



TED TAYLOR

Bush's Radical Agenda

Bobby Kennedy Jr. takes on dirty air, dirty water, dirty politics.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. made an impromptu appearance in Eugene Sept. 23 and held a press conference on the EWEB plaza with only about a dozen people able to attend. Kennedy is arguably the nation's most prominent environmental attorney. He is currently senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, chief prosecuting attorney for Riverkeeper, and president of Waterkeeper Alliance. His new book is called Crimes Against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy. Below is a partial transcript of his talk in Eugene, with a more complete version online at www.eugeneweekly.com.

I've written a book about the Bush's environmental record, but it's not so much about the environment as it is about an excess of corporate power and the corrosive impact of that on our democracy. And it's not about a Democrat attacking a Republican. I've been disciplined for 20 years as an environmental advocate about being non-partisan and bi-partisan in my approach to these issues. I don't think there's any such thing as Republican children or Democratic children, and the worst thing that can happen to the environment is if it becomes the province of a single political party. But you can't talk honestly about the environment today in any context without speaking critically about this president. This is the worst environmental president we've had in American history.

If you look at NRDC's website, you'll see over 400 major environmental roll-backs that have been promoted by this administration during the last three and a half years, and I tell you it's part of a concerted deliberate attempt to eviscerate 30 years of environmental law.

It's a stealth attack. They have concealed their radical agenda from the American public using Orwellian rhetoric. When they destroy the forest, they call it the Healthy Forest Act; when they destroy the air they call it the Clear Skies bill. And most insidiously they have put polluters in charge of virtually all the agencies that are supposed to protect Americans from pollution. The head of the Forest Service is a timber industry lobbyist. The head of public lands is a mining industry lobbyist who believes that public lands are unconstitutional. The head of the air division at EPA is a utility lobbyist who has represented the worst air polluters in America. The second in command at EPA is a Monsanto lobbyist. The head of Superfunds, an agency critical to quality of life here in Oregon, is a lobbyist whose last job was teaching corporate polluters how to evade Superfunds.

If you go through all the agency heads, sub-heads and secretaries in the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, Department of Energy and EPA, you'll find the same thing: The polluters are running regulatory agencies that are supposed to regulate them. And these are not individuals who have entered government service for the sake of the public interest, but rather specifically to sub-

vert the very laws that they are in charge of enforcing. This is impacting our quality of life in America in so many ways that we don't know about because the press simply isn't doing its job of informing the American public, scrutinizing these policies, connecting the dots between the corporate contributors and the dramatic decline in American quality of life that we are now experiencing.

This year for the first time since the passage of the Clean Water Act, EPA announced that America's waterways are actually getting dirtier. This morning *The New York Times* ran a story that the levels of sulfur dioxide (that causes acid rain) have grown 4 percent over the last year.

SO WE ARE LIVING TODAY IN A SCIENCE FICTION NIGHTMARE WHERE MY CHILDREN AND THE CHILDREN OF MILLIONS OF OTHER AMERICANS WHO HAVE ASTHMA ARE BEING BROUGHT INTO A WORLD WHERE THE AIR IS TOO POISONOUS TO BREATHE — BECAUSE SOMEBODY GAVE MONEY TO A POLITICIAN.

I have three children who have asthma and one out of every four black children in this country in our municipalities now has asthma. Asthma rates have doubled among our children over the last five years. Whether it's hormones in our food or antibiotics, something is causing our children to have these kinds of haywire immune systems. We do know that asthma attacks are triggered primarily by ozone and particulates. About 60 percent of those materials in our atmosphere are coming from 1,100 coal-burning power plants that are burning illegally. They were supposed to have cleaned up 15 years ago. The Clinton administration was prosecuting the worst 70 of these plants for criminal violations. But this is an industry that donated \$48 million to President Bush and the Republican Party in the 2000 cycle and have given \$58 million since. And one of the first things that President Bush did when he came into office was to order the Justice Department to drop those lawsuits against those utilities.

According to the EPA, just the criminal exceedences from these 70 plants kill 5,500 Americans every year. And then the Bush administration tore the heart out of the Clean Air Act, abolishing the New Source Reviews section that require these companies to clean up their pollution. That decision is killing 30,000 Americans every single year, according to EPA, including 165 people in the state of Oregon.

Last week the federal EPA announced that in 19 states it's now unsafe to eat any freshwater fish because of mercury contamination. In 48 states it's now unsafe to eat at least some of the fish or most of the fish, and Oregon is one of those.

We know a lot about mercury now that we didn't know 10 years ago. We know that one out of every six American women now has so much mercury in her womb that her children are at risk for autism, blindness, mental retardation, cognitive impairment, heart, liver and kidney disease. I have so much mercury in my body — I got levels tested recently — that I was told by Dr. David Carpenter who's a national authority on mercury contamination, that a woman with my levels, which are three times the safe levels, would have a child with cognitive impairment. He estimated a permanent IQ loss of 5 to 7 points in her children. He said the science is very certain. Today there are 630,000 children born in this country every year who've been exposed to dangerous levels of mercury in the womb.

Clinton, recognizing this catastrophic na-

tional epidemic, reclassified mercury as a hazardous pollutant under the Clean Air Act, which triggered a requirement that those plants remove 90 percent of the mercury within three and a half years. It would have cost them less than 1 percent of revenues and it would have solved the problem. Well, this is the same industry that's given that \$100 million to the president, and eight weeks ago President Bush announced that he was scrapping the Clinton-era regs, substituting instead regulations that the industry *never* has to clean up their mercury contamination.

So we are living today in a science fiction nightmare where my children and the children of millions of other Americans who have

asthma are being brought into a world where the air is too poisonous to breathe — because somebody gave money to a politician. And where my children and the children of most Americans can no longer go fishing with their father and come home and eat the fish — because somebody gave money to a politician. And the mercury in the waters here in Oregon, the fish are too dangerous, particularly for children and women. Some of that mercury is coming from the power plants, most of it's coming from old mining tailings and from Superfund sites. On the Willamette River, that's where the mercury's coming from. Well, guess what? The Bush administration has allowed the Superfund to go bankrupt, which means that those sites will probably never get cleaned up.

Superfund (money) is raised through a tax on polluting industries, and it's a very, very small tax. But they don't like it. They don't mind the tax, what they mind is that that fund is used as a leverage to force them to spend billions of dollars to clean up their mess. And this is how it works. The Superfund doesn't just clean up orphan sites, but it can also be used by EPA to clean up the sites of recalcitrant polluters. So the EPA — there's a provision in Superfund that says that if a polluter refuses to clean up its Superfund site, the EPA can go to them and say, OK, fine, we're tired of dealing with the lawyers and enriching your lawyers. What we're going to do instead is clean it up ourselves and charge your triple. It's called the Treble Damages Provision. At virtually every Superfund site that's been cleaned up by industry over the past 20 years, since 1981, it's been cleaned up because of the threat of the Treble Damages Provision. It's the only thing that makes them clean up. Well, guess what? That threat no longer exists. The teeth have been ripped out of EPA so that they will no longer be able to force polluters to clean up their sites. As a result of that, most of these sites along the Willamette will never get cleaned up, and if they do get cleaned up, guess who's paying for it? You and I and the American public. How ridiculous is that?

This is an administration that's about plundering our air and our water, plundering our national treasure, shifting our wealth, plundering the great relationships we had with people all over the world, and shifting the wealth of those assets to large corporations who are its donors, who are the lowest bottom feeders who profiteer on the American people. We must turn them out of office. **EW**