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What It's Like to be a Radical Conservative

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What It's Like to be a Radical Conservative

Abstract

“What is your major?”

“Environmental Science.”

The snarky retort, “Don’t go joining GreenPeace now, you’re becoming a radical.”

I know there are many uses of the word “radical,” but in this context, I know that it is not meant as a compliment. Because I study environmental science and global climate change, this person associates me with radicals – those utilizing extreme methods to bring about extreme changes. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, radicals, conservative, Republican, activism

Disciplines

American Politics | Civic and Community Engagement | Environmental Policy | Political Science | Politics and Social Change

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu/) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A RADICAL CONSERVATIVE

September 4, 2013

"What is your major?"

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The snarky retort, "Don't go joining GreenPeace now, you're becoming a radical."

I know there are many uses of the word "radical," but in this context, I know that it is not meant as a compliment. Because I study environmental science and global climate change, this person associates me with radicals – those utilizing extreme methods to bring about extreme changes.

The problem with that, though, is that it is the fossil fuel industry that is bringing about the extreme changes to our earth. They are the radicals. There is [agreement among scientists that the earth is warming](#) and that humans are playing a role in that warming. The only doubt that exists is caused by those who profit from the fossil fuel industry, [intentionally lying to the public](#) to deceive them into thinking global warming is a myth. Now that sounds radical to me.

Bill McKibben addressed this issue very eloquently during his ["Do The Math"](#) tour. He asked (and I will paraphrase) "why are we the radical ones? The people in the fossil fuel industry who want to completely alter the Earth's climate without regard for those living on this planet would be considered radical."

Why is it that wanting a cleaner, more sustainable future is considered extreme? Is it because society relies enormously on the fossil fuel industry, and bringing attention to global warming is a call to change that economy? If that is the reason we are called radicals – because we know that we must develop renewable energy sources as an alternative to fossil fuels – then I guess we are guilty.

One example of a radical approach we must consider is changes to the government subsidies for renewable energy sources. We know that we must be developing alternatives to fossil fuel. So why isn't the government doing more to make this happen? It all boils down to money and politics. The Environmental Law Institute conducted a seven-year study that determined that subsidies for fossil fuels was an alarming [\\$72 billion dollars](#). In comparison, the subsidies for traditional renewable energy sources were a meager \$28 billion dollars.

And it is not as though the government is simply reflecting the desires of its citizens. A 2010 Stanford University poll found that [public support for more tax breaks for water, wind, and solar electricity was at 84%](#).

The desire to change is present, and the support is growing, but why are we being ignored? Frankly, the fossil fuel lobby (in particular, their money) is a louder voice. We must make our voice louder.

But don't these radical actions also make us conservatives? After all, our call is to stop the radical changes that are already happening to the earth – to conserve the earth and to conserve the future.

The way I see it, we are all radical conservatives, and our only choice is which kind of radical conservative we will be. We can choose radical methods to deny what all scientists agree on in order to conserve the current economy for the benefit of the fossil fuel industry. Or we can choose radical methods to force change, change that will allow us to conserve the environment and our future.

Call me a radical if you like, but I like the second option.

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