

Donald Trump wants to abolish EPA and leave environmental regulation to the states. Given that many environmental problems cross state lines, it's not clear how he thinks this would work. But never mind that. A more immediate problem is understanding why this position may appeal to his core voters.

For candidates like Cruz, it's not hard to understand their anti-environmentalism. The GOP has been very close to the extractive industries (coal, oil and gas, etc.), and someone like Cruz has been a beneficiary. His anti-environmentalism is one reason he's attracted so much support from people like the Koch brothers. But Trump doesn't need that kind of support.

It helps to take a closer look at Trump voters. A [study](#) of Super Tuesday voting results by Jeff Guo for the Washington Post shows that Trump did significantly better in counties with higher death rates for middle-aged whites and in counties where there was a bigger loss of manufacturing jobs in the past twenty years. This is consistent with two other findings: working class whites have had an increased death rate (in part from drug use and suicide), and working class incomes have stagnated or declined. In short, this is a group for whom life has gotten worse in the past quarter century. It's no wonder that they're attracted to a candidate who promises to "make America great again."

Republicans have worked hard to sell the story that excessive regulation has destroyed jobs. The evidence doesn't really show that much of an effect, but as we know, evidence and politics aren't necessarily connected. Unfortunately, environmentalists haven't done as well at communicating that EPA's work primarily involves public health, leaving many people with the impression that its primary mission is protecting nature rather than humans.

Although the jobs portion of the attack on environmental regulation is unfounded, there is more truth to the claim that regulation raises energy prices. Although the increases are generally small, this is understandably a matter of great concern to people whose incomes are stuck in place or eroding, particularly since energy is a larger share of their expenditures than is true of the more affluent.

Cap-and-trade, along with emissions taxes, provide ways of addressing the problem by recycling some revenue back to energy users. Such methods can be designed to target the less affluent and to avoid incentives for over-consuming. Whether such measures would reduce pushback against EPA is unclear, but regardless of the politics, they would be worthwhile in order to avoid further burdening a vulnerable segment of the population.

I think the more important point, however, is the need to do more to highlight the public

health dimension of environmental law, as opposed to the intrinsic value of protecting nature. That's something that should appeal to all Americans. Even Trump voters have to breathe.