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Greening the Media

Will We Have a Green Presidency in 2016?

Denial versus technocracy is not good for the American people

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US Presidents have considerable control over Federal government land and international environmental negotiation; but otherwise, they rely on the goodwill of Congress. In the current electoral season, which renews the world's quadrennial laughter and derision at the quality of US democracy, the environment is on the debating table. What do the remaining plausible candidates have to say about it, and what do we think will happen come November?

Donald Trump repeatedly calls global warming "a hoax," a way of unnamed forces making money (something he professes to admire most of the time), and a means of justifying taxation; and he derides the Environmental Protection Agency.¹

Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio voted against protecting the ecosystems of the Great Lakes, the coasts, and the oceans. Rubio says markets will protect the environment because governments cannot. He produces no evidence for this claim, or for the assumption that markets and governments are opposed rather than coordinated forms of economic activity.² Unlike Trump, both Cruz and Rubio show a certain respect for science. Sometimes.³

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders both favor "clean energy tax breaks, reject drilling offshore and in the Arctic, and oppose the (now-rejected) Keystone XL pipeline." Only Sanders would ban hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which is supported by all other Presidential candidates, from both sides of the aisle.⁴ Sanders alone has an impeccable record of environmental protection in his congressional votes.⁵ The League of Conservation Voters Action Fund has endorsed Clinton, but Big Green in general has yet to commit to any candidate.⁶

Despite Sanders' appeal to white liberals and young people, he has not so far carried sufficient minorities to suggest he can gain the nomination—though he's a great guy to share a cab with.⁷ So when Big Green decides what to do, it'll probably bear down on the initials "H.C."

On the Republican side, as of our deadline, Trump holds the cards that bear his gruesome eponym, but if either Rubio or Cruz were to step quietly into their personal library, alone other than armed with a service revolver and the determination to do the gentlemanly thing, then the remaining Congressman might defeat Trump for the nomination.

And what will happen come that big day in November—the general election—if it is a tycoon's legatee son versus a former President's wife; a shouting, angry, blustering, ignorant populist versus a demure, rational, anti-leftist, reasonable technocrat? A golf-course developer versus a Goldwater activist? A Trump versus a Clinton?

One version of our future has Trump losing badly and giving Clinton such lengthy coattails that the Democratic

Party gains both the House and the Senate, propelled by a big turnout of minorities and white liberals repelled by his bigotry and irrationality and a reduced white reactionary turnout, disgusted by what has become of “their” party.

Another prediction sees a wave of anti-political fervor sweeping the country and returning Trump, thereby bringing home to Republican grandees the final reality of their cynical exploitation over the last two decades of a bigoted, anti-scientific, ignorant base that over those twenty years got nothing in return for faithfully heeding wolf calls at election time; now, finally, they can imagine having their own man in office.

This is a bipartisan problem: the Iowa caucuses saw 43% of registered Democrats describe themselves as socialists.⁸ Those leftists have also suffered from having their support taken for granted, their views cavalierly tossed aside once cynical professional politicians were ensconced in office.

People often ask how the party of Lincoln could have become the party of white privilege. How could that same party of Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon (yes, him) who gave us National Parks (Teddy) and the EPA (Tricky Dicky) produce this group of ecological simpletons? Conservatism is meant to be about stewardship, and its vocalists need to be reminded of the fact rather than encouraged to roll with reaction.

Sad to say, the Democrats have no equivalent figures to admire when it comes to the environment by contrast with, for example, Johnson’s conversion to civil rights. But they do have a reasonable record of supporting academic knowledge, unlike the *sacerdotes* of superstition to their right.

Whatever happens on that fateful Tuesday, when it comes to the environment, we have the right to expect that our media will hold the candidates to account in a serious way that heeds science, not fantasy, and is animated by the public interest, not private desire. That means presenting them with scientific fact during debates, press conferences, or interviews; testing their knowledge rather than requesting their opinions; and calling upon them to think and speak beyond the comfort of their dutiful chorines.

Empty hortatory rhetoric about what people believe or the state of the nation won’t do. We need passion with policy, ideas without ideology, intelligence with initiative. Expecting anything less would sell us all short.

1. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jan/24/bernie-s/...>
2. <http://www.ontheissues.org/Environment.htm>
3. <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2015/10/ultimate-climate-candidat...>
4. <https://newrepublic.com/article/128434/bernie-sanderss-radical-environme...>
5. <http://www.ontheissues.org/Environment.htm>
6. <http://prospect.org/article/fracking-fracas-sanders-attacks-clinton-envi...>
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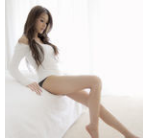


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