

Given Newt Gingrich's current spurt in the polls, it's worth taking a bit of a closer look at his environmental views. He [favors](#) dismantling EPA, which should make him popular with the tea party. But apparently he has problems in that quarter:

The reaction from some conservative commentators was swift and harsh. "Intellectually incoherent," said Myron Ebell, the director of energy and global warming policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. "Asinine," a blogger for the American Spectator opined....

As a supporter of corn-based ethanol, he has come under fire from fiscal conservatives who call such policies a waste of government funds. The Wall Street Journal recently dubbed him "Professor Cornpone" for his position on the issue.

Meanwhile, despite his opposition to the Democrats' 2009 cap-and-trade bill, his past advocacy for action on global warming also puts him at odds with Tea Party supporters, the vast majority of whom say they doubt that climate change is occurring at all and declare that carbon dioxide emissions pose little or no threat to the climate.

The distrust toward Gingrich on cap and trade is understandable, since he made a video with Nancy Pelosi a few years ago about the need for action to address climate change. When he was Speaker, he also [reportedly](#) helped save the Endangered Species Act from repeal at the behest of his friends who are zookeepers and helped educate him on the issue.

As the Pelosi video and the ESA episode indicate, Gingrich's environmental views haven't been easily encapsulated. In some politicians this might simply reflect expediency in the face of changing political currents, and of course that may be partly true here. But there may be more going on here.

I read Gingrich's book, [Contract with the Earth](#), when it came out. His proposals were a bit vague but involved a lot of collaborative problem-solving with business, more reliance on state and local regulators, and support for green technology. I can't say that I was sold by his analysis, although the proposals were vague enough that it's hard to provide a crisp critique. I did end up feeling, however, that he was making an effort to reconcile a genuine interest in environmental protection with his overall free market ideology.

Given the dynamics of the nomination process, we're not likely to get a clearer idea of what Gingrich would actually propose doing as President unless or until he sews up the nomination. That still seems relatively unlikely to me, but politics is full of surprises.