

Fighting Bob Fest

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Baraboo, Wisconsin

September 18, 2004

Thank you very much. I'm really, really happy to be here in Baraboo and to be at this event celebrating one of the greatest progressives in American history. I also want to welcome my aunt, my father's sister, Rosemary Kennedy, who is here in the front row and thank her for coming.

I want to talk about a little bit about Bush's environmental record. My voice is shot so I apologize that I can't project as well as normally, but I'm going to do my best.

And I -- you know for 20 years as an environmental advocate and I have been disciplined about being nonpartisan and bipartisan in my approach to these issues. I have supported Republican leaders, as few as they are, who work good on this issue, and I don't believe there's any such thing as Republican children or Democratic children. And the worst thing that can happen to the environment is it becomes a province of a single political party.

But you cannot talk -- you cannot speak honestly about the environment in any context today without speaking critically about this president. This is the worst environmental president we've had in American history.

If you look at NRDC's website, if you talk to the leaders of all the environmental groups -- there's a group of actually 20 top environmental leaders in the country -- if you talk to the CEOs of all those groups and ask them five years ago what's its gravest threat to the global environment, they would have given you a range of answers from global warming, overpopulation, habitat destruction. Today they will all tell you the same thing -- George W. Bush. There is no other issue, environmental issue today except that one. If you look at NRDC's website, one of the groups I work for the National Resource Defense Council, they've compiled a list of over 400 major environmental rollbacks that have been promoted or implemented by this administration over the last three and a half years, and they're designed to eviscerate 30 years of environmental law. They've already done irreparable damage.

If even a fraction of the ones currently proposed are actually implemented over the next year or two, we will effectively have no significant environmental law left in our country. That's not exaggeration. That's not hyperbole. It is a fact. Many of our laws will remain on the books in one form or the other, but they will be unenforceable. And we will be like Mexico which has these wonderful, poetic environmental laws, but nobody knows about them, and nobody complies with them because they cannot be enforced.

It's a stealth attack as I show in my book. They know in the White House because the pollster, Frank Luntz told the President this in a memo that I reproduce in my book where he says that 81 percent of Republicans want stronger environmental laws, want them strictly enforced. And Democrats, they're almost exactly the same -- I always say Republicans -- you know 80 percent of Republicans are just Democrats who don't know what's going on -- but Frank Luntz warned the President that this was going to alienate -- this radical agenda was going to alienate even the

Republican base. And if they wanted to go forward with applying a sledge hammer to our environmental laws, they were going to have to do it by stealth.

And he recommends hiring scientists, these phony, aberrant scientists, to say that there's no such thing as global warming or DDT is good for you or whatever -- we call them "biostitutes." And that they would use this kind of Orwellian rhetoric to disguise from the American public the radical nature of their agenda. When they're going to destroy our forests, they call it the Healthy Forest Law; when they destroy our air, they call it the Cleaner Sky.

But the most insidious part of this stealth attack is that they have put polluters and lobbyists for the biggest, the worst polluters -- the bottom feeders of America in charge of the agencies that are supposed to protect Americans from pollution.

The head of Public Lands in this country today is Steven Griles, a mining industry lobbyist who believes that public lands are unconstitutional. The head of the Forest Service, Mark Rey, is the most rapacious timber industry lobbyist in American history. The head of the air division of the EPA, Jeffrey Holmstead, has represented nothing but the worst polluters in America over the past 20 years. The head of the Superfund division of the EPA is a woman whose last job was advising and counseling corporations how to avoid Superfund -- evade Superfund. The second in command of the EPA is a Monsanto lobbyist.

If you look at the Department of Energy, Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, and EPA, virtually all the sub-secretariats and agency heads in all those different divisions are now lobbyists for the worst polluters -- the very polluters that are regulated by those agencies. This is something that's already impacting all of the quality of life all across America.

The worst thing that's happening in the country right now is the negligence of the American press, because we are not getting the truth. And you know what? The best thing that could happen is the entire White House Press Corps all drank poison Kool-Aid, because they're part of a cult, and they're nothing more than stenographers for this White House.

And they aren't subjecting these catastrophic policies to the President to go to war in Iraq, to destroy our environment to the kind of scrutiny, to the lies and the half-truths that we are hearing out of this White House day after day after day. And there's absolutely no scrutiny by the press. They just report them and think they've done their job. And there's no kind of ethic among the press that is not just to report both sides of the story, but we have to search for the truth and tell the truth to the American people. And we are not getting the truth, we are getting Michael Jackson and Kobe Bryant. And they are -- those networks -- there are six corporations that own all of our networks and they are appealing -- the news divisions have devolved from the public forums of our democracy and a marketplace for ideas into a marketplace for commerce alone.

And they're marketing to the lowest common denominator of the American people, which is to appeal to our prurient interest and celebrity gossip and sex, and they're not giving us news. They're giving us Michael Jackson and Kobe Bryant. And the President can get away with anything that he wants with this kind of press corps in America. And it really represents an erosion of our democracy.

And you know -- what I'm going to talk to you about today is an excess of corporate power. The thing that threatens American democracy more than anything else. And this is already eroding our environment and injuring the quality of life for Americans all over our country -- but the American people don't know it's happening because the press isn't telling them. They don't understand the connection between the President's corporate donors, the President's policies on air, and the impacts to the American people to our children, etc. The dots are not being connected by this negligent, lazy press, an indolent press.

And let me tell you a few examples, small examples, just from the energy industry about the way that these environmental rollbacks are already impacting quality of life all over America. I have three sons who have asthma. One out of every four black children in our American cities now has asthma. We don't know why we are having this epidemic of pediatric asthma in our country. But more and more of our children -- it's doubled again over the last five years -- but more and more of our children are being born with asthma. Maybe it's pesticides or hormones or something in our food, we don't know why it is.

But we do know that asthma attacks are caused primarily by two components of air pollution ozone particulates. And we know that the principal cause, source of those materials in our air are 1,100 coal burning power plants who are burning coal illegally. It's been illegal for 15 years. They were supposed to modernize their process, they didn't do it. The Clinton administration was prosecuting the 70 worst of these, criminally and civilly, but this is an industry that donated \$48 million to President Bush during the 2000 cycle and have given \$58 million since.

And one of the first things that Bush did when he came into office was to order the Justice Department and the EPA to drop those lawsuits. The Justice Department attorney said that this had never happened in history before, where a presidential candidate accepts money from a criminal who is a target of a prosecution -- a federal prosecution -- and then orders those prosecutions dropped once he comes to office.

And you remember how excited and indignant the American press got when Bill Clinton pardoned Mark Rich, and all the Republicans got upset about this. But this is 70 people, targets of an active criminal investigation simply dropped. And Mark Rich, I have to remind you, never killed anyone. But according to the EPA, these 70 plants alone, the criminal exceedances from those plants alone kill 5,500 Americans every single year. And, after they excused these criminals from prosecution, the Bush administration went ahead and tore the heart out of the Clean Air Act to remove the provision that would require them to clean up. So that they will never ever have so clean up the ozone particulates. Nearly 30,000 Americans because of this law will die every single year because of the adjustments that the Bush administration made to that law.

Now we're suing him. What he did was illegal, and we're going to win the lawsuit, but it's going to take us ten years. And it will take another ten years to straighten out the mess, and his friends will be profiteering during that period at the expense of the American people.

This week the federal EPA announced that in 19 states it is now unsafe to eat any freshwater fish in the state because of mercury contamination. In 48 states at least some of the fish is unsafe to eat. The only two states that don't have advisories are now Alaska and Wyoming because they don't allocate the money to do the fish testing. But in 48 states there's so much mercury in the fish that some species can't be eaten -- I mean water bodies where fish can't be eaten.

We know a lot about mercury that we didn't know ten years ago. We know, for example, according to the CDC in Atlanta that 1 out of every 6 American women now has so much mercury in her womb that her children are at risk for a grim inventory of diseases including autism, blindness, mental retardation, cognitive impairment, heart, liver and kidney disease and many others. I have so much mercury in my body, I got tested recently, my levels are three times the levels considered safe. Dr. David Carpenter is a national authority on mercury contamination told me if I were a woman of childbearing years with these levels, my children would have cognitive impairment. And I said to him, you mean might have, and he said no, no, no, the science is very certain now, they would have cognitive impairment. And he estimated a permanent loss of IQ in these children of 5 to 7 points.

Well, the Clinton administration, recognizing the catastrophic impacts of this epidemic on our national health, reclassified mercury as a hazardous pollutant under the Clean Air Act. That triggers a requirement that those 1,100 power plants, which are the source of our mercury, remove 90 percent of the mercury within three and a half years. It would have cost them

according to EPA less than 1 percent of planned revenues, and it would have worked. When they shut down those mercury emissions within three years the fish downstream of them to clean up their fish. This is a great deal for the American people, but it's still a lot of money for those utilities, billions of dollars, and this is the same industry that gave \$100 million to this president.

And eight weeks ago President Bush announced he was scrapping the Clinton era regs and substituting instead regulations that were written by industry lobbyists from the utility industry's number one lobbying firm Latham and Watkins. They wrote this new regulation, and that regulation will allow the utilities to continue poisoning our fish and our air with mercury forever. They say that the regulations say on its face that they have to clean up the mercury within 15 years -- 70 percent of it, which by itself is outrageous, but in truth, the industry lawyers who wrote that reg have woven so many loopholes into it that the industry will never -- literally never have to clean up. The head -- the chief lobbyist for Latham and Watkins, the law firm -- the lobbying firm for utilities is Jeffrey Holmstead who is now the head of the air division of the EPA, and he's the one who promulgated these regs.

So we now live in a science fiction nightmare where my children and the children of millions of other Americans are being brought into a world where the air is too poisonous for them to breathe because somebody gave money to a politician. And when my children and the children of most Americans can no longer engage in the seminal, primal activity of American youth, which is to go fishing with their father and come home and eat the fish because somebody gave money to a politician. And this is what we're fighting about.

I live two hours south of the Adirondacks where I take my children fishing and hunting and hiking and camping. The oldest wilderness area on the face of the planet. It's been protected, forever wild since 1888. We had a right, the American people, to believe that generations of Americans would be able to enjoy those pristine landscapes and those beautiful waterways. But today one-fifth of the lakes in the Adirondacks are sterilized by acid rain. It has also destroyed the forest cover on the high peaks of the Appalachians from Georgia all the way up to Quebec. And it's already -- the acid rain is also coming from the same 1,100 power plants that gave that big contribution to the President. And this administration has put the brakes on the statutory requirements that they clean up that acid rain.

I was down last year flying over the coal fields of Kentucky and West Virginia, and I saw a site there that if the American people could see it, it would be a revolution in this country. We are cutting down the Appalachian mountains with these giant bulldozers that are 22 stories high, and 2,500 tons of dynamite that we explode in Appalachia every single day knocking the tops off these mountains dumping them into the adjacent river valleys. And when my father was fighting strip-mining back in 1968 he told me the reason -- he said this is going to destroy the environment, they're going to destroy the capacity of those communities to ever regenerate any kind of economic activity, and they also -- the reason their doing it, it's their way of destroying the unions and firing the workers. And there were a 114,000 miners in West Virginia when he told me that and today there's 12,000 left. And they're producing the same amount of coal, and they're not unionized, and the profits are going to these large corporations and these giant machines.

Well, of course, they buried 1,200 miles of streams already, and they're burying many more. They will, if Bush gets reelected, they will destroy by the end of this next term an area the size of Delaware. Flatten these historic landscapes where Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett run. The source of our values, our virtues, our character as a people -- and they're flattening it, cutting it to the ground, and, of course, this is illegal. You cannot in the United States of America take rock and debris and rubble and toxic waste and dump it into a stream without a Clean Water Act permit. And you can't get a permit to do that kind of stuff.

So, we sued them. Joe Lovett, the attorney on that case, won the case in front of a federal judge in West Virginia who enjoined all mountaintop mining. Two days. Two days from when we won

that decision the White House rewrote the Clean Water Act and changed one word in it so to allow all mountaintop mining to continue and to allow rock, debris, rubble and any solid waste now to be dumped into any waterway in America without a Clean Water Act permit.

This is the battle we're fighting. This is not an esoteric battle to save fishes and birds. This is protecting -- we are protecting nature for our own sake because it is the infrastructure of our communities. And if we want to meet our obligation as a generation, as a civilization, as a nation, which is to create communities for our children that give them the same opportunities for dignity and enrichment as the communities that our parents gave us, we have to start by protecting our environmental infrastructure: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the fisheries, the wildlife. The public lands that connect us to prior generations of Americans and connect us to our communities and provide the source of our values and our virtues and our characters of people that define us as a nation. These are the things we're fighting to protect.

Now if you ask the people in the White House why are you doing this, first of all, they're going to lie to you and tell you half-truths, and they're going to say, oh, we're not doing it, we're actually helping the environment with these laws. But if you get one of them or one of their apologists on a day when they're being honest, and they can make their best argument, what they'll say is, well, you know, we have to choose now between economic prosperity on the one hand and environmental protection on the other.

And that is a false choice in 100 percent -- in 100 percent of the situations good environmental policy is identical to good economic policy. If we want to measure our economy, and this is how we ought to be measuring it, based on how it produces jobs and the dignity of jobs over the long term, over the generations, and how it preserves the value of the assets of our community. If on the other hand, we want to do what they've been urging us to do -- what George Bush has been urging us to do, which is to treat the planet as if it were a business and liquidation. Convert our natural resources to cash as quickly as possible -- have a few years of pollution-based prosperity. We can generate an instantaneous cash flow and the illusion of a prosperous economy, but our children are going to pay for our joy ride with denuded landscapes and poor health and huge clean up costs that are going to amplify over time, and they're never going to be able to pay.

Environmental injury is deficit spending. It's a way of loading the costs of our generation's prosperity onto the backs of our children. And I want to say this, there is no stronger advocate for free market capitalism than myself or John Kerry. And I believe that free market is the most efficient, democratic way to distribute the goods to the land. And the best thing we could do for the environment is to have a true free market economy. In a free market, we are encouraged to use goods efficiently. Efficiency means the elimination of waste, and that's the elimination of pollution. Environmental injury is not caused by the free market, but by the suspension of free market rules. You show me a polluter, and I'll show you a subsidy. I'll show you a fat cat who's using political clout to escape the discipline of the free market and force the public to pay its production cost. In a true free market economy you can't make yourself rich without making your neighbor rich and without enriching your community; but what polluters do, they make themselves rich by making everybody else poor. They raise standards of living for themselves by lowering quality of life for everybody else, and they do that by escaping the discipline of the free market and forcing the public to pay their production costs.

When those coal utilities burned that coal that puts acid rain and mercury and ozone particulates in the air that poison our children, that make them be born with autism, that reduce their IQs and reduce worker days, that destroy the lakes in the Adirondacks, that deprive me of the capacity to fish in my own home state even after I already paid for the fishing license. Those impacts impose costs on the rest of us that should, in a true free market economy, be reflected in the price of General Electric -- of the utilities -- Southern Companies or whatever, Alliant Energy's product when it makes it into the marketplace. But what these companies do, which is what all polluters do, they use political clout to escape the discipline of the free market and force the public to pay their production costs.

You know I talked to Jim Hightower the other day who is going to talk here later tonight. We were talking about the free market and he said, yeah, the free market is a great thing -- we should try it sometime. We don't have a free market economy in this country anymore. And all of the environmental laws were meant, all of the environmental laws -- the federal environmental laws were meant to restore free market capitalism in America by forcing actors in the marketplace to pay the true cost of bringing their product to market.

And what I do as an environmental lawyer for Riverkeepers, Waterkeepers, and NRDC is I don't even consider myself an environmentalist anymore I'm a free marketeer. I go out into the marketplace, and I find the polluters, and I say to them, we're going to force you to internalize your costs the same way that you're internalizing your profits. Because when somebody cheats the free market, all of us gets cheated. It distorts the entire marketplace, and none of us gets the advantages, the benefits, the efficiency, and the democracy that the free market otherwise promises our nation.

And Americans have to understand that there is a huge difference between free market capitalism which democratizes our nation, which makes us more efficient and prosperous, and the kind of corporate, crony capitalism that has been embraced by this White House -- which is as antithetical to democracy and prosperity and efficiency in America as it is in Nigeria.

And you know corporations don't want free markets, and they don't want democracy. They want profits. And the best, fair way for them to get profits is by buying politicians. Using this corrupt campaign finance system we have in this country, which is just a form of legalized bribery, and the capture control of the agencies and the politicians. And then they use that control to eliminate the marketplace and eliminate their competitors and privatize the commons and allow them to devour the air and water which belongs to us.

The public trust asset, the commonwealth of our country which are open to plunder by these thieves, and they get a hold of this by campaign finance, but that's a form of plunder ultimately. I spoke two years ago to a group of farmers in Clear Lake, Iowa, and there were 1,200 farmers there, and I said something there that day -- I said I was not fearful of the big corporate integrators like Smithfield and Premium Standard Farms and these other big integrators that are coming in and shattering rural communities and building these hog factories and driving the farmers off of their land and destroying their water and the air and the property values of those communities. And I said corrupting politicians while they do it and eroding our democracy and bulldozing our democratic institutions.

And farmers know this is going on because there's no free market left in agricultural in the United States of America. It is gone. You can't -- you know, except for these farmers' markets here which are trying to restore it, you can't take a pig and bring it to a slaughter house and sell it in the marketplace anymore. That whole system is controlled by a few large corporations now that I work in North Carolina against this industry. And 15 years ago -- and the big farm groups down there -- 15 years ago there were 27,500 independent hog farmers in the state of North Carolina, and today there's none left. They've been completely replaced by 2,200 hog factories -- 1,600 owned by one company -- Smithfield Foods. And these large corporations are coming in, emptying rural landscapes shattering rural communities. The Raleigh News and Observer did a five-part series for which they won the Pulitzer Prize that showed how these corporations are coming in and have corrupted the public officials in North Carolina and bought the agencies and bulldozed democracy. So these farmers knew what I was talking about, and I said I was more fearful of the big, corporate multi-national integrators than I was of Osama bin Laden. And when they stood up, and they gave me a 10-minute standing ovation -- 1,200 farmers.

But I got beat up by the Farm Bureau for the next six months -- the big corporate agri-business people and all their allies in the press for six months for having said it. But I'll say it again, and I stand on what I said. And it's the same thing that's been said by the most visionary political leadership throughout our American history -- including the Republicans -- they've all said it.

That, you know, today it's in vogue to say we should be scared of big government and overreaching, but our leaders from the beginning of American history have warned us not so much of big government -- which we also have to be careful about -- but about corporate power, the excess of corporate power as the gravest threat to our democracy. And that's what Fighting Bob LaFollette was warning us about as well.

And you know Teddy Roosevelt said the exact same thing that I said and that's that our country would never be defeated by a foreign enemy. Our commitment to democracy and political institutions and soul of our nation were too strong, but we would be -- our democratic institutions would be subverted by malefactors of great wealth who would erode them from within. And Dwight Eisenhower, another Republican, in his most famous speech, greatest speech ever warned Americans of the domination by the military industrial complex. And Abraham Lincoln, the greatest Republican ever, in the height of the Civil War in 1863 said, "I have the South in front of me, and I have the bankers behind me, and for my country I fear the bankers most." And Franklin Roosevelt said that the domination of government by corporations is fascism. That's how he defined it. And he agreed with Mussolini who said fascism should not be called 'fascism,' it should be called 'corporatism,' because it's the merger of state and corporate power.

And Americans have to understand that there's a big difference between free market capitalism. There's communism which is the domination of business by government; fascism is the domination of government -- or the other way around. Communism is the domination of business by government; fascism is the domination of government by business. And both of those -- we need to walk the narrow alley between those which is free market capitalism and democracy.

And those things need to be nurtured, cared for. And we need a strong, vibrant press which will exercise scrutiny over our public offenses or we're going to lose that very, very quickly in this country. And right now we're in the process of that. And I want to say when you open government -- when corporations, these individuals who I talked about who are running our agencies, they have not entered government for the public service; they have entered government specifically to subvert the laws that they now in charge with enforcing. To privatize the commons, to take what we own: the public trust assets, the air, the water, the wildlife, the public lands, the shared assets of our community, the commonwealth, and turn it over to private corporations for their own profits.

This is the administration of plunder. In The 1880s we almost lost our democracy, too, during the Gilded Age. And the reformers came along like Teddy Roosevelt and Bob LaFollette, and ultimately, in 20 years they reformed our government and strengthened democratic institutions and gave us back our democracy. But today we're seeing those reforms eroded systemically by this government, and we're seeing our commons turned over to large corporate power for corporate profit-taking again. And this is the administration of plunder.

We've seen how they have taken the \$5 trillion Clinton surplus, a 10-year surplus and turned it into a \$5 trillion deficit. The largest shift of wealth in the history of the world -- \$10 trillion shifting from the people of our country and from our treasury and from future generations into the pockets of large corporations and the wealthy few. And we've seen how they have plundered and squandered the biggest asset of our wealth, which was the world's goodwill towards us, okay.

And when I was a little boy, I traveled over the country with the President, and I went to Europe with my father to Czechoslovakia and Poland and France, Italy, England, and Greece. And I saw everywhere we went these vast crowds of people who came to meet us, hundreds of thousands of people who were hungry for American leadership, who loved our country, who wanted to believe in so strongly our moral authority. And they named their streets after our presidents: Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson and Roosevelt and Kennedy.

And I remember the day after 9/11 when the headline of the Le Monde, the biggest newspaper in France was "We Are All Americans Now." And the goodwill and the love -- we were beloved

among the world, and it took us 230 years for our nation to work up those reserves, to develop those reserves of respect and love and moral authority around the world. And in three and a half years it's all been squandered. We are now the most despised nation on Earth. There are 5 billion people around the planet who hate and fear the United States of America because of the actions of this president and the alliances that we put together. These crucial, treasured alliances with the European allies after World War II are squandered and destroyed.

And our relationship with the modern Muslim countries are destroyed because those people can no longer support us openly and manufacturing terrorists in those countries. And in the meantime while we're squandering \$200 billion in Iraq while we're not protecting our nuclear plants and chemical plants enforcing the industries who were profiteering on those things to share their burden, to shoulder their burden of that. And I talk about that in my book. This is the -- most of all the worst place for plundering is our public trust assets, our public lands, air, water, wildlife, endangered species, our fisheries, all those things that make us proud to be American.

This is the government -- this is the Republicans who took the conserve out of conservatives.

And, you know, this is all of the values that they claim are just shallow facades, that they have eroded through wormwood from beneath and from behind. They do nothing. They embraced these values they call values, but they have nothing to do with the real American values. Torture is not an American value. Conservation. They have taken the conserve out of conservative. They claim to embrace the free market economy, but what they really want is corporate welfare and capitalism for the poor and socialism for the rich. They claim to like property rights but what they really want is the right for polluters to use their property, to destroy their neighbors' property, and to destroy the public property. They claim to like local control, but it's only when it means removing the obstacles -- the legal obstacles for large corporations to come in and dominate the local political landscape.

And when I work with these rural communities who are trying to zone out these hog farms or the rural communities in West Virginia who are trying to zone out the mountaintop mining, and the federal government is there under President Bush's leadership crushing that kind of local control. Where are they then? When they talk of local control, and they talk of law and order while letting big corporate polluters and corporate criminals off the hook.

And they talk about Christianity while they violate the manifold mandates of Christianity. To each other to organize religion through the great books of those religions, through art, music, and literature and poetry but nowhere was there such clarity and texture and grace and joy as through creation. We don't know Michelangelo by reading his biography; we know him by looking at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. And we know our Creator best by experiencing creation and going out and -- you know the undiluted work of the Creator: the rivers, the streams, the national forests, the things that we leave in tact for future generations so they also can get the benefits of that exposure.

When we destroy nature, we diminish ourselves; we impoverish our children. We're not fighting to preserve those ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest, as Rush Limbaugh loves to say, for the sake of the spotted owl; but because we believe that those trees have more value to humanity standing than they would if we cut them down. And I'm not fighting for the Hudson River for the sake of the shad or the sturgeon or the stripers, but because I believe that my life would be richer and my children and my community would be richer if we live in a world where there are striped bass in the Hudson and shad and sturgeon. And my children could see the fishermen out on the river in their tiny boats doing what they've been doing for generations and touch them when they come to shore to prepare their nets or wait out the tides. And doing that connects themselves to 350 years of New York State history and understand that they're part of something larger than themselves; they're part of a continuum; they're part of a community. I don't want my children to grow up in a world where there are no more commercial fishermen left in the Hudson. Where it's all Unilever and 400-ton factory trollers a hundred miles offshore strip-mining the ocean. And

where there are no more family farmers left in America where it's all Smithfield and Cargill and Premium Standard raising animals in factories and treating both animals and human beings with unspeakable cruelty and destroying these communities.

And where we've lost touch with the seasons and the tides and the things that connect us to the 10,000 generations of human beings that were here before there were laptops. And they connect us ultimately to God. And like I said I don't believe that nature is God and that we ought to be worshipping it as God, but I do believe that it's the way God communicates for us most forcefully. And you know, if you look at all of the religious traditions of mankind's history, the central epiphany always occurs in the wilderness. Buddha had to go into the wilderness to experience self realization; Mohammad had to go to the wilderness of Mt. Hera in 629 to wrestle an angel in the middle of the night to have the Koran squeezed out of her; Moses had to go up into the wilderness of Mt. Sinai to get the Commandments; the Jews had to spend 40 years in the wilderness to purge themselves of the 400 years of slavery in Egypt; Christ had to go into the wilderness for 40 days to discover his divinity; and his mentor John the Baptist is a man who lived in a cave in the Jordan Valley and dressed in the skins of wild beasts.

And all of Christ's parables are taken from nature: I am the vine you are the branch, the mustard seed, the little swallow, the scattering the seeds in the fallow ground, the lilies of the field. He calls himself a fisherman, a farmer, a vineyard keeper, a shepherd. The reason he did that is that's how he kept in touch with the people. He was saying things that were revolutionary, that contradicted everything they heard from the literate, sophisticated people of their time. And they would have dismissed him as a quack, but they were able to confirm the wisdom of his proverbs through their own observations of the fishes and the birds. And they were able to say, he's not telling us something new, he's simply illuminating something that is very, very old. Messages that were written into creation by the Creator at the beginning of time, and we haven't been able to decipher them until the Prophets came and told us what they were, and that's why all the Prophets in the Koran, in the Old Testament, in the Upanishads, in the New Testament -- almost all of them come out of the wilderness. And almost all of them are shepherds, because that daily connection to nature gives them the special access to the wisdom of the Almighty.

And in our country the wisdom always came off of the farms. And today we are driving the nail into Thomas Jefferson's vision -- the final nail in the coffin of Thomas Jefferson's vision of an American democracy rooted in tens of thousands of freeholds owned by family farmers. So that in order to make corporate profit-taking more easy and accessible to the President's campaign contributors, we are wiping out our wilderness area. We're destroying the capacity of Americans to experience nature undiminished and to experience communities -- to enjoy communities; to give them the same opportunity for dignity and enrichment and the same opportunity ultimately to experience the Divine. To understand what God is and, therefore, what our own potential is as human beings, and the values of our country, and the character of our people -- the things that make us proud to be American.

All of these things are things that are being squandered by this terrible, terrible, terrible administration and we need to rise up and fight against them. This is the most important election. And I hope all of you will stand shoulder to shoulder with me and throw these people out of the White House. Thank you.