

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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Do the 2020 Presidential Candidates Care About the Environment?

It is less than two months away from the 2020 presidential election, and there have been no debates between the two candidates, Donald Trump and Joe Biden. And even if there was a debate, it is unlikely that the environment would be addressed just like four years ago when this was not discussed, probably a condition of agreeing to debate.

Even if Trump and Biden had a debate and were asked questions about the environment, their responses would be based on what the audience wants to hear. It doesn't mean that the newly elected president would actually do what he said he would do. I have always judged politicians, and people in general, based on what they have done rather than what they say they will do. This is a better way to judge what a person will do. What a person has done is a better indicator of what the person will do in the future rather than what he says he will do.

A major environmental issue over the past few years has been the potential approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline. The pipeline will connect Alberta, Canada to the U.S. Gulf Coast to deliver 800,000 barrels per day of tar sands oil to be refined, exported and burned. There has been much opposition because this oil requires so much refining that it may require more energy for the process than what the final product will produce. It is still under consideration despite Trump's support for the oil industry.

Trump has pushed for so much oil production in order to become energy independent, that we now have an excess of oil. So the oil companies are lobbying to use the U.S. influence to have Kenya reverse its strict limits on plastics in order to sell in Africa excess plastic produced from excess oil. Donald Trump has already reversed some of the E.P.A. regulations imposed by Obama to protect water and air contamination, so we know where he stands relative to the environment. You may recall that when Trump was campaigning in 2016, he promised he would "drain the swamp", meaning he would eliminate lobbyists, and he kept his word by hiring them. A former coal-industry lobbyist, Andrew Wheeler, now heads up the EPA. His position on the environment, and climate change in particular, can be summarized when he withdrew from the Paris Agreement. However, no country can withdraw until three years after making that decision, and it doesn't take effect until one year after that. So the U.S. won't officially have withdrawn from the Paris Agreement until November 4, 2020, the day after the election.

Joe Biden has been integral with climate change since his term as vice-president under Barack Obama. However, even before that, Biden introduced a bill after James Hansen testified before Congress about the need to reduce carbon emissions. The Global Climate Protection Act was passed to have the U.S. create a task force to study climate change and work along with Russia. In 1997, Biden joined in a 95-0 vote for a Senate resolution voicing opposition to any protocol that exempted fast-developing nations like China from cutting greenhouse gases.

Now we are hearing more about Biden's version of the Green New Deal which was first proposed by Jill Stein in 2016 when she ran for president on Green Party. Its main objective was to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2030 at a cost of \$200 billion per year, or \$2 trillion. Biden's program, however, has other objectives like not banning fracking. And in addition, he will rejoin the Paris accord. Now \$2 trillion seems like a huge commitment over ten years, but the Green Party presidential candidate for 2020, Howie Hawkins, has a proposal that will cost \$27.5 trillion over the next ten years.

Since moving forward with any environmental proposal will depend on the makeup of the Senate and House of Representatives, there is no guarantee that any of these will ever take place. And we are never sure that the president, whoever he is, will even propose something for the environment. It seems that there are still too many people, at least in the U.S., that are not that concerned about the environment. If either candidate were more concerned, I would recommend another approach to climate change.

My recommendation for the newly elected president would be to propose a universal carbon tax based on the carbon footprint of every product, and it would have to be implemented by every major economy in the world. Assuming that China agrees to it, which I doubt, the price of manufactured products from China would increase significantly because so much of its energy production is from dirty coal. If you add the carbon emission generated for shipping the products to the U.S., they may not be much cheaper than U.S. products, if at all. A universal carbon tax could also shift the manufacturing of some of these products to Mexico which will probably make them cheaper than from China because of slightly lower wages and considerably shorter shipping distance. Who knows, maybe this will improve the Mexican economy and reduce the immigration of Mexicans into the U.S. – or maybe some will even return home.

I believe that Joe Biden would agree to something like this as it would help meet some of his objectives. And just think, if Donald Trump accepts climate change to be real and tries to do something about it, he may even help another goal of bringing jobs back to the U.S. First he has to win the election, and then someone needs to convince him that climate change is not a hoax but real. Is this possible?

The bottom line is when you vote in 2020 for president of the United States, make your choice based on some issue other than the environment. You may easily be disappointed by whatever either candidate will do relative to the environment.