

Watching [Bill Clinton's interview with Jon Stewart](#) earlier today, I was struck by one thing: Clinton's advocacy of Walmart's environmental practices. If the 42nd President is to be believed, the retailing giant has pioneered a series of seemingly impressive environmental initiatives, particularly in the use of solar photovoltaics, and in reducing VMT for its vast fleet of trucks. All very well and good, and the sort of thing that one would hope more in the business community would support.

But it is hard to look at this in isolation. Walmart's [Dickensian labor practices](#) are [legend](#). Does the environmental movement, which has long battled charges of elitism, really want to side with Wal-Mart against labor, especially in light of [promising new initiatives](#) to link the two?

Coalition politics requires compromise: adversaries will always attempt to offer different groups benefits in order to kick-start a circular firing squad on the other side. Wal-Mart is particularly adept at this, offering large amounts of cash to [buy off civil rights organizations such as MALDEF](#). But it is hard to see how honoring Walmart will get the environmental movement where it wants to go. Breaking apart a tenuous progressive coalition only serves to assist the Republican Party, which has [essentially declared war on the environment](#). Until and unless Republicans actually undertake to defend the planet, environmentalists are better off sticking with their current allies. Straddling will only weaken the already-weak environmental movement: sitting on a fence has deleterious anatomical effects — at least for men.

Natalie Merchant, reprising the old tune, puts it most clearly and cleanly:

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxfZtNEG1xU>]