

In few policy contexts has the right's shift rightward been more apparent, over the last few decades, than on environmental issues. Not that long ago, environmental values fit nicely within the GOP. Teddy Roosevelt created the national parks; the National Environmental Policy Act, one of our mainstay federal environmental statutes, passed the Senate unanimously, won all but 15 votes in the House, and was signed into law by Nixon. As some contemporary but outnumbered Republicans point out (Bob Inglis comes to mind), the pairing isn't even really a stretch. After all, what's more conservative than conservation?

Late last week, the NY Times ran [a remarkable op-ed](#) demonstrating how far backwards the GOP has rolled on issues of environmental protection. It was authored by William D. Ruckelshaus, Lee M. Thomas, William K. Reilly and Christine Todd Whitman, all former EPA administrators appointed by Republican presidents. They write in defense of President Obama's plan to step up regulation of greenhouse gases, and they take swipes at the current Republican stance on climate change along the way:

We served Republican presidents, but we have a message that transcends political affiliation: the United States must move now on substantive steps to curb climate change, at home and internationally. There is no longer any credible scientific debate about the basic facts: our world continues to warm, with the last decade the hottest in modern records, and the deep ocean warming faster than the earth's atmosphere. Sea level is rising. Arctic Sea ice is melting years faster than projected. The costs of inaction are undeniable. The lines of scientific evidence grow only stronger and more numerous. And the window of time remaining to act is growing smaller: delay could mean that warming becomes "locked in."

They endorse President Obama's decision to "use his executive powers to require reductions in the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by the nation's power plants and spur increased investment in clean energy technology, which is inarguably the path we must follow to ensure a strong economy along with a livable climate." But a broader aim of their piece, it is clear, is to try to shepherd the GOP flock back to the fold on issues of conservation:

As administrators of the E.P.A under Presidents Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and George W. Bush, we held fast to common-sense conservative principles — protecting the health of the American people, working with the best technology available and trusting in the innovation of American business and in the market to find the best solutions for the least cost.