



Rural Americans' Anger, Trump's Election And Environmental Regulation

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At least one celebrity and self-identified member of the liberal elite grasps rural Americans' anger, and this anger played a crucial role in propelling Donald Trump to the presidency. "The utter contempt with which privileged Eastern liberals such as myself discuss red-state, gun-country, working-class America as ridiculous and morons and rubes is largely responsible for the upswell of rage and contempt and desire to pull down the temple that we're seeing now," Anthony Bourdain, celebrity chef, author and TV host, stated in an interview published on Reason.com. "I've spent a lot of time in gun-country, God-fearing America. There are a hell of a lot of nice people out there, who are doing what everyone else in this world is trying to do: the best they can to get by, and take care of themselves and the people they love. When we deny them their basic humanity and legitimacy of their views, however different they may be than ours, when we mock them at every turn, and treat them with contempt, we do no one any good."

A growing source of rural Americans' anger is the ever-tightening grip of environmental regulations that have less to do with the environment than they do liberal elites' desire for social engineering and control over ordinary peoples' lives. A good example is President Obama's signature environmental initiative—curtailing use of fossil fuels, especially coal, in order to decrease carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and combat sea level rise. "So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can; it's just that it will bankrupt them, because they're going to be charged a huge sum for all that greenhouse gas that's being emitted," Obama bragged in 2008 during his first presidential campaign. He made good on his vow in August 2015 with the release of the Clean Power Plan, which is designed to phase out coal-fired power plants and will cost as many as 34,000 jobs by 2020, should it survive legal challenge. Many of these jobs will be in blue-collar coal country; Appalachia and portions of the rural Midwest, South and Intermountain West. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates the Clean Power Plan will result in a net job gain, but this is doubtful because the Plan's ultimate goal of forcing American to switch to renewable energy will act as a regressive, job-killing tax due to renewable energy generally being more expensive than carbon-based energy.

Even though the Clean Power Plan is going to inflict pain on working-class Americans in order to reduce CO₂ emissions, "The EPA does not anticipate that this proposed rule will result in notable CO₂ emission changes," according to a 2013 EPA document on the Plan, which the

agency subsequently removed from the its website. “Even if the entire U.S. coal fleet was somehow eliminated, the decrease in projected sea level rise would be less than the thickness of a dime,” Lisa Miller, spokesperson for the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, said. The Clean Power Plan is projected to reduce the temperature by a miniscule 0.02°C, according to Chip Knappenberger of the Cato Institute.

Despite his 2008 statement and 2015 Clean Power Plan, Obama dissembled. “For the past five years, President Obama has denied the Republican charge that he is waging a war on coal,” Coral Davenport of the New York Times reported in January 2016, when the administration announced a moratorium on coal leases on federal land—in other words, a war on coal and affordable electricity. “When rural America says President Obama has contempt for their lives and livelihoods, they mean decisions like today’s announcement,” Senator John Barrasso from Wyoming stated to the Times. “A moratorium on federal coal leasing effectively hands a pink slip to the thousands of people in Wyoming and across the West.”

Putting tens of thousands of rural Americans out of work is of minor concern compared to liberal elites’ larger goals, which were evident during a March 2016 Congressional hearing. Rep. David McKinley of West Virginia queried EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy about the Clean Power Plan: “If it doesn’t have an impact on climate change around the world, why are we subjecting our hard working taxpayers and men and women in the coal fields to something that has no benefit?” McCarthy candidly responded; “We see it as having had enormous benefit in showing sort of domestic leadership as well as garnering support around the country for the agreement we reached in Paris.”

Then in March 2016 Hillary Clinton, while running for president, admitted “we’re going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business” in the process of her goal to make America switch from carbon-based to renewable energy. “The Obama Administration’s Clean Power Plan is a significant step forward in meeting the urgent threat of climate change,” Clinton stated. “It’s a good plan, and as President, I’d defend it.”

In addition to eliminating carbon-based energy, one of the federal regulatory programs most cherished by elites who use the environment as a social engineering tool is the Clean Water Act. The Act is supposed to protect against discharge of pollutants into waters navigable by boat, but since its passage in 1972 the federal government has expanded its reach to encompass areas that have nothing to do with navigation, including ditches, isolated wetlands and areas that are usually dry but turn into temporary puddles when it rains.

Consider the case of the late John Rapanos, a hard-working, patriotic Michigan developer who, as the son of Greek immigrants, was living the American dream. His dream turned into a nightmare when the Environmental Protection Agency wanted to throw him in jail for five years and fine him \$15 million for allegedly violating the Clean Water Act by polluting navigable water. In reality, the 54 acres owned by Rapanos was 20 miles away from the nearest navigable water on Lake Michigan and consisted of flat fields with no wetlands. All John did was cut some trees, remove the stumps and move sand from one portion of the property to another as he prepared the land for development. John Rapanos, represented by the Pacific Legal Foundation, challenged the government’s authority to regulate his property under the Clean Water Act, and won his case before the Supreme Court in 2006.

Yet virtually all the major environmental pressure groups, along with a collection of recreational hunting and fishing organizations, filed briefs with the Supreme Court in support of the federal government and against Rapanos. These groups like to portray themselves as latter-day Davids fighting pro-development Goliaths. However, these groups are the true Goliaths, not folks like John Rapanos. The 50 largest U.S. environmental pressure groups have a combined annual budget of \$3.8 billion, 25,000 employees, and boards of directors that are a who's who of the elite, including actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert Redford, billionaires John Doerr and Stanley Druckenmiller, and scores of mere mega-millionaires, such as Laurance Rockefeller, Jr. and film producer Laurie David.

Working-class Americans are angry because of the increasing control exerted over their lives by the 1-percent, such as those running environmental pressure groups. Adding insult to injury is the sneering contempt liberal elites have for rural Americans, which celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain and President-elect Trump recognize. Natural resource-based communities are being slowly strangled of jobs, opportunities and hope by environmental pressure groups bent on turning rural America into an eco-themed museum. Pressure groups seek to accomplish this in a number of ways, including: eliminating carbon-based forms of energy; turning private property into public property through regulations such as the Clean Water Act that converts private property into defacto public property; stymieing and driving out of business natural resource-based industries; and converting public lands—most notably the 440 million acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management that are statutorily obligated to be multiple-use (e.g., recreation, mining, grazing, environmental protection, logging and oil and gas production)—from multiple-use to single-use (i.e., no grazing, mining, logging or oil and gas). Liberal elites have little problem with the loss of rural, natural resource-dependent jobs because it means fewer reliably conservative voters and legislative districts.

Ironically, environmental pressure groups' game plan results in a lower quality environment because rural Americans and natural resource-based industries are necessary for a healthy environment. If people are out of work or living on the edge financially they will be most focused on their survival, rather than environmental protection and especially the luxury of liberal elites' eco-utopianism. Only when people are financially secure do they feel they can afford environmental protection. In rural America, natural resource-based jobs are crucial to people's security and, hence, a healthy environment. Also, America's millions of rural landowners and people involved in natural resource-based jobs—such as farming, ranching, and forestry—constitute by far the largest “installed base” of conservationists who, by profession, are land and resource managers.

Alienating rural Americans and destroying their communities is self-defeating if the goal is environmental protection but not if the goal is social engineering. Rural Americans are looking for their voices to be heard and their concerns taken seriously by policymakers.