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As delivered.

A New American Environmentalism  
and the New Economy

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I'm both pleased and honored to have been asked by NCSE to give this 10<sup>th</sup> Annual John H. Chafee Memorial Lecture. I knew John personally and had the opportunity to work with him during his long and distinguished service on the Senate Environment Committee. He was a wonderful person and a great Senator. I wish we had a dozen John Chafees in the Senate today. And I want also to acknowledge the ever-more important role NCSE has played in our national life. Many of you are familiar with its contributions, including this blockbuster conference, but you may not know of its leadership in creating and supporting a council of deans and directors of America's environmental schools. I know that that initiative meant a lot to us at Yale. And let me especially join in celebrating the achievements of the remarkable Herman Daly, a profound thinker, a generous soul, and a great wit. Herman launched us into considering the steady state economy and led in the creation of the now highly-productive field of ecological economics. We owe him a great debt for all he has done.

To begin, I would like to invite you to join me in a journey of the imagination. I want you to join me in visiting a world very different from the one we have today.

As the new decade begins in this world, the President, early in his first term, stands before Congress to deliver his State of the Union address. He says the following:

“In the next ten years we shall increase our wealth by fifty percent. The profound question is – does this mean that we will be fifty percent richer in a real sense, fifty percent better off, fifty percent happier?...

“The great question... is, shall we make our peace with nature and begin to make reparations for the damage we have done to our air, our land and our water?

“Restoring nature to its natural state is a cause beyond party and beyond factions. ... It is a cause of particular concern to young Americans – because they more than we will reap the grim consequences of our failure to act on programs which are needed now if we are to prevent disaster later....

“The program I shall propose to Congress will be the most comprehensive and costly program in this field ever in the nation’s history.

“The argument is increasingly heard that a fundamental contradiction has arisen between economic growth and the quality of life, so that to have one we must forsake the other. The answer is not to abandon growth, but to redirect it...

“I propose, that before these problems become insoluble, the nation develop a national growth policy. Our purpose will be to find those means by which Federal, state and local government can influence the course of ... growth so as positively to affect the quality of American life.”

And Congress acts. To address these challenges, it responds with the toughest environmental legislation in history. And it does so not with partisan rancor and threats of filibusters but by large bipartisan majorities.

In this world that we are imagining, the public is aroused; the media are attentive; the courts are supportive. Citizens are alarmed by the crisis they face. They organize a movement and issue this powerful declaration: “We, therefore, resolve to act. We propose a revolution in conduct toward an environment that is rising in revolt against us. Granted that ideas and institutions long established are not easily changed; yet today is the first day of the rest of our life on this planet. We will begin anew.”

Meanwhile, the nation's leading environmental scholars and practitioners, and even some economists, are asking whether measures such as those in the Congress will be enough, and whether deeper changes are not needed. GDP and the national income accounts are challenged for their failure to tell us things that really matter, including whether our society is equitable and fair and whether we are gaining or losing environmental quality. A sense of planetary limits is palpable. The country's growth fetish comes under attack as analysts see the fundamental incompatibility between limitless growth and an increasingly small and limited planet. Advocacy emerges for moving to an economy that would be "nongrowing in terms of the size of the human population, the quantity of physical resources in use, and [the] impact on the biological environment." Joined with this is a call from many sources for us to break from our consumerist and materialistic ways – to seek simpler lives in harmony with nature and each other. These advocates recognize that, with growth no longer available as a palliative, "one problem that must be faced squarely is the redistribution of wealth within and between nations." They also recognize the need to create needed employment opportunities by stimulating employment in areas long underserved by the economy and even by moving to shorter workweeks. And none of this seems likely, these writers realize, without a dramatic revitalization of democratic life.

Digging deeper, some opinion leaders, including both ecologists and economists, ask, "whether the operational requirements of the private enterprise economic system are compatible with ecological imperatives." They conclude that the answer is "no." Environmental limits will eventually require limits on economic growth, they reason.

“In a private enterprise system,” they conclude, “[this] no-growth condition means no further accumulation of capital. If, as seems to be the case, accumulation of capital, through profit, is the basic driving force of this system, it is difficult to see how it can continue to operate under conditions of no growth.” And thus begins the thought: how does society move beyond the capitalism of the day?

You can see that the world we are imagining is one of high hopes and optimism that the job can and will be done. It is also a world of deep searching for the next steps that will be required once the immediate goals are met.

Now, at this point, I suspect there may be a generational divide in the audience. Those of you of my vintage have probably realized that this is not an imaginary world at all. You do not have to imagine this world – you remember it. It is the actual world of the early 1970s. That is really what President Nixon said to the Congress in 1970. Congress really did declare that air pollution standards must protect public health and welfare with an adequate margin of safety and without regard to the economic costs. The revolutionary Clean Water Act really did seek no discharge of pollutants, with the goals of restoring the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the nation’s waters and making our waters fishable and swimmable for all by the mid-1980s. Many scientists, economists and activists supported the longer term thinking about growth and consumerism that I just mentioned, and they recognized the ties to social equity issues. They saw the challenge all this posed to our system of political economy. I have quoted John Holden, Paul and Anne Ehrlich and Barry Commoner, opinion leaders in this era,<sup>1</sup> but there were many others, including Kenneth Boulding who famously noted, “Anyone who thinks

exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.”

It was in many respects a great beginning. Not perfect, not to be romanticized, but still a remarkably strong start. And now four decades have passed. So let us fast forward to the present and take stock. What do we find today? The powerful environmental laws passed in the 1970s are still in place. They have been attacked often, chipped away here and there but have also been strengthened in important respects. Overall, the ones that were really tough have brought about many major improvements in environmental quality, particularly in light of the fact that today’s U.S. economy is three times larger than it was in 1970. And the introduction of market-based mechanisms has saved us a bundle. In the 1980s a new agenda of global-scale concerns came to the fore, and there are now treaties addressing almost all of these global concerns.

Major, well-funded forces of resistance and opposition have arisen, and virtually every step forward, especially since 1981, has been hard fought. The environmental groups, both those launched after 1970 and earlier ones have grown in strength, funding, and membership, and most groups can point to a string of victories they have won along the way. One shudders to think of where we would be today without these hard-won accomplishments.

That said, it is also true that we mostly pursued those goals where the path to success was clearer and left by the wayside the more difficult and deeper challenges. Much good thinking and many good ideas of the 1960s and 1970s were not pursued. And our early successes locked us into patterns of environmental action that have since proved

no match for the system we're up against. We opted to work within the system and neglected to seek transformation of the system itself.

And it is here that we arrive at the central issue – the paradox which every U.S. environmentalist must now face. The environmental movement – we still seem to call it that – has grown in strength and sophistication, and yet the environment continues to go downhill, fast. If we look at real world conditions and trends, we see that we are winning victories but losing the planet, to the point that a ruined world looms as a real prospect for our children and grandchildren. And the United States is at the epicenter of the problem. So, a specter is haunting U.S. environmentalists – the specter of failure. The only valid test for us is not membership, staff size, or even our victories but success on the ground – and by that test we are failing in our core purpose. We are not saving the planet. We have instead allowed our only world to come to the brink of disaster. Some who look at the latest science on climate change and biodiversity loss would say we are not on the brink of disaster, but well over it.

I looked hard at environmental conditions and trends, both global and national, a couple of years ago when I was writing my book, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*. In a nutshell, here is what I found.<sup>2</sup>

Here at home, despite four decades of environmental effort, we are losing 6000 acres of open space every day and 100,000 acres of wetlands every year. Since 1982 we have paved or otherwise developed an area the size of New York State. Forty percent of U.S. fish species are threatened with extinction, a third of plants and amphibians, twenty percent of birds and mammals. Since the first Earth Day in 1970 we have increased the miles of paved roads by 50 percent and tripled the total miles driven. Solid waste

generated per person is up 33 percent since 1970. Manicured mountains of trash are proliferating around our cities. Half our lakes and a third of our rivers still fail to meet the fishable and swimmable standard that the Clean Water Act said should be met by 1983. EPA reports that a third of our estuaries are in poor condition, and beach closings have reached a two-decade high. A third of Americans live in counties that fail to meet EPA air quality standards, which are themselves too weak. We have done little to curb our wasteful energy habits, our huge CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, or our steady population growth. And we are still releasing truly vast quantities of toxic chemicals into the environment – over five billion pounds a year, to be more precise. The *New York Times* reported recently that a fifth of the nation’s drinking water systems have violated safety standards in recent years.

Meanwhile, the United States is deeply complicit in the even more serious trends in the global environment. Half the world’s tropical and temperate forests are now gone. The rate of deforestation in the tropics continues at about an acre a second, and has been for decades. Half the planet’s wetlands are gone. An estimated ninety percent of the large predator fish are gone, and 75 percent of marine fisheries are now overfished or fished to capacity. Almost half of the world’s corals are either lost or severely threatened. Species are disappearing at rates about 1,000 times faster than normal. The planet has not seen such a spasm of extinction in 65 million years, since the dinosaurs disappeared. Over half the agricultural land in drier regions suffers from some degree of deterioration and desertification. Persistent toxic chemicals can now be found by the dozens in essentially each and every one of us.



Human impacts are now large relative to natural systems. The earth's stratospheric ozone layer was severely depleted before the change was discovered. Human activities have pushed atmospheric carbon dioxide up by more than a third, along with other greenhouse gases, and have started in earnest the calamitous process of warming the planet and disrupting climate. Despite stern warnings now thirty years old, we have neglected to act to halt the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and are now well beyond safe concentrations. Industrial processes are fixing nitrogen, making it biologically active, at a rate equal to nature's; one result is the development of hundreds of documented dead zones in the oceans due to overfertilization. Human actions already consume or destroy each year about 40 percent of nature's photosynthetic output, leaving too little for other species. Freshwater withdrawals are now over half of accessible runoff, and soon to be 70 percent. Water shortages are increasing in the United States and abroad. Aquatic habitats are being devastated. The following rivers no longer reach the oceans in the dry season: the Colorado, Yellow, Ganges, and Nile, among others. We have treaties on most of these issues, yes, but they are in the main toothless treaties. Global deterioration continues; our one notable success is protecting the ozone shield.

And so here we are, forty years after the burst of energy and hope at the first Earth Day, on the brink of ruining the planet. Indeed all we have to do to destroy the planet's climate and biota and leave a ruined world to our children and grandchildren is to keep doing exactly what we are doing today, with no growth in the human population or the world economy. Just continue to release greenhouse gases at current rates, just continue to impoverish ecosystems and release toxic chemicals at current rates, and the world in

the latter part of this century won't be fit to live in. But human activities are not holding at current levels – they are accelerating, dramatically.

The size of the world economy doubled since 1960, and then doubled again. World economic activity is projected to quadruple again by mid-century. At recent rates of growth, the world economy will double in size in two decades. It took all of human history to grow the \$7 trillion world economy of 1950. We now grow by that amount in a decade! We thus face the prospect of enormous environmental deterioration just when we need to be moving strongly in the opposite direction.

It seems to me one conclusion is inescapable. We need a new environmentalism in America. The world needs a new environmentalism in America. Today's environmentalism is not succeeding. America has run a 40-year experiment on whether mainstream environmentalism can succeed, and the results are now in. The full burden of managing accumulating environmental threats has fallen to the environmental community, both those in government and outside. But that burden is too great. Environmentalists get stronger, but so do the forces arrayed against us, only more so. It was Einstein, I believe, who first said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Well, we are not insane. It's time for something different – a new environmentalism. We must build a new environmentalism in America. And here is the core of the new environmentalism: it seeks a new economy. And to deliver on the promise of the new economy, we must build a new politics.

I applaud NCSE for taking the important step of focusing us on the economy and economic transformation. And surely NCSE is correct that it must be a green economy –

an economy that protects and restores the environment, one that lives off nature's income while preserving and enhancing natural capital. Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins have wonderfully described key features of such an economy in their book *Natural Capitalism*, which I will not repeat now.<sup>3</sup>

The first step in building a green economy is to ask why the current system is so destructive. As I describe in *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*, the answer lies in the defining features of our current political economy. An unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at almost any cost; powerful corporate interests whose overriding objective is to grow by generating profit, including profit from avoiding the environmental costs they create and from replicating technologies designed with little regard for the environment; markets that systematically fail to recognize environmental costs unless corrected by government; government that is subservient to corporate interests and the growth imperative; rampant consumerism spurred endlessly by sophisticated advertising; economic activity now so large in scale that its impacts alter the fundamental biophysical operations of the planet – all these combine to deliver an ever-growing world economy that is undermining the ability of the planet to sustain life. These are key issues – these issues that are more systemic – that must be addressed by our new environmentalism.

But the new environmentalism will not get far if it is focused *only* on greening the economy, as important as that is. As David Korten, John Cavanagh and I and others in the New Economy Working Group are saying, the old economy has actually given rise to a triple crisis, and they are tightly linked. The failure of the old economy is evident in a threefold economic, social, and environmental crisis. The *economic* crisis of the Great

Recession brought on by Wall Street financial excesses has stripped tens of millions of middle class Americans of their jobs, homes, and retirement assets and plunged many into poverty and despair.

A *social* crisis of extreme and growing inequality has been unraveling America's social fabric for several decades. A tiny minority have experienced soaring incomes and accumulated grand fortunes while wages for working people have stagnated despite rising productivity gains and poverty has risen to a near thirty-year high. Social mobility has declined, record numbers of people lack health insurance, schools are failing, prison populations are swelling, employment security is a thing of the past, and American workers put in more hours than workers in other high income countries.

An *environmental* crisis, driven by excessive human consumption and waste and a spate of terrible technologies, is disrupting Earth's climate, reducing Earth's capacity to support life, and creating large scale human displacement that further fuels social breakdown.

And I would add that we are also in the midst of a *political* crisis. The changes we now badly need require far-reaching and effective government action. How else can the market be made to work for the environment rather than against it? How else can corporate behavior be altered or programs built that meet real human and social needs? Inevitably, then, the drive for real change leads to the political arena, where a vital, muscular democracy steered by an informed and engaged citizenry is needed.

Yet, for Americans, merely to state the matter this way suggests the enormity of the challenge. Democracy in America today is in trouble. Weak, shallow and corrupted, it is the best democracy that money can buy. The ascendancy of market fundamentalism

and anti-regulation, anti-government ideology has been particularly frightening, but even the passing of these extreme ideas would leave deeper, more long-term deficiencies. It is unimaginable that American politics as we know it today will deliver the transformative changes needed.

There are many reasons why government in Washington today is too often more problem than solution. It is hooked on GDP growth – for its revenues, for its constituencies, and for its influence abroad. It has been captured by the very corporations and concentration of wealth it should be seeking to regulate and revamp. And it is hobbled by an array of dysfunctional institutional arrangements, beginning with the way presidents are elected.

Peter Barnes describes the problem starkly: “According to the Center for Public Integrity, the ‘influence industry’ in Washington now spends \$6 billion a year and employs more than thirty-five thousand lobbyists....[I]n a capitalist democracy, the state is a dispenser of many valuable prizes. Whoever amasses the most political power wins the most valuable prizes. The rewards include property rights, friendly regulators, subsidies, tax breaks, and free or cheap use of the commons....We face a disheartening quandary here. Profit-maximizing corporations dominate our economy....The only obvious counter-weight is government, yet government is dominated by these same corporations.”<sup>4</sup> As Bob Kaiser says, “So Damn Much Money.”<sup>5</sup>

These four crises underscore that our current system is not working for people or planet. Far too many people get a raw deal, as does the environment. No wonder there is so much populist anger today.

Now, these four crises are linked, powerfully linked. They cannot be dealt with separately. That seems daunting, for sure, but the only promising path forward is to address them together. And that's why it is not enough only to green the economy – and that is also why the new environmentalism must embrace social and political causes that once seemed non-environmental but are now central to its success. Let's explore some of these linkages.

America's gaping social and economic inequality poses a grave threat to democratic prospects, the democracy on which our success depends. In his book *On Political Equality*, our country's senior political scientist, Robert Dahl, concludes it is "highly plausible" that "powerful international and domestic forces [could] push us toward an irreversible level of political inequality that so greatly impairs our present democratic institutions as to render the ideals of democracy and political equality virtually irrelevant."<sup>6</sup> The authors brought together by political analysts Lawrence Jacobs and Theda Skocpol in *Inequality and American Democracy* document the emergence of a vicious cycle: growing income disparities shift political influence to wealthy constituencies and businesses, and that shift further imperils the potential of the democratic process to correct the growing disparities.<sup>7</sup>

Social inequities are not only undermining democracy, they are undermining environment as well. If the market is going to work for the betterment of society, environmental and social costs should be incorporated into prices, and wrongheaded government subsidies, a vast empire today, should be eliminated. Honest prices would be a lot higher, in some cases prohibitively high. But how can we expect to move to honest prices when half the country is just getting by? Honestly high prices are not a problem

because they are high; they're a problem because people don't have enough money to pay them, or they can't find preferable alternatives. In a similar vein, we cannot get far challenging our growth fetish and consumerism in a society where so many are nicked and dined to death and where the economy seems incapable of generating needed jobs and income security. Clearly, addressing social and environmental needs must go hand in hand.

Consider also the link between the recent financial collapse and the ongoing environmental deterioration. Both are the result of a system in which those with economic power are propelled, and not restrained by government, to take dangerous risks for the sake of great profit.

So, we see that the new economy – the prime objective of the new environmentalism – must be about more than green. We need a broader, more inclusive framing of our goal. We need to answer the probing question posed by John de Graaf in his new film: What's the economy for anyhow? The answer, I believe, is that we should be building what I would call a “sustaining economy” – one that gives top, over-riding priority to sustaining both human and natural communities. It must be an economy where the purpose is to sustain people and the planet, where social justice and cohesion are prized, and where human communities, nature, and democracy all flourish. Its watchword is caring – caring for each other, for the natural world, and for the future.<sup>8</sup> Promoting the transition to such an economy is in fact the mission of the New Economy Network, which I'm now working with many others to build. It will be a broad, welcoming space for all those pursuing diverse paths to these goals.

To build the new economy we need innovative economic thinking and new models. There is today wide-spread dissatisfaction with much of current economic orthodoxy. Enter the New Economics Institute, which is now being launched in the United States. The new economy needs a new economics.<sup>9</sup> The new economy also needs a journal to focus our attention beyond problems to solutions, and I applaud Bob Costanza for launching the new journal *Solutions*.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the generalities, it is fair to ask for more on how this new economy might look. As an early step in building a new economy, I believe we must begin to question the current centrality of economic growth in our economic and political life, what Clive Hamilton has called our “growth fetish.” With recent books like Peter Victor’s *Managing Without Growth*, Tim Jackson’s *Prosperity Without Growth*, and the New Economics Foundation’s *The Great Transition*, this is no longer as quixotic a cause as it was when I wrote my *Bridge* book just a few years ago. Peter Brown’s wonderful book, *Right Relationship*, also deserves mention in this context.<sup>11</sup>

Economic growth may be the world’s secular religion, but for much of the world it is a god that is failing – underperforming for most of the world’s people and, for those of us in affluent societies, now creating more problems than it is solving. The never-ending drive to grow the overall U.S. economy undermines communities and the environment, it fuels a ruthless international search for energy and other resources, and it rests on a manufactured consumerism that is not meeting the deepest human needs. We’re substituting growth and consumption for dealing with the real issues – for doing things that would truly make us better off.



Before it is too late, I think America should begin to move to post-growth society where working life, the natural environment, our communities, and the public sector are no longer sacrificed for the sake of mere GDP growth; where the illusory promises of ever-more growth no longer provide an excuse for neglecting to deal generously with compelling social needs; and where citizen democracy is no longer held hostage to the growth imperative.

Yet, even in a post-growth society there are many things that do need to grow. It is abundantly clear that American society and many others do need growth along many dimensions that increase human welfare: growth in good jobs, meaningful work, and in the incomes of the poor; growth in availability of affordable health care and in compassionate care for the elderly and the incapacitated; growth in education, research and training; growth in security against the risks of illness, job displacement, old age and disability; growth in investment in public infrastructure and amenity; growth in the deployment of climate-friendly and other green technologies; growth in the restoration of both ecosystems and local communities; growth in non-military government spending at the expense of military; and growth in international assistance for sustainable, people-centered development for the half of humanity that live in poverty, to mention some prominent needs. A post-growth economy would shift resources away from consumption and into investments in long-term social and environmental needs.

I put jobs and meaningful work first on this list because they are so important and unemployment is so devastating. Likely future rates of economic growth, even with further federal stimulus, are only mildly associated with declining unemployment. The availability of jobs, the wellbeing of people, and the health of communities should not be

forced to await the day when overall economic growth might deliver them. It is time to shed the view that government mainly provides safety nets and occasional Keynesian stimuli. Government instead should have an affirmative responsibility to ensure that those seeking decent jobs find them. And the surest, and also the most cost-effective, way to that end is direct government spending, investments and incentives targeted at creating jobs in areas where there is high social benefit. Creating new jobs in areas of democratically determined priority is certainly better than trying to create jobs by pump priming aggregate economic growth, especially in an era where the macho thing to do in much of business is to shed jobs, not create them.

Of particular importance to the new economy are government policies that will simultaneously temper growth while improving social and environmental well-being. Such policies are not hard to identify: shorter workweeks and longer vacations, with more time with our children and friends; greater labor protections, job security and benefits; job protection guarantees to part-time workers, flextime and generous parental leave; restrictions on advertising and a ban on ads aimed at children; a new design for the twenty-first-century corporation, one that embraces rechartering, new ownership patterns, and stakeholder primacy rather than shareholder primacy; incentives for local production and consumption and for community revitalization; new indicators of national social and environmental well-being that dethrone GDP;<sup>12</sup> strong social and environmental provisions in trade agreements; rigorous environmental, health and consumer protection, including full incorporation of environmental and social costs in prices; greater economic and social equality, with genuinely progressive taxation of the rich and greater income support for the poor; heavy spending on public services and amenities; and initiatives to

address population growth at home and abroad. Cumulatively, such measures would indeed slow growth, but we'd be better off with a higher quality of life.

Environmentalism's new agenda should embrace measures like those just listed. The new environmentalism must be about more than green. Mainstream American environmentalism to date has been too limited. In the current frame of action, too little attention is paid to the corporate dominance of economic and political life, to transcending our growth fetish, to promoting major lifestyle changes and challenging the materialistic and anthropocentric values that dominate our society, to addressing the constraints on environmental action stemming from America's vast social insecurity and hobbled democracy, to framing a new American story, or to building a new environmental politics. The new environmentalism must correct these deficiencies.

The new environmental agenda should expand to embrace a profound challenge to consumerism and commercialism and the lifestyles they offer, a healthy skepticism of growthmania and a redefinition of what society should be striving to grow, a challenge to corporate dominance and a redefinition of the corporation and its goals, a deep commitment to social equity and justice, and a powerful assault on the materialistic, anthropocentric and contempocentric values that currently dominate in our culture.

I have concentrated mostly on needed policies, I suppose because that is my background. But there is another hopeful path into a sustainable and just future. This is the path of "build it and they will come" and "just do it." One of the most remarkable and yet under-noticed things going on in our country today is the proliferation of innovative models of "local living" economies, sustainable communities and transition towns and for-benefit businesses which prioritize community and environment over profit and

growth. The work that Gar Alperovitz and his colleagues are doing in Cleveland with the Evergreen Cooperative is a wonderful case in point. An impressive array of new economy businesses has been brought together in the American Sustainable Business Council, and a new Fourth Sector is emerging, bringing together the best of the private sector, the not-for-profit NGOs, and government. The seeds of the new economy are already being planted across our land.<sup>13</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, the transition to a new economy will require a new politics, and a new environmental politics in particular. The leading environmental journalist, Philip Shabecoff, recognized this a decade ago in his far-sighted book, *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.<sup>14</sup> How should we approach the job of building a new politics? Consider the triple crisis I mentioned earlier. All three result from a system of political economy that is profoundly committed to profits and growth and profoundly indifferent to the fate of people, communities and the natural world. Left uncorrected, this system is inherently rapacious and ruthless, to use the description used by Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus in their famous macro-economics text. So it is up to us citizens, acting mainly through government, to inject values of fairness and sustainability into the system. But this effort commonly fails because our politics are too enfeebled and Washington is increasingly in the hands of the powerful and not the people. It follows, I submit, that the best hope for real change in America is a fusion of those concerned about environment, social justice, and strong democracy into one powerful progressive force. All progressive causes face the same reality. We rise or fall together, so we'd better join together.

Environmentalists should therefore support social progressives in addressing the crisis of inequality now unraveling America's social fabric and join with those seeking to reform politics and strengthen democracy. And they should join with us. Corporations have been the principal economic actors for a long time; now they are America's principal political actors as well. So here are some key issues for the new environmental agenda: public financing of elections, regulation of lobbying, nonpartisan Congressional redistricting, a minimum free TV and radio time to qualifying candidates, bringing back the Fairness Doctrine, and other political reform measures.

The new environmentalism must work with this progressive coalition to build a mighty force in electoral politics. This will require major efforts at grassroots organizing; strengthening groups working at the state and community levels; and developing motivational messages and appeals — indeed, writing a new American story, as Bill Moyers has urged. Our environmental discourse has thus far been dominated by lawyers, scientists, and economists. People like me. It has been too wonkish, out of touch with Main Street. *The Death of Environmentalism* was right about that. Now, we need to hear a lot more from the poets, preachers, philosophers, and psychologists.

And indeed we are. The world's religions are coming alive to their environmental roles — entering their ecological phase, in the words of religious leader Mary Evelyn Tucker. And just last year, the American Psychological Association devoted its annual gathering to environmental issues. The Earth Charter text and movement are providing a powerful base for a revitalization of the ethical and spiritual grounds of environmental efforts. The Charter's first paragraph says it all: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly

interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms, we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Toward this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.”

The new environmental politics must be broadly inclusive, reaching out to embrace union members and working families, minorities and people of color, religious organizations, the women’s movement, towns and cities seeking to revitalize and stabilize themselves, and other groups of complementary interest and shared fate. The “silo effect” still separates the environmental community from those working on domestic political reforms, a progressive social agenda, human rights, international peace, consumer issues, world health and population concerns, and world poverty and underdevelopment, but we are all in the same boat.

And the new environmental politics must build a powerful social movement. We have had movements against slavery and many have participated in movements for civil rights and the environment and against apartheid and the Vietnam War. We now need a new broad-based social movement – demanding action and accountability from governments and corporations, protesting, and taking steps as citizens, consumers and communities to realize sustainability and social justice in everyday life.

Recent trends reflect a broadening in approaches. Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have certainly worked outside the system, the League of Conservation Voters and

the Sierra Club have had a sustained political presence, groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund have developed effective networks of grassroots activists around the country, the World Resources Institute has augmented its policy work with on-the-ground sustainable development projects, and environmental justice concerns and the climate crisis have spurred the proliferation of grassroots efforts, student organizing, and community and state initiatives. Groups like 1Sky, the Energy Action Coalition, the 350 Campaign, Green for All, the Blue-Green Alliance, and others are transforming the environmental landscape. All this is headed in the right directions, but it is not nearly enough.

If all this seems idealistic and daunting, and it must to many, we should try not to let today's political realities and the art-of-the-possible get in the way of clear thinking. The planet is literally at stake and with it our children's future. In our super-rich country millions of fellow citizens are facing unnecessary economic and social deprivation. All the crises I have referred to are real – economic, social, environmental and political. They are very real. We see that every day. And right now we are fumbling around unable to find answers to any of them. The current system is broken. We need something better. Let's find it. The important thing is to know the general direction we should take and to start marching. As Thoreau said, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams." We know a lot already about needed policy initiatives, and an impressive array of new economy initiatives is already underway. And here is an especially compelling part: if we succeed in building the new environmentalism, we can not only contribute greatly to saving our planetary home but also help build the ideas and momentum needed to address many other big challenges our country faces.

In conclusion, I hope you will remember three things:

- Remember what my friend Paul Raskin said: Contrary to the conventional wisdom, it is business as usual that is the utopian fantasy; forging a new vision is the pragmatic necessity.<sup>15</sup>
- Second, in order to shore up my diminished ecumenical credentials, remember what Milton Friedman said: “Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately the crisis is here, if we would but recognize it as such.
- And, finally, remember that most of the ideas I have sketched this evening are not new. As we saw, they actually take us back to where we began, in the 1960s and 1970s. They gained prominence then and they can again. Perhaps they are now, belatedly, ideas whose time has come. We can’t recreate the 1960s and the 1970s; we shouldn’t even try. But we can learn from that era and find again its rambunctious spirit and fearless advocacy, its fight for deep change, and its searching inquiry.

Thank you.



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<sup>1</sup> President Nixon's January 22, 1970, State of the Union Address is reproduced in Council on Environmental Quality, *Environmental Quality: The First Annual Report of the CEQ*, transmitted to Congress August, 1970 (Appendix B), which also contains the President's Letter of Transmittal of the CEQ report (pp. v-xv). The citizens' declaration quoted in the text is the Santa Barbara Declaration of Environmental Rights, which followed quickly after the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969. The material in the text regarding growth, materialism, redistribution and job creation is drawn from Paul Ehrlich, Anne Ehrlich and John Holdren, *Human Ecology: Problems and Solutions* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1973), pp. 259-274. See also William R. Burch, Jr. and F. Herbert Bormann eds., *Beyond Growth: Essays on Alternative Futures*, Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Bulletin No. 88, Yale University, New Haven, 1975. The discussion on whether private enterprise can be compatible with ecological imperatives is from Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 255-275. See also Robert L. Heilbroner, *Business Civilization in Decline* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 97-110.

<sup>2</sup> James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). The environmental conditions and trends information in the text is drawn from this book, where it is more fully elaborated and referenced. See Introduction and Chapters 1 and 3. Many of the themes in the text are developed at greater length in this book.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hawken et al., *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Barnes, *Capitalism 3.0* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2006), pp. 34, 36, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Robert G. Kaiser, *So Damn Much Money* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *On Political Equality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), x. Dahl believes an alternative, hopeful outcome is also "highly plausible." "Which of these futures will prevail depends on the coming generations of American citizens," he writes.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence R. Jacobs and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Inequality and American Democracy* (Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> See Raine Eisler, "Roadmap to a New Economics: Beyond Capitalism and Socialism," *Tikkun*, November/December 2009, p. 17. Julian Agyeman has stressed the need to link social and environmental justice. See Julian Agyeman, *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). Important recent contributions to new economy thinking include Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007); Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver, *Right Relationship: Building the Whole Earth Economy* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009); and David Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

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<sup>9</sup> See David Boyle and Andrew Simms, *The New Economics* (London: Earthscan, 2009). The New Economics Institute is being launched by the New Economics Foundation (based in London) and the E. F. Schumacher Society.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.thesolutionsjournal.com](http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com).

<sup>11</sup> See Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth* (London: Earthscan, 2009); Peter Victor, *Managing Without Growth* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008); Stephen Spratt and New Economics Foundation, *The Great Transition* (London: New Economics Foundation, 2009); and Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver, *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009). See also Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), to whom we are all indebted. And see Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Costanza et al., *Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress* (Boston: Pardee Center, Boston University, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g. [www.asbcouncil.org](http://www.asbcouncil.org); [www.fourthsector.net](http://www.fourthsector.net); [www.evergreencoop.com](http://www.evergreencoop.com); [www.smallisbeautiful.org](http://www.smallisbeautiful.org); [www.bouldercountygoinglocal.com](http://www.bouldercountygoinglocal.com); <http://transitionsc.org>; and generally <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/TransitionCommunities>.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Shabecoff, *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Raskin et al., *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead* (Boston: Stockholm Environment Institute and Tellus, 2002), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Milton Freidman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Introduction.