profit centers. They no longer have any obligations to serve the public interest. Their only obligation is to their shareholders. So they have gotten rid of their foreign news bureaus. You cannot get foreign news in the United States anymore without going to BBC. That is one of the reasons why we ended up in Iraq, because Americans do not understand foreign cultures.

They got rid of their investigative reporters, so people are not trying to connect the dots between the kid they see who has asthma and the whole impact of the President's policy and the effect that the power plants have and the money that comes from the power plants. No, those dots are not being connected on network TV. The networks do not have any obligations, except to their shareholders, and how do they fulfill that obligation? The networks expand viewership. Well, you do not expand viewership by explaining to the American people difficult issues such as Social Security and the budget and Medicare and the Warner Act and global warming. That turns people off. So how do you do it? One does it by entertaining them, by appealing to the spurious interests that all of us have from our reptilian brain, for sex and celebrity gossip, so it is Michael Jackson and Lacey Peterson and Kobe Bryant and Brad and Jen. Today,

we are the best entertained and the least informed people on the face of the earth.

This has real impacts on our democracy. The Fairness Doctrine of 1928, when it was passed, was at the dawn of commercial radio. It invoked these extraordinary debates that Thomas Jefferson had with the founders at the beginning of our republic. Jefferson himself said that the public and the masses will trade a hundred years of hard-fought-for civil rights for half an hour of welfare. They will sell themselves cheap to the first demagogue and vicious tyrant who comes along and promises them something like a three hundred dollar tax break. He said that the remedy for that is not the private or public money, but instead education, because it is the uninformed public that will do those things. If you want a democracy, you have to educate the public.

In 1928, when they passed the Fairness Doctrine, they invoked those debates. They said, "now radio is going to be where most Americans get their information." "We must make sure that it is used as a tool for democracy." "Whether the people want to be educated or not, we have to educate them." "We have to inform them about these things." Therefore, enacted with that, you see this huge decline in journalists and journalistic ethics in our country, where it is all focused on entertainment.

To bring it back to the environmental issues that I have worked on, I said that there had been a profound diminution in the quality of life in this country that Americans do not understand. The White House is taking efforts to conceal that. It is also because we do not have an aggressive press that is out there connecting the dots for the people. I will tell you a couple of examples, just from one industry that I talk about in my book. I talk about all these different industries that have a stranglehold on this administration: corporate hog farms, industrial agriculture, the chemical industry and the nuke industry, etc.

I just want to talk about one industry today [and give you] a few examples from just one industry: coal-burning power plants. I have three sons who have asthma. One out of every four black children in American cities now has asthma. We know asthma attacks are triggered primarily by bad air, by ozone and particulates. The primary source of those materials in our atmosphere is the eleven hundred coal-burning power plants that are burning coal illegally. Coal burning has been illegal for seventeen years. The Clean Air Act required that they clean up those materials and eliminate them, which was seventeen years ago. A lot of companies did, but a little over one thousand did not. These companies dragged their feet on it. The Clinton administration was prosecuting the worst seventy-five both

criminally and civilly, under the Clean Air Act. However, this is an industry that has donated forty-eight million dollars to this White House during the two thousand cycle and have given fifty-eight million dollars since. One of the first things that President Bush did when he came to office was to order the Justice Department and the EPA to drop all those lawsuits. The top three air enforcers, Sylvia Lawrence, Bruce Buckheit and Eric Shaeffer, all resigned their jobs in protest. These were not the top Democrats. These were individuals whom had served for the Reagan administration and the previous Bush administration. The top justice department official in charge of the case said that this had never happened before in American history; that a candidate running for President accepts money from criminals under indictment then orders the indictments dropped when he achieves political office. After the President did that, he went on to abolish the New Source rule, which is the heart and soul of the Clean Air Act and is the most important provision in that statute. That is the rule that required those companies to clean up seventeen years ago. So today, as a result, there is no legal requirement that they ever have to clean up the ozone and particulates. I will watch my children gasping for air on bad air days because somebody gave money to a politician.

If you go to the Environmental Protection Agency's ("EPA") website, you will see that one decision alone kills eighteen thousand persons every single year, which is six times the number of people who were killed in the Trade Center attack. This is year after year. This should be the front-page headline in every newspaper in our country every day. However, you will not read about it in the American press.

Eight months ago, the Federal EPA announced that, in nineteen states, it is now unsafe to eat any freshwater fish because of mercury contamination. The mercury is coming from those same eleven hundred coal-burning power plants. In forty-eight states, at least some of the fish are unsafe to eat because of mercury. In fact, the only two states where all the fish are safe to eat are Wyoming and Alaska, where Republican-controlled legislatures have refused to appropriate money to test the fish. We know a lot about mercury now that we did not know a few years ago. We know, for example, that, according the EPA, one out of every six American women now has so much mercury in her womb that her children are at risk for a grim inventory of diseases: autism, blindness, mental retardation, and heart, kidney, and liver disease.

Anyone who wants their levels tested should go to our website, [www.waterforalliance.com](http://www.waterforalliance.com). Every woman of child-bearing years should certainly do this. Just send a lock of your hair and we will test the levels of

mercury in your body and send you a report back. I have had my levels tested, they are double the levels the EPA considers safe, and this is just by eating fish. I was told by Dr. David Carpenter, a national authority on mercury contamination, that a woman with my levels of mercury in her blood would have children with cognitive impairment. I said to him, "you mean, *might* have." He said, "no, no, the science is very strict today. Her children *would* have some level of permanent brain damage," probably an IQ loss at my level [of mercury] in those kids of about five to seven points. According to the Centers for Disease Control ("CDC"), there are six hundred and forty thousand children born in this country every year who have been exposed to dangerous levels of mercury in their mother's womb.

The Clinton administration, recognizing the gravity of this national health epidemic, reclassified mercury as a hazardous pollutant, under the Clean Air Act. This triggered a requirement that all those companies remove ninety percent of the mercury within three and a half years. It would have cost them less than one percent of planned revenues. This is already required in Massachusetts and all the plants use it. It is used all over in Europe and elsewhere in the world. This was a great deal for the American people, still billions of dollars for the utilities. This is the industry that gave one hundred million dollars to President Bush. About ten weeks ago, the White House announced it was abolishing the Clinton rules, substituting instead rules that were written by utility industry lobbyists that will require the industry effectively to never have to clean up any mercury. The new rules, incidentally, were written, not by Federal Regulators, as was the routine prior to the Bush administration, but rather they were written by a utility industry lobbying firm called Latham & Watkins. This firm was invited into the back room of the White House and literally wrote these new regulations that impose huge penalties on the American people and create huge payoffs for this industry. The chief lobbyist for that firm, until recently, was a man named Jeffery Holmstead who today is the head of the air division of the EPA.

Today, this country is living in a science fiction nightmare. My children and the children of most Americans can now no longer engage in the seminal, primal activity of American youth, which is to go fishing with their mother and father at their local fishing hole, come home, and safely eat the fish, because someone gave money to a politician. I live two and half hours south of the Adirondack Mountains where I take my kids fishing, hiking, hunting, swimming and camping. This is the oldest wilderness area that has been protected since 1888. We had the right to believe that generations of Americans would be able to enjoy those pristine landscapes unspoiled. However, today, one fifth of the lakes in the



Adirondacks is sterilized by acid rain, coming from those same eleven hundred plants that have destroyed forests – the Appalachians from Georgia all the way to the northern Quebec. And President Bush, having accepted all that money from all those utilities, has put the brakes on the statutory requirements to clean up the sulfur dioxide that causes the acid rain. This year, according to the EPA, for the first year since the passage of the Clean Air Act, the sulfur dioxide levels have gone up in America's air astronomically, a whole four percent just this year.

In May, I flew over the coal fields in the Appalachians where all this coal is coming from. I saw something that, if the American people could see it, there would be a revolution in our country. We are cutting down the Appalachian Mountains with these giant machines called drag mines that are twenty-two stories high. It cost a half a billion dollars for one machine and they practically dispense the need for human labor – which indeed is a point. When my father was fighting strip mining in Appalachia back in the 1960s, I remember a conversation I had with him. I was fourteen years old. He said they are not just destroying the environment, but they are permanently impoverishing these communities because there is no way they can generate an economy for these moonscapes that are left behind. They are doing it so they can break the unions. That is exactly what happened. Back then, there were one hundred and forty-eight thousand unionized mine workers digging coal out of tunnels in the ground and enriching their communities, getting paid, etc. Today, there are only eleven thousand left, digging the same amount of coal, almost none of them unionized. All the money is leaving the state. They are using these giant machines and twenty-five hundred tons of dynamite is exploding every day in West Virginia, Hiroshima-sized bombs every week. They are blowing off the tops of these mountain ranges, these historic landscapes, where Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett roamed, that is the source of so many of our values, virtues and culture as a people. They are blowing them off to get the coal underneath. Then they take the rock, debris, and rubble and scrape it into the adjacent river valley and flatten out the landscapes. They have already buried over twelve hundred miles of American rivers and streams. By the time President Bush leaves office, we will have flattened the area of the Appalachians the size of Delaware, according to EPA's own reports.

It is all illegal. You cannot take rock, debris, and rubble in the United States and dump it into a clean water body without a clean water permit. Also, you could never get a permit to do such a thing. So we sued them. We got a conservative Republican judge, Judge Charles Hayden, a wonderful, West Virginian judge who passed away two months ago and he

said the same thing I said. He said, "It is all illegal. It has been illegal since day one." Judge Hayden enjoined all further mountaintop mining. Two days from when we got that decision, Steven Griles met with Peabody Cole and Massey Cole, who had given President Bush several million dollars in the West Virginia primary, and they rewrote the interpretation of one word in the Clean Water Act, the definition of the word "fill." These men changed thirty years of statutory interpretation to make it legal, as it is today, to dump rock, debris, rubble, garbage and any kind of solid waste into any body of water in the United States without a Clear Water Act permit. All you need today is a rubber stamp permit from the Corps of Engineers that you can get over the telephone or through the mail.

So, this is what we are dealing with. This is not just the destruction of our environment; it is a subversion of democracy. The polluting industries and their indentured servants in the political process have been very skillful over the past decades in marginalizing environmentalists as "radicals" or "tree-huggers" or "pagans who worship trees and sacrifice people." There's nothing radical about the idea of clean air and clean water for our children. We are not fighting for the environment to save the fishes and birds. We are protecting the environment because we recognize that nature is the infrastructure of our communities. If we want to meet our obligation as a generation, as a nation, and as a civilization (to create communities for our children that provide them with the same opportunities for dignity and enrichment as the communities our parents gave us), we have to start by protecting our environmental infrastructure: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the public lands, the wildlife, the wandering animals, the lands that enrich us, that connect us to our past and to our history, that give context to our communities and that are the ultimate source of our values and virtues, and our character as a people.

If you talk to the people on Capitol Hill – the White House and Congress – who are promoting this kind of rollback and ask them why you are doing this, they invariably say that the time has come in our nation's history when we have to choose between economic prosperity on the one hand and environmental protection on the other.

That is a false choice. In one hundred percent of the situations, good environmental policy is identical to good economic policy. If we want to measure our economy, (which is how we ought to be measuring it) it should be based upon how it produces jobs and the dignity of jobs over the generations, the long term, and how it serves the value of the assets of our communities. If, on the other hand, we want to do what they have been urging us to do in the White House, which is to treat the planet as if it were

business and liquidation, convert our natural resources into cash as quickly as possible and have a few years of pollution-based prosperity, we can generate an instantaneous cash-flow and the illusion of a prosperous economy, but our children are going to pay for our joyride. They are going to pay for it with denuded landscapes, poor health, and huge cleanup costs that may amplify over time which they will never be able to pay. Environmental injury is deficit spending and it is a way of loading the cost of our generation's prosperity on to the backs of our children.

One of the things that I have done pretty consistently over the past several years, since 1995 when the (unintelligible) Congress came in and we started having to fight these people on Capitol Hill (they managed this very powerful anti-environmental movement) is to constantly confront this argument that an investment in our environment diminishes our nation's wealth. It does not diminish our wealth; it is an investment in infrastructure, which is the same as investing in telecommunications and road construction. It is an investment we have to make to ensure the economic vitality of our generation and the next generation.

This term "sustainability" that environmentalists use all the time, all it means is that God wants us to use the things that we have been given, the bounties of the earth, to enrich ourselves, to improve our quality of life, to serve others. But we can not use them up. We can not sell the farm piece by piece to pay for the groceries. We can not drain the ponds to catch the fish. We can not cut down the mountains to get the coal. We can live off the interest, but we can not go into the capital. That belongs to our children.

There is no stronger advocate for free-market capitalism than me. I believe that the free market is the most efficient and the most democratic way to distribute the goods of the land. I believe that the best thing that could happen to the environment is if we had true, free market capitalism in this country because the free market encourages efficiency. Efficiency means the elimination of waste, and pollution is waste. The free market also encourages us to properly value our natural resources. The under-evaluation of those resources is what causes people to use them wastefully. In a true free-market economy you cannot make yourself rich without making your neighbors rich and without enriching your community. What polluters do is make themselves rich by making everybody else poor. They raise standards of living for themselves by lowering the quality of life for everybody else. They do that by escaping the discipline of the free market.

You show me a polluter and I will show you a subsidy. I will show you a fat cat using political clout to escape the discipline of the free market

and force the public to pay his production costs. Corporations are externalizing machines. They are constantly figuring out ways to get somebody else to pay costs of production. One of the easiest, most obvious ways is by shifting their cleanup costs to the public. We were all taught to clean up after ourselves when we were in kindergarten. They know better than that. They are going to get someone else to clean up. These coal-burning power plants put mercury in the air that poisons our children's brains, that steals the fish. I pay thirty dollars every year for a fishing license in New York State and I cannot even fish anymore. They privatized it; a southern company privatized the fish in New York State. This company stole from the state. The constitution of the State of New York says that the people of the state own the fish of the state. They are not owned by the corporations, the legislature, the governor or the Fisheries Department. They are owned by the people. Everybody has the right to use them. Nobody has the right to use them in a way that will diminish or injure their use as enjoined by another. This is ancient law. It goes back to Roman times. It is in the Code of Justinian. It is in the Magna Carta. It is in the constitutions of all of our states. The public trust assets belong to the public. The poorest kid in Florida has a right to go down to his local water bank with a fishing rod, pull out a fish, bring it home to his family, and feed it to them with pride. No matter how bad the economy gets, he still has that right. That right is a social safety net for every state. During the Great Depression, tens of thousands of people went to the Hudson River and fed their families from the fish there.

Today, if we had another depression like in the past, that safety net is gone because those fish are so contaminated, you are now poisoning your family. So that is a theft from the public. They are stealing a public asset, liquidating it for cash and making themselves richer. That is what pollution is: when they destroy the timber stands in the Adirondacks, when they destroy the lakes that my family would otherwise enjoy as well as the other people in the State of New York, when they put the ozone and particulates in the air, when they give us one million asthma attacks a year, and hundreds of thousands of lost work days. Those costs, those impacts, they throw those costs on the rest of us that should, in a true free market economy, be reflected in a price of that company's product when it makes its market. What all the federal environmental laws were meant to do was to restore free market capitalism in America, by forcing actors in the marketplace to pay the true costs in bringing their product to market.

What we have are fifty-seven Riverkeepers, including many in Florida, patrolling waterways, each with a patrol boat. We sue polluters. We do not even consider ourselves environmentalists anymore. We are

free marketeers. We go out into the marketplace and we catch the cheaters, the polluters. We say to them, "We are going to force you to internalize your costs the same way you internalize your profits." As long as someone is cheating in the free market, it distorts the whole marketplace. None of us gets the advantages, the efficiency, and the democracy that the free market otherwise promises our nation. What we have to understand in the United States is that there is a huge difference between free-market capitalism, which democratizes the country, making us more efficient and more prosperous, and the kind of corporate-croney capitalism which has been embraced by this White House, which is as antithetical to democracy and prosperity and efficiency in America as it is in Nigeria.

Corporations are a good thing. Corporations drive our economy. They encourage people to accumulate wealth, to create jobs, to risk money, etc. I own a corporation and I am all for them. There is nothing wrong with corporations, but they should not be running our government. That is where the problem is. The reason they should not be running the government is because corporations do not want the same things for America as the rest of us want. Corporations do not want free markets. They do not want democracy. They want profits. And the best way for them to get profits oftentimes is to use surplus wealth to inject into our campaign finance system, which is just a system of legalized bribery. They get their hooks into a public official and then use that public official to dismantle the marketplace, to give them a competitive advantage and to privatize the economy, to transfer private wealth in to their hands, in other words, to plunder. That is the whole point. In fact, corporations are not allowed to behave in a philanthropical way in this country. It is illegal for them to do something for the benefit of the public. When Walmart sends water down to the Katrina victims, they have to justify that to their shareholders, that this is somehow going to make them larger profits in the long run. Otherwise, their shareholders can sue them. Right? They are not allowed legally to behave philanthropically. They can do things that appear philanthropical but they have to be in self-interest. If they are not, they can be sued by their own shareholders.

There is nothing wrong with that. What is wrong is if we let them run our government. This White House has been so skillful in persuading the American people and a gullible press that the big threat to American democracy is big government. Of course, big government is the ultimate threat to democracy. We are seeing more and more of that today, you know with torture and eavesdropping and all this stuff. However, the much bigger threat is successful corporate lobbying. From the beginning, our national history, our most visionary political leaders, both Republican and

Democrat, have been warning Americans against the excess and domination of corporate power. Teddy Roosevelt, a Republican, said that America would never be destroyed by a foreign enemy, like Al Qaeda, but that our democratic institutions would be subverted by malefactors of great wealth who would erode it from within. Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican in his most famous speech ever, warned Americans against the domination by the military and industrial complex. Abraham Lincoln, the greatest Republican of history, said during the height of the Civil War in 1863, "I have the South in front of me and I have the bankers behind me, and for my nation, I fear the bankers more." And Franklin Roosevelt said during World War II that the domination of government by corporate power was "the essence of fascism." Benito Mussolini (who had an insider's view in that process) said pretty much the same thing. He complained that fascism should not be called fascism; it should be called "corporatism," because it was the merger of state and corporate power. What we have to understand as Americans is that while the domination of business by government is called communism, the domination of government by business is called fascism. Our job is to walk that narrow trail in between, which is free market capitalism and democracy, and keep the government at bay with our right hand and the business with our left. If we are going to do that, we need a vigorous public that understands that tyranny is a continuum, that understands every component of that continuum, and that is able to recognize it. We also need a vigorous and independent and aggressive press that is willing to stand up and speak against power. We no longer have that in the United States of America.

I want to talk about one other issue I started out with, which is the idea that we are not protecting the environment so much because of the fishes and the birds but because we recognize that nature enriches us. It enriches us economically, yes. It is the basis of our economy and we ignore that to our peril. The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of an environment. However, it also enriches us esthetically, recreationally, culturally, historically and spiritually. Human beings have other appetites besides money. If we do not feed those appetites, we are not going to grow up. We are not going to become the kind of beings our Creator intended us to become. When we destroy nature, we diminish ourselves. We impoverish our children. We are not fighting to save those ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest, as Rush Limbaugh likes to say, for the sake of the spotted owl. We are preserving those forests because we believe that those trees have more value to humanity standing than they would have if we cut them down. I am not finding for the Hudson River for the sake of the shad,

the sturgeon, and the striped bass, but because I believe my life, my children, and my community will be richer.

We need to live in a world where there are shad, sturgeon and striped bass in the Hudson and where my children can see the traditional gear and the small-family owned fishing fisherman of the Hudson River (for whom I have been working for twenty-two years) defending their livelihood, their property line, their capacity to make a living. We have fishing families on the Hudson River that I represent that have been fishing the river continuously since Dutch Colonial times. They use the same fishing gear that was taught by the Algonquin Indians to the original Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam. I want my kids to be able to see those men coming out of the river with their ash poles, gill nets, and small open boats, and touch them when they come to shore to prepare their nets or to wade out the tides. In doing that, [they will] connect themselves to three centuries of New York State history and understand that they are part of something larger than themselves; they are part of a continuum, they are part of a community. I do not want my children to grow up in a world where there are no commercial fisherman left on the Hudson, where it is all Borden Seafood and Unilever in four-hundred ton factory trawlers one hundred miles offshore, strip mining the ocean with no interface with humanity or our communities.

I do not want my kids to grow up in a world where there are no family farmers left in America, where it is all Smithfield, Cargill, Tyson, Premium Standard Farms that are raising animals in factories and treating their stock and their workers and their neighbors with unspeakable cruelty. Polluting the environment and emptying our rural landscapes of human beings and driving the final nail into the coffin of Thomas Jefferson's vision of American democracy, rooted in tens of thousands of independent freeholds owned by family farmers, each with a stake in our democracy. I do not want my kids to grow up in a world where we have lost touch with the seasons, where we have paved South Florida. We have lost touch with the seasons and the tides and the things that connect us with the ten thousand generations of human beings that were here before there were laptops. They connect us ultimately to God.

I do not believe that nature is God. What we ought to be worshipping is God. But I do believe that it is a way that God communicates to us most forcefully. God talks to human beings through many factors, through each other, through organized religion, through great books, through wise people, through art, literature, music, and poetry. But nowhere with such force, clarity, detail, texture, grace, and joy as through creation. We do not

know Michelangelo by reading his biography. We know him by looking at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. We know our Creator best by immersing ourselves in nature. I wrote a book on Saint Francis. This is one of the messages he had. He had two messages. One was against religious fundamentalists, which was also the central message of Christ's mission on earth. He was constantly challenging the fundamentalists (the Sadducees and the Pharisees) of his time, the people who had the literal interpretation of the Bible. He derided them for loading heavy burdens for other men to carry, urging his followers to stop paying attention to the rules and regulations of the Bible; man was not made for laws but laws were made for man.

Saint Francis had that same message: that fundamentalism is the end of religious belief, the end of exploration of the gifts that God has given us, and that it is about an exercise of power; however, it is about religion, not about spirituality. His other message was that you find God in nature. Like I said, you know Michelangelo by looking at the Sistine Chapel. We know our Creator best by immersing ourselves in nature, particularly wilderness, which is the unpolluted work of our Creator.

If you look at every religious tradition throughout the history of mankind, the central epiphany always occurs in the wilderness. Buddha had to go to the wilderness to experience Nirvana and self-realization. Mohammed had to go to the wilderness of Mount Hara in 629 and climb to the summit alone in the middle of the night and wrestle an angel there to have the Ramadan . . . . Moses had to go to the wilderness, to the summit of Mount Sinai, alone for forty days, to get the Ten Commandments. The Jews spent forty years wandering in the wilderness to purge themselves of the four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. Christ had to go into the wilderness for forty days to discover his divinity for the first time. His mentor was John the Baptist, a man who lived in the cave in the Jordan Valley and dressed in skins of wild beasts and ate locusts and honey.

All of Christ's parables were taken from nature. "I am the Vine, the mustard seed, the little swallows, scattering the seeds that fell to the ground, the lillies of the field." He called himself a fisherman, farmer, a vineyard keeper, a shepherd. The reason he did that is the same reason why all the Old Testament prophets, the Talmudic prophets, and the Koranic prophets, came out of the desert, the wilderness, and they were all shepherds. That daily connection with nature gave them a special access to the wisdom of the Almighty. They all spoke in parables taken from nature, all the way back to pagan prophets. They saw nature. They used parables, allegories, and fables drawn from nature to teach us the difference between



right and wrong; it is where morality plays in. And to teach them what the face of God looks like it. All of them were revolutionaries. All of them were challenging the fundamentalists of their own time. The reason they used these parables from nature (and Christ did it), is that that is how they stayed in touch with the people. They were all saying things that were revolutionary and that contradicted everything that they heard from the literate and sophisticated people of their time. They would have dismissed him as a quack but they were able to confirm the wisdom of his parables through their own observations of the fishes and the birds. They were able to say, "He is not telling us something new. He is simply illustrating something very, very old;" passages that were written into creation by the Creator at the beginning of time. We have not been able to discern or decipher them until the prophets came that immersed themselves into the wilderness and have learned this language and then come back to the cities to explain to us the wisdom of God.

This is where our values come from. If we separate ourselves from those values, from the source of those values, by paving our landscapes and destroying our relationship with nature, we also destroy part of our humanity, the reality of those values, which makes us human. These are not just the values of the Bible. These are our national values too. Our country is deeper than any of the other democracies of the world. From the beginning of our national history, our greatest political leaders, our most visionary philosophers, cultural leaders, writers, and poets have been telling the American people, "you do not have to be ashamed because you do not have the fifteen hundred years of culture that they have in Europe, because you have this relationship to the land, in particular wilderness which is the unpolluted work of God. That is going to be the source of your character and values."

Fredrick Jackson Turner, who was our greatest American historian, said that American democracy came out of the forest. Our defined political institution is rooted in the woodlands and forests. If you look at every valid piece of classic American literature, whether it's Melville, Hawthorne, Jack London, Mark Twain, Edgar Poe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Willa Cather, the unifying theme through every piece is that nature is the critical defining element of the American character. The first great international bestseller that we produced was written by James Fenimore Cooper who wrote these books, *The Leather Stocking Tales*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Deerslayer*, and *The Pathfinder*. They are about this character, Natty Bumppo, a creature of the woods. He has all the virtues the European romantics associated with the American woodland. He is independent, self-reliant, and courageous. He is a crack shot. He has honesty and

integrity. He is a gentleman. They made him a bestseller in Europe not because he was great (because it was atrocious), but because they believed that there was truth there, that there was a new character being created out of the American wilderness.

We made it a bestseller in this country because we believe that about ourselves. A generation after that, Emerson and Thoreau had come along and kicked off the traces of our European heritage and embraced nature as a spiritual parable of all Americans. They say that if you are an American and you want to hear the voice of God, you have to go into the forests, listen to the songs of the birds, the rustle of the leaves. If you want to see the American soul, you have to look to the mirror of Walden Pond, our poets, Whitman, Frost, Emily Dickinson, Robert Service. We have two defining schools of art in this country, the Hudson River School, which is Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Samuel F.B. Morse, etc., and the Western School, Remington and Russel. All of them are in stark, indomitable landscapes. El Capitan, the Sierra Nevada, Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, Storm Chief Mountain in Adirondack. Any evidence of humanity is in ruins.

There are other national schools of art that painted nature: the British had their still lifes, the French and Italians for their garden scenes, but that is nature tamed. The American painters chose to paint nature at its wildest because they saw it as the way to capture the American character and its soul.

We have people in the White House who are looking at the last wildernesses in our country, the last places that still look the way they did when our national character was formed, like the Arctic Refuge and some of our western parts. They see these green landscapes and all they see is cash, quick cash for their contributors. They do not understand that this is all about values.

It is ironic to me that it is an administration that panned itself as an administration of values. All the values that they claim to embrace seem to be just facades and masks for the one thing that they really consider fighting for, corporate profit taking. They say they are conservatives, but they have torn the "conserve" out of conservatism. They say that they like free markets but if you look at their feats rather than the seductive words from their mouths, they despise free markets. They are constantly fighting for corporate welfare and for capitalism for the poor but socialism for the rich. They claim to like property rights, but it is only when it is the right of the property owner, a polluter, to use his property to destroy his neighbor's property and destroy the public property. They say they like law and order,

but they are the first ones to let the corporate lawbreakers off the hook. They say they like local control and states' rights, but they only like that when it means sweeping away the barriers to profit taking at the local level. I see this all the time.

Let me give you an example. My cousin, Arnold Schwarzenegger, recently signed an automobile emissions standard because the federal laws are not protecting the people in the state of California. Ten percent of the children in San Bernadino and every other major city in California, in mostly black neighborhoods, have permanent lung damage from breathing automobile air because it is part of the culture. The federal laws are not protecting our citizens. We need tougher laws for automobile emissions. Detroit is now suing California and Governor Schwarzenegger. The federal government has now said that it is going to join the lawsuit on the side of Detroit; so much for local control. I see the same thing when I am fighting the hog farms down in North Carolina. The local people passed zoning laws (local control) to zone out hog farms. The first thing they heard was Ken Olson and the federal government, saying, "that is an interference with federal commerce. We are going to come down there and put the hammer to you." The same thing happens with the coal mines, coal communities in West Virginia, when they try to zone out mountaintop mining. The Federal government comes down on the side of industry. So, they do not care about local control.

They claim they love Christianity. As far as I can tell, they have violated every one of the manifold mandates of the Christian faith. We treat our planet as stewards, treat our children with respect, that sort of thing. I will close with a proverb from the Lakota people that has been expropriated to some extent by our environmental movement. We do not just inherit this land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children. I would add to that: If we do not return to our children something that is roughly the equivalent of what we received, and that is not just land but the values that emanate from the land, then they will have the right to ask us some really difficult questions.