Ben Carson is rapidly rising in the polls for the GOP presidential nomination. He has a number of strengths including a demeanor that is the opposite of Donald Trump's and an arresting personal story. Apparently, for many GOP voters, part of his charm is his lack of experience in politics or government. He has taken very clear-cut positions on some issues like abortion. But the environment isn't one of them. What he has said mostly reflects standard conservative talking points, but there are a some striking differences as well. Energy and environment aren't among the issues discussed on his website, so you have to do a bit of digging to find anything.

Here's one of his few mentions of climate change and almost his only discussion of energy policy:

"*Whether we are experiencing global warming or a coming ice age, which was predicted the 1970s, we as responsible human beings must be concerned about our surroundings and what we will pass on to future generations. However, to use climate change as an excuse not to develop our God-given resources makes little sense. Expanding our wealth of energy resources, as well as encouraging development of new renewable energy sources, can provide an enormous economic lift with obvious benefits. But it can also bolster our role as a formidable player in the struggle for world leadership.*"

The opening phrase implies that we don't know whether global warming is real, coupled with the "ice age prediction in the '70s meme"– the usual climate skeptic line. And he obviously supports developing conventional energy resources. (More recently, he said, "There is no overwhelming science that the things that are going on are man-caused and not naturally caused." Jerry Brown sent him a pile of evidence in response). But then there's also the statement that "we as responsible human beings must be concerned about our surroundings and what we will pass on to future generations. And he does call for "encouraging development of new renewable energy sources."

He goes on to talk briefly about the need to develop energy, and he's negative about "far left environmentalists," but he doesn't seem to just mean pulling more coal out of the ground:

"*EU energy freedom would require the quick establishment of a rational energy development platform that does not cater to the far-left environmentalists. Many advocates of common sense are also very concerned about the environment but*

are reasonable enough to realize that rather than using Environmental Protection Agency regulations to stifle abundant energy production, we can use the EPA in conjunction with the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship to produce and export a vast amount of clean energy."

I'm not sure exactly what he's talking about when he says "clean energy"(and he may not be sure either), but it sounds like natural gas or nuclear, or maybe coal with carbon sequestration. It's probably significant that this discussion is part of an op. ed. about how to respond to the Russian aggression in the Ukraine, which is indicative of how far away energy and environment are from being focal points for him.

In another setting, Carson sounds almost like Pope Francis in discussing the environment, denouncing greed and calling for protection of future generations:

"*Greed really encompasses most of the other negative aspects of capitalism, such as lack of regard for the environment. Many of the industrialists who helped propel our country to the forefront of the global economy were much more interested in growing their businesses than they were in protecting the environment. The result? Dangerous pollution and the compromised habitat of many animals. Protecting the environment is neither a Democratic nor a Republican position, but rather it should be a LOGICAL position for capitalists AND socialists, because everyone should be looking out for the interests of future generations and trying to protect their own health as well. If our government were able to identify what needs to be done in our country to protect our environment, and our representatives (who are supposed to be looking out for their constituents) agreed on our policies and followed through on them, it would benefit us all.*"

Notice that greed by "industrialists" led to "dangerous pollution and the compromised habitat of many animals." It's hard to imagine mainstream conservative Republicans like Mitt Romney or Jeb Bush saying that.

Most likely, if Carson ever gets around to fleshing out his position on environment and energy, it will feature the standard conservative anti-environmental policies. On the other hand, depending on who he talks to about the issues, he could end up going in a different direction. Like Trump, he seems to be something of a wild card, but without Trump's strong pro-business instincts.

It appears that this isn't the only place where Carson's views are quirky. He's a fan

of the Second Amendment but thinks that there should be more regulation of semi-automatic weapons in cities; he hates Obamacare but thinks that Medicare and Medicaid should covering people with preexisting conditions. The rise of Carson and Trump suggests that there is a disconnect between the fierce conservative orthodoxy of the party's leadership and the views of its base.