

Voting Pro–Environment is Good For Jobs, Health, and Security

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**By Mark Jeantheau**

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There are many issues on the minds of US voters these days, but according to national polls, the environment ranks ...um... somewhere above hemp policy and just below humane treatment for Teletubbies.

People are, of course, justly concerned about top issues such as health care, terrorism, and jobs. But the environment actually has a role to play in all of those areas. Below are some examples of how this is so.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING CAN MEAN BETTER HEALTH

"If you have your health, you have everything"—so goes the old cliché. We usually don't think too much about our health until we have a problem. Diseases usually creep in on us slowly. They're very patient, waiting until our defenses are down far enough for us to be susceptible.

The health of the environment—the quality of the air we breathe, the purity of the water we drink, the condition of the land we grow our food on—are prime factors in the health of our bodies. We protect the health of our families by reducing pollution, by encouraging better farming practices that result in more nutritious agricultural products, and by getting the toxic chemicals out of the products we use every day.

Politicians are busy jousting about who has the better plan for improving health care, but they're mostly silent on the most basic health issue—keeping disease-causing pollutants out of the environment and out of us.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING CAN MEAN BETTER SAFETY

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What are the terrorist targets that have the most potential for causing problems? Here are three. Ports — We're still inspecting only a fraction of the more 6 million containers arriving in US coastal cities each year. Many security experts think it's just a matter of time before terrorists sneak a nuclear, chemical or biological device into one of them. By supporting the concept of "buying local," our leaders could begin reducing the traffic in our ports and thus make the problem more manageable. This would also reduce the huge level of pollution associated with product transport. Instead, our leaders pursue ever-grander "free trade" schemes that will INCREASE port security problems. Chemical Plants and Other Facilities That Use Chemicals — A terrorist strike at a facility that manufactures or uses toxic substances could release clouds of poisonous chemicals. And we're not only talking about heavy-duty chemical and industrial plants; many water-treatment facilities, for instance, still use toxic forms of chlorine for disinfection, even though safer alternatives are available. Those who currently control our federal government have been far too passive in addressing problems with high-chemical-use industries. Nuclear Power Plants — Although most nuclear facilities are hardened against airplane strikes, many are vulnerable to direct terrorist takeover. Because there are only 103 nuclear power plants in the US and because they do get a fair degree of attention when it comes to security, this is probably the least

likely of the three disaster scenarios presented here. But it's still a possibility, and instead of trying to reduce the level of the vulnerability by diverting investment resources to development of wind, solar, wave, and other clean, safe forms of electricity generation, some politicians are pushing plans to build MORE nuclear power plants. Egad.

### ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING CAN MEAN MORE JOBS

Mature industries do not typically create large numbers of new jobs. Industries based on oil, gas, and coal—the "business-as-usual industries" in the energy sector—are certainly not going to bolster our sagging job numbers, given that they're caught between the twin hammers of dwindling fossil-fuel supplies and anti-pollution pressures.

But there is a good solution. According to analyses by The Apollo Alliance, embarking on an ambitious program to develop renewable energy will allow us to create three million new, high quality jobs, free ourselves from imported oil, and clean up the environment. That certainly sounds a lot better than no new jobs and lots more black smoke in the sky.

### TOOLS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING

So, are you convinced that voting green also supports many of our other primary goals at the ballot box? If so, the best way to decide which candidate is the most supportive of our environment is NOT to listen to what they say, but instead to look at their voting records. A good way to do that for national candidates is to review the information at Project Vote Smart (<http://www.vote-smart.org/>), which is an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to providing facts on the voting records of candidates for the US congress and other federal offices. They cover all issues, not just the environment.

While Project Vote Smart is an incredible resource, if your main goal is to zero in on candidates' environmental records, you can do this more easily by letting the League of Conservation Voters (LCV)

be your guide. LCV's National Environmental Scorecard (

) analyzes and rates candidates' environmental voting

records. If you want to keep it reeeaaaally simple, the Scorecard has a single percentage number for each candidate to summarize how often the candidate supported the "environmental position." The higher the number, the greener the candidate. And by the way, LCV is a non–partisan organization—they endorse donkeys, elephants, and political animals of other stripes too.

Even though the environment may not come up much in debates and TV ads, it is our air, our water, and our land. Keeping it clean is an important issue in its own right, but it plays a part in almost all other issues too. Vote green!

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Mark is a writer, financial analyst, web developer, environmentalist, and, as necessary, chef and janitor. Grinning Planet is an expression of Mark's enthusiasm for all things humorous and green, as well as a psychotic desire to work himself half–to–death. Hobbies include health foods, music, getting frustrated over politics, and occasionally lecturing the TV set on how uncreative it is.

## **An Environmental Voting Guide for US State Elections**

**By Mark Jeantheau**

In these times when states are suffering extreme downward pressure on budgets and spending, how is our environment making out? Did it suffer cuts right along with the Program to Assist Millionaires Become Billionaires? Are important environmental projects being dropped from the budget along with luxury items like the statehouse's new Gold–Plated Enforcement Gavel?

And why is the issue of environmental protection relevant at the state level? Doesn't the US Environmental Protection Agency handle all that stuff? This article answers these questions and provides smart–voting tools for you to help ensure your surroundings remain green and healthful.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION AT THE STATE LEVEL**

While the US Environmental Protection Agency garners much of the media attention when it comes to

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environmental enforcement, it is actually the states that are carrying most of the load: 75% of the federal programs that can be delegated to states have been delegated; 90% of environmental enforcement actions are taken by the states; 94% of the data in EPA databases came from the states.

In 2003, states were only spending 1.4% of their budget on environment and natural resources—an all–time low, according to Resources for the Future ([www.rff.org](http://www.rff.org)).

Reducing resources at the state and local levels can cut the heart out of the monitoring and enforcement actions needed to ensure that our air, water, and land—and our bodies—are protected from environmental toxins. Even more troublesome are elected officials who have a weak commitment to the environment. The back–room deals cut in your governor's mansion, your statehouse, and your county council chambers can have a great impact on the environment.

### STATE–BY–STATE ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING GUIDES

What have YOUR elected local officials been doing to (or for) your state and county environmental agencies, and how have they voted on environmental issues in general? Did your state legislators fund the widening of the Porkbarrel Parkway while downsizing your state's Department of Natural Resources? Find out! Grinning Planet has compiled a list of the best available environmental voting guides for all 50 US states. Find it at

, along with some other

helpful voting tools.

Also, don't forget about your county elections. Many important issues, such as land use and recycling programs, are usually decided at the county level. The state–level organizations we list sometimes feature links to related county or regional groups. You can also check with your local chapter of the Sierra Club ([www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)) to see if they have a county–level voting guide.

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