

SALIENCE OVER SUSTAINABILITY: PRESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL  
RHETORIC FROM FDR TO BARACK OBAMA

By

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## Chapter One – Introduction

### **Introduction**

On November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama was elected on a mandate of change. On issues of both domestic and foreign policy, Obama represented a significant transformation from the previous eight years of the second Bush presidency. This change was well received by environmental advocates and non-governmental organizations devoted to environmental sustainability. The day following the election, Sierra Club issued a statement proclaiming that the environmental future of the country is in “very capable hands” (Environmental News Service para. 2). The same day, the president of Environmental Defense echoed this sentiment in a public statement stating: “this election offers us the greatest opportunity we have ever had to change course on global warming” (Environmental News Service para. 6). Similarly, the Defenders of Wildlife Action publicly announced:

For the first time in nearly a decade, we can look to the future with a sense of hope that the enormous environmental challenges we face will begin to be addressed and that our air, land, water, and wildlife -- and the overall health of our planet -- will not be sacrificed to appease polluting industries and campaign contributors. (Burkhalter para. 14)

One month after the election, environmentalists excitedly professed that: “change really is here” (Jiwatram para. 1). Obama’s environmental appointments also signaled a radical diversion in the relationship between the presidency and the environment that promised to bring “science back in the forefront” of policy (Jiwatrama para. 12). Not only was the mandate of environmental change permeating through the public imaginary, Obama

promised tangible policy approaches. In his 2008 book, Obama stated that his environmental policy would “signal to the world the U.S. commitment to climate change leadership by implementing an aggressive domestic cap-and-trade program” (74).

These strong expectations continued well into Obama’s presidency, demanding a rhetorical response. From his address on clean energy development at Southern Illinois-Carbondale’s first Agricultural Industry Day in April 2005, to his Oval Office address on the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (BP oil spill) in June 2010, Obama has been a leading advocate for passing government regulations to prevent environmental devastation. He has vocally supported several environmental policies, including a significant investment in clean energy and renewable technologies (“Clean Energy” para. 15), a cap on greenhouse gas emissions with an industrial trading scheme (“2010 State of the Union” para. 35), a clean-up effort in response to the BP oil spill (“Oil Spill” para. 7), and a substantial increase in regulation of the oil industry (“Oil Spill” para. 13). His arguments in support of each policy have been carefully constructed to motivate public and congressional environmentalism (Mufson and Eilperin para. 3).

The following thesis is a rhetorical examination of President Barack Obama’s environmental rhetoric during his first seventeen months in office. This chapter will advance four sections. First, I discuss the practical justifications for studying Obama’s presidential environmental rhetoric. Next, I provide examples of prior research that will guide the investigation of this set of presidential addresses. Next, I describe the methodology used to examine the possible implications of Obama’s rhetorical choices. Finally, I provide the layout of the following chapters.

## **Justification for Study**

Obama's presidential campaign excited environmentalists. However, this excitement created high expectations for Obama to follow through on campaign pledges. Environmentalists were anxious to see the change the president had promised reach fruition in policy changes. As president, Obama faced challenges wading through the exigencies of political constituencies, public opinion, financial cost and other policy priorities. When Obama was unable to respond to environmental exigencies with policy change, he often attempted to ameliorate concerns through public address. Therefore, an evaluation of Obama's rhetorical approach to environmentalism is a necessary component for understanding the interaction between environmental rhetoric and successful environmental policy.

A major focus of Obama's environmentalism was rhetorically constructing approaches that motivated the public to support liberal environmental policy. There is no shortage of literature supporting the importance of presidential rhetoric in influencing public opinion towards legislative goals. In 1908, Woodrow Wilson described that:

The nation as a whole has chosen him [the president], and is conscious that it has no other political spokesman. His is the only national voice in affairs. Let him once win the admiration and confidence of the country, and no other single force can withstand him, no combination of forces will easily overpower him. His position takes the imagination of the country. He is the representative of no constituency, but of the whole people. When he speaks in his true character, he speaks for no special interest. If he rightly interprets the national thought and boldly insist upon it, he is irresistible; and the country never feels the zest of

action so much as when its President is of such insight and calibre. Its instinct is for unified action, and it craves a single leader. (Prestritto 183)

With the advent of widespread media access and globalization, one can only assume Wilson's statements have increased in relevance throughout the last century.

The president, both domestically and internationally, is the supreme example of a single representative voice. And, while a presidential mandate may not be necessary to achieve legislative policy (for example, on widely popular issues), "when he decides to become involved, his influence can be decisive indeed" (Baumgartner and Jones 241). However, Cohen notes that this uniquely large influence is not determinative:

Barriers to public receptivity also exist. Politics is rarely an overriding or daily concern of most people... The president also competes with other factors that influence the public's thinking about politics and policy. While other politicians might not be strong competitors in this regard, pre-existing attitudes, the mass media, and real-life experience may effectively compete with the president for influence over public opinion. For example, those with pre-existing attitudes may be hard to budge, while those without pre-existing attitudes may be disinterested in politics. Consequently, both may be immune from the president's message, requiring extra presidential effort. (88)

Given that presidential rhetoric is salient, but does not wholly determine the response of the public, it is important to uncover the possible influence of differing rhetorical choices and arguments.

While there certainly are limits on the power of the presidential bully pulpit, it is difficult to deny the significant importance of a president's rhetorical support for

legislative agenda items. Lawrence found that those test subjects that were exposed to a presidential “speech were approximately 4.6 times more likely to identify an issue mentioned in the speech as the most important problem than respondents who did not watch the speech” (16). President Obama is case-in-point for highlighting the influence of political rhetoric; Obama, with his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, went from a relatively unknown Illinois State Senator to a potential presidential candidate in less than twenty minutes (Rowland and Jones 433).

Obama’s rhetorical choices may provide insight into the lack of public support for environmental protection and regulation and provide possible guidance towards rectifying this concern. Substantial public support may be the only way to overcome the political constituencies that oppose liberal regulation:

Public opinion polls, too, speak for the American public. If public opinion had once been an amalgam of public correspondence, politicians' conversations, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and public demonstrations, this has not been the case for more than a half century...politicians, government officials, and the public pay attention to public opinion reflected in polling data. While public opinion may not ultimately settle issues, it almost always factors in decision making, as accounts of the operations of the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations indicate. And if public opinion is especially one sided, it may actually be controlling. (Sparrow 579)

The defeatist perception of the liberal public sphere as terminally stagnant is incorrect; change certainly can occur. The challenge is motivating the public to embrace attitudes and actions that improve environmental sustainability in an era of rampant consumerism



(Rowland 214). Since presidents often offer a guiding role for moving public opinion, it is useful to see what worked and failed for Obama.

There is deep ideological polarization on the issue of how the government should respond to environmental problems. Not only is there a political divide about the role of government in protecting the environment, there is also a clear lack of consensus as to whether there is an environmental problem at all – especially in the case of global warming. Despite Obama’s best efforts, the wider public fails to recognize that ideological shifts made within the environmental movement today, and subsequent developments of environmental policy, will implicate humanity well into the future. In a post-election 2008 poll, Washington Post-ABC pollsters asked 1,003 respondents: “What would you say is the one important problem you would like to see Obama and Congress deal with next year” (Washington Post, q. 7)? Fewer than one percent responded “environment,” and even fewer responded “global warming. These results were consistent with polling done in December of 2006 and 2005. An overwhelming majority wanted economic prosperity, a policy shift in the war in Iraq, unemployment legislation or a new health care policy (Washington Post q. 7).

This divide is troubling; because, on the issue of global warming, the science could not be more clear: “of 928 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals randomly selected from the thousands that have been published in the last decade, not one questioned the fundamental conclusions” that global warming is real, human induced and an environmental concern (Hendricks and Inslee 7). Despite this scientific consensus, Gallup Polling reveals:

[P]olitically polarized opinions, resulting in two Americas divided along ideological lines. Over the past decade, an increasing majority of Republicans question the validity of climate science and dismiss the urgency of the problem, while an increasing majority of Democrats accept climate science and express concern about the issue. (Nisbet 14)

Analyzing Obama’s environmental arguments illuminates what can potentially motivate a public to support environmental regulation and protection:

[I]nstitutions and professional groups share the uncontroversial goal of calling attention to climate change as a pressing problem while empowering citizens to become involved in national and local decisionmaking. Yet despite these unified objectives, public engagement with climate change is still missing. If major policy change is to be achieved, new meanings and messengers for climate change are needed. Communication can no longer remain a guessing game. (Nisbet 22)

Motivating environmental responsibility is difficult because it’s nearly impossible to personalize the impact of a collapsing environment to individuals. Similarly, environmental catastrophes are perceived as long-term problems of such a large magnitude that individual changes are rationalized as insufficient and unnecessary. Therefore, it is understandable that politicians are searching for the most motivational environmental arguments (Nisbet 22).

To this end, Obama participated in at least two strategy sessions with “a cross section of experts” to determine the best frame for his environmental policy (Mufson and Eilperin para. 2). In July 2008, Obama listened to his advisors to best determine “how he could sell a low-carbon future of the American public” and to make his environmental

policy “pop more” for the public (Mufson and Eilperin para. 4, 5). At this time, campaign strategists argue, Obama turned from moral suasion to a pragmatic frame of national and economic security. This framing choice is not haphazard or off-the-cuff; rather, it’s the result of strategizing with top environment and economic officials.

There is practical significance to studying Obama’s presidential environmental rhetoric. The importance of this area of study is magnified because environmental communication is an area of contemporary public address scholarship in which “insights can be translated back to the practical, problem-oriented contexts where political deliberations transpire” (Peterson 9). Significantly, presidential environmental communication may provide the foreground for a “convincing demonstration of practical utility” (Peterson 9). The state of the environment is in quick decline from global warming, pollution, species loss, desertification and land degradation. Environmental decline has the propensity to negatively influence all of humanity, no matter socioeconomic status nor geographic location. Moreover, environmental decline requires global cooperation and response; however, in order for this to occur the United States must show leadership by enacting policies that promote environmental sustainability. Given that presidential rhetorical choices influence the perception of both environmental decline and government response, determining the rhetorical choices most likely to motivate environmentalism is a worthy cause.

### **Prior Research**

A plethora of prominent scholars across a wide variety of disciplines provide a theoretical foundation for analyzing Obama’s presidential environmental rhetoric. Rhetorical scholars have begun the investigation into Obama’s presidency; however, the

vast majority of current works focus on Obama's campaign strategies and pre-presidential addresses. Rowland and Jones evaluate the rhetorical strategies of the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention (425). Kephart and Rafferty evaluate questions of agency in Obama's campaign rhetoric (6). Simonson documents the primary campaign strategies of Obama and Clinton in South Texas (94). The majority of rhetorical scholarship found in journals devoted to rhetorical criticism focus on the issue of race or equality in Obama's senatorial rhetoric; while, very few evaluate Obama's rhetorical environmentalism as president.

Despite the limited criticism of Obama's environmental rhetoric, there is a vast array of scholarship devoted to understanding environmental rhetoric of previous administrations. Peterson edited a volume of case studies examining presidential environmental rhetoric in *Green talk in the White House*. This text traces environmental rhetoric from Theodore Roosevelt through the beginning of the second Bush administration. The template used in each chapter is to provide a layout of rhetorical strategies used by presidents to support environmentalism, determine how those strategies helped shape policy outcomes and provide evaluative statements about the most and least effective of the rhetorical choices. Peterson outlines that the goal for environmental scholars is to stress communicative exchanges as foundational to understanding environmental policy (10). Environmental presidential rhetoric scholarship creates the potential for cross-fertilization with methods and theories developed by public sphere scholars (Peterson 13). In this way, public deliberation and presidential advocacy may in some ways provide insight to public policy, and scholarship

devoted to these texts “speak to the intellectual pursuit of a richer public sphere” (Peterson 14).

Environmental communication scholarship, not focused on presidential environmentalism, provides insight as well. Previous seminal texts include: Myerson and Rydin’s *The language of environment: A new rhetoric*; Killingsworth and Palmer’s *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America*; Waddell’s *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and the Environment*. In *Conserving Words*, Philippon highlights the importance of rhetorical choice in framing the environmental movement. Specifically, Philippon notes the importance of metaphor in establishing “presence” in language for a situated audience (14, 17). Although Phillipon is discussing the relevance of choices made by speech-writers for representatives of the environmental movement, there is clear applicability to presidential environmental rhetoric. Nisbet describes the many strategies which have been deployed to motivate the public to support environmental regulation: morality and ethics, religion, human rights, economic development, national security potential, apocalypse and public health (21-22). Nisbet argues that environmental policy will deeply influence the bedrock of democratic liberalism; and, “[t]hese decisions are therefore too significant to leave to just elected officials and experts’ citizens need to be actively involved” (14). Rhetorical construction of environmentalism is important for understanding citizen involvement because: “[f]raming a policy problem or issue endows certain dimensions of the complex issue with greater apparent relevance than they would have under an alternative frame” (Nisbet 17).

The following chapters draw from a permutation of the three areas of rhetorical criticism discussed above: Obama’s rhetorical strategies, historical presidential

environmentalism and environmental communication. In doing so, I apply a rich academic foundation that is dedicated to determining the influence presidential environmental rhetoric has on achieving policy success.

## **Methodology**

The texts evaluated in the following chapters are limited to Obama's addresses as president, presented to an immediate domestic audience. There are several reasons for choosing these boundaries. First, while it would be insightful to study all of Obama's rhetoric, the magnitude of that project is beyond my capabilities; therefore, some limiting choices must be made. Second, limiting analysis to *presidential* environmental rhetoric helps explain the influence of the presidential bully pulpit, as opposed to environmental advocacy in general. For example, my analysis excludes other environmental advocates like Al Gore, Bono and Bill Gates. In doing so, the template developed by Peterson in *Green Talk* for Roosevelt through the second Bush administration is extended to the Obama administration. Third, I limit texts to Obama's rhetoric presented to an immediate domestic audience because I am interested in how Obama frames his environmental advocacy to motivate the domestic audience to support his political agenda. I assume that the framing strategies focused towards an international audience will be different, simply, because audience expectations are divergent (Brummans et al. 28). I am less interested, for the purpose of this study, about Obama's addresses at international venues attempting to motivate an international audience to support environmental protection – largely because domestic regulation is a pre-requisite to action by the global community (Brown 239).

To determine which addresses “count” as Obama’s environmental rhetoric, I utilize a Washington Post database that categorizes Obama’s addresses based on issues of concern. For example, there are separate sections devoted to: education, health care, homeland security, social issues, energy and environment, etc. Some speeches, such as the State of the Union addresses can be found in nearly all categories. Between Obama’s inauguration and July 15<sup>th</sup> 2010, there were forty speeches in the “energy and environment” issue category; therefore, these forty speeches were the set that I used to parse out Obama’s rhetorical strategies and justifications for his environmental and energy agenda.

For a method of criticism, I use an open-ended search for environmental arguments and justifications within these texts. I locate the components of Obama’s speeches where he advocates changes in environmental policy or describes the inadequacies of the status quo approach to the environment. To do this, I use key term searches for pivotal terms: environment, global warming, climate change, species, biodiversity, energy and oil. I map the themes and topoi that emerge from the text and attempt to discern Obama’s strategy. In doing this, my goal is to use “every instrument” available, and allow the text to disclose itself emically (E. Black xii). Thus, I impose no theory that does not emerge from the “rhetorical transaction itself” (E. Black 332). In the analysis section of the fourth chapter, I draw upon strands of methods from: metaphoric criticism, social scientific response polling, critical analysis, Burkean criticism and several other rhetorical approaches.

After determining which arguments Obama preferences in arguing for environmental policy, I analyze how those choices may influence outcomes in both

public opinion and policy change. Three rhetorical scholars provide the theoretical foreground for this evaluation: Bitzer, Zarefsky and Burke. Bitzer's discussion of rhetorical exigence helps explain why Obama's environmental rhetoric does not match the exact desires of environmental advocates. While environmentalists are wholly concerned with the exigence of environmental decline, Obama is forced to respond to several distinct exigences: other domestic priorities, economic decline, political constituencies, etc. This helps explain the frustration of environmental advocates and non-governmental organizations with Obama for not pursuing an environmental agenda directly in tune with the desires of these environmental groups.

Zarefsky's keynote address "Definitions" at Alta provides a theoretical foundation for determining how specific rhetorical justifications function for an audience. Using one justification for environmental policy dissociates, for the audience, other possible rhetorical justifications. For example, an argument for the economic benefits of green energy is not purely additive; instead, it deflects alternate arguments or justifications for similar environmental and energy policies. Thus, using one definition of a situation inherently excludes possible alternative explanations. Burke describes this rhetorical transaction as both a "selection and a deflection of reality" (45). In the case of Obama, using non-environmental justifications for environmental policy dissociates environmental justifications and sidesteps the environmental debate entirely. By justifying environmental policies with non-environmental arguments, environmental impacts are sidelined and the impact of the policy on the environment itself becomes a secondary concern. Obama's political strategy is clear: given the overwhelming public antipathy because of the sluggish economy, the economic and national security frames



may be able to motivate individuals who would otherwise be apathetic towards environmental policy. However, is there a cost to this strategy? Are there unforeseen consequences of privileging the economic and national security arguments, while explicitly disregarding scientific consensus over climate change? The following chapters will address these questions.

### **Subsequent Chapters**

The rhetorical examination of Obama's environmental advocacy will proceed through three subsequent chapters. Chapter two provides a historical discussion of presidential environmental rhetoric, with a principled focus on FDR through the second Bush administration. Chapter three describes the rhetorical strategies used by Obama in public addresses, and determines the most oft-used environmental justifications throughout the first seventeen months of the Obama presidency. The final chapter rhetorically evaluates Obama's messages in an effort to build a theory for understanding pragmatic presidential environmental rhetoric. The final chapter will also advance possible implications of this study and discuss future areas of research.

## Chapter Two – History of Presidential Environmental Rhetoric

### **Introduction**

The United States has seen over a century of presidential rhetoric devoted to environmental causes. There has been substantial diversity among the approaches taken by different presidents, yet consistent themes and approaches emerge. To determine the possible effects of Obama's justifications for his environmental policy, it is helpful to look at historical successes and failures of presidential environmental rhetoric.

While Teddy Roosevelt is remembered as the Great Conservationist, “most of contemporary U.S. environmental policy is grounded in the political structure developed by Franklin Roosevelt (who is not strongly identified with the environmental movement in the popular imagination)” (Peterson 18). Franklin Roosevelt, Teddy's distant cousin, was the first to use the integration of “environmental issues into the political, scientific, social and economic challenges facing his administration” (Peterson 18). Thus, Franklin Roosevelt was the first president to dedicate himself to several thoughtful and distinct rhetorical strategies to motivate environmentalism, instead of relying on appeals to morality as the primary rhetorical strategy. Moreover, the depression era “witnessed the rise of environmental consciousness”; therefore, a focus specifically on post-depression era interaction between presidential environmental rhetoric and political successes is pertinent (Conan 3). Separating Franklin Roosevelt from the environmentalism of his distant cousin is helpful in understanding the foundation of American environmentalism:

If one attempts to look at young FDR apart from these other, more traditional environmentalist, he finds that FDR's strong commitment to the natural

environment fueled an ethic much more complex and applied than that of his famous conservation-minded cousin. (B. Black 22)

Therefore, I use Franklin Roosevelt's presidential terms as the earliest period for evaluating the ability of presidential environmental rhetoric to produce effective regulatory policy, and chronologically describe rhetorical strategies used from FDR to the second Bush administration.

### **From FDR to the Second Bush Administration**

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's environmentalism was both motivated and limited by a plethora of political, economic and institutional concerns. While Roosevelt was a self-proclaimed environmentalist, he was also an "astute student of American politics"; therefore, he understood that political lobbies and constituencies as well as public opinion had the potential to limit his environmental policy (Daughton and Beasley 86). Similarly, the economic crisis and turbulent international arena during the 1930's constrained Roosevelt's reign over environmental policy:

When FDR assumed office in 1933, the country was reeling from the economic devastation of the Great Depression...By 1940 the American people were increasingly turning their attention to the mounting hostilities abroad; by 1942 citizens were probably more interested in conserving their food rations than anything else. (Daughton and Beasley 88)

Despite these constraints, Roosevelt kept environmentalism at the top of his concerns, arguing to Congress that: "conservation of our national resources must necessarily be one of the primary responsibilities of the Federal Government at all times" (Roosevelt "Progress Report"). Roosevelt chose his rhetorical justifications very carefully: "instead

of talking about the need to preserve or even appreciate nature for its own sake, Roosevelt repeatedly argued that conservation made good economic sense for the United States” (Daughton and Beasley 87). In a study of Roosevelt’s environmental rhetoric, historians found that nearly 80 percent of his environmental justifications contained “economic appeals for the conservation of all resources” as a “major focus” of his arguments (Daughton and Beasley 93). Rhetorically, his programs were portrayed as efficient job creators, while justifications that highlighted the environmental benefits of his policies were either secondary or non-existent.

Political cartoonist Jay Norwood Darling was a leading critic of Roosevelt’s environmental policy. While Roosevelt surely chose politically expedient and pragmatic justifications for his environmental policy, Darling depicted Roosevelt’s economic justifications for his environmental policy as born out of “political compromise” and “middle course” that would not lay the groundwork for a truly environmentally sustainable society (Daughton and Beasley 87). Darling worried that Roosevelt’s environmental policy was not founded on a desire for long-term or sustainable support; rather, that it was based on “political zeitgeist” that would waver once popular opinion became focused on another issue (Daughton and Beasley 100).

An illustration of the limitations of Roosevelt’s economic justifications for environmental policy can be found in the debate between Darling and Roosevelt over the Hoover dam:

While justifying environmental action almost solely in terms of economic gain, for example, Roosevelt said very little about why the natural world might be valuable for other reasons (or even in its own right)...this is exactly the charge

Darling leveled repeatedly at Roosevelt and his secretary of the interior Harold Ickes. Building a dam might put people back to work and provide an additional power source, but it was also apparent to scientists and conservations even of Roosevelt's era that such construction would do irreparable damage to the local ecosystem" (Daughton and Beasley 106).

This example repeats itself throughout history as economic justifications for environmental policy produce a compromised short-term success, but fail to garner widespread public or congressional support for sustainable environmentalism (Leslie 4).

Roosevelt integrated a secondary justification for environmental policy based on national security. He appealed to civil unity and national security by referring to his conservation policy as a "great battle" to save the forests and protect the environment (Daughton and Beasley 92). This limited integration of the military metaphor, while difficult to tie explicitly to a change in public understanding is an important foundation for the depiction of military metaphor in both environmental and social policy throughout the next seventy years.

Harry Truman, after serving as vice president to Roosevelt, shared many of the "same values that FDR advocated" (Daynes and Sussman, "White House Politics" 36). He supported environmental protection and pressured Congress on multiple occasions to enact environmental legislation. However, his justifications were not based on environmental values, but instead: "he realized that conserving resources was the key to ensuring a viable economy and a strong position for America abroad" (Daynes and Sussman "White House Politics" 36). By using economic and national security justifications for environmental policy, environmentalism for the sake of the environment

was sidelined. In fact, this negotiated and compromised approach wasn't intended to protect the environment at all. Instead, Truman argued in a 1951 address to Congress that conservation was only valuable insofar as it allowed the conserved resources to be exploited for industrial strength and military prowess:

With these purposes in mind, we must apportion materials and manpower carefully among military needs, stockpiling, and industrial needs. We must divide industrial supply carefully, so as to expand in some areas while contracting its others. We must divide total civilian supply carefully between industry and consumers, so that we do not weaken manpower while improving tools. The handling of our natural resources is a vital aspect of this problem. Many projects must be cancelled or deferred, but those necessary for defense and essential civilian needs must go forward... If we do not expand the use of some of these resources, for example, through carefully selected power developments, we cannot expect to reach the full potential of our industrial strength. We can cut down enough on the private and public use of materials and manpower for nonessentials to accomplish these essential projects. Our human resources are our main economic strength. When we finally win in the contest between freedom and slavery, it will not be primarily because of our superior technology. (35-36)

Truman's choice to frame his conservation policy in terms of economics and industrial strength significantly limited his ability to achieve effective resource conservation and environmental regulation. The value placed on the environment was primarily for human consumption and use, not the environment itself. In a time of economic and military crisis, environmental policy became expendable because it was not based on

environmentalism for the sake of the environment. Thus, when distracted by international or domestic economic concerns, compromise and negotiation was required and came directly at the expense of the environment.

Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican following two Democratic administrations, preferred a much more conservative approach to both domestic policy and environmentalism (Lammers and Genovese 173). Eisenhower was principally interested in foreign policy and was less concerned with expending political capital on domestic environmental reform. His small government approach substantially constrained environmentalism during his administration:

[W]hile he would suggest the need to conserve limited resources, he made it quite clear that he was more seriously concerned with maintaining fiscal responsibility at the federal level rather than ensuring environmental quality. (Daynes and Sussman “White House Politics” 124)

Even when his environmental policy achieved success, Eisenhower avoided publicizing these accomplishments. While he did preside over legislation that limited air and water pollution, “environmentalism in the 1950s could be considered an issue that was not a primary concern of Eisenhower” (Daynes and Sussman “White House Politics” 138).

John F. Kennedy, voted one of the ten greenest presidents in American history, was elected in 1960 by an extremely narrow margin (The Daily Green para. 1). He campaigned on a platform to “get the country moving again.” His rhetorical approach to environmental policy offered contrast from the presidents before him. Instead of emphasizing mostly economic or national security justifications for his environmental policy, he noted the intrinsic value of the natural world:

Our primary task is to increase our understanding of our natural environment to the point where we can enjoy it without defacing it, use its bounty without permanently detracting from its value and, above all, maintain a living evolving balance between man's actions and nature's reaction. For the nation's great natural resource base is as elastic and as productive as our ingenuity and skills.

(Kennedy "University of Wyoming")

What distinguishes this approach from the rhetoric that precedes it is the emphasis on the limits to consumption. Unlike Truman's approach, which only saved resources for future consumption, Kennedy noted the necessity of preservation of resources for achieving a balance between humanity and nature.

Kennedy surely purported balance at times; however, his justifications modeled historical environmental arguments in some ways as well. Similar to Truman's emphasis on military and industrial strength, Kennedy argued that:

Today this great gift of material wealth provides the foundation upon which the defense of freedom rests, here and around the world. And our future greatness and our strength depend upon the continued abundant use of our natural resources. (Kennedy "Dedication")

In this way, Kennedy embraced policies founded on an exceptionalist vision of the United States.

While his rhetorical choices varied, his commitment to conservation and environmental sustainability did not. With Kennedy's "strong endorsement," the Clean Air Act of 1963 passed Congress (Daynes and Sussman "White House Politics" 51). Kennedy also issued nineteen executive orders devoted to environmental protection.



Coinciding with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which is credited with starting the modern environmental movement, Kennedy's presidency witnessed the advent of public excitement for environmental sustainability.

Johnson, following Kennedy's assassination, continued Kennedy's tradition of justifying environmental policy with a thematic permutation of American exceptionalism and intrinsic beauty. During this time, concerns for the environment were bipartisan and action to prevent continued environmental decline was publicly popular (Daynes and Sussman "White House Politics" 57). The first dedication to environmental questions for public polling occurred during the Johnson administration. A Gallup poll reveals that the percentage of people who thought "reducing pollution of air and water" was one of the three national problems that should receive government attention dramatically increased from 17 to 53 between 1965 and 1970 (Dunlap 93). The number of people who viewed air pollution as a serious problem doubled between 1965 and 1968 (Dunlap 93). And, the number of people who viewed water pollution as a "very or somewhat serious" threat doubled between 1965-1970 (Dunlap 93). While it is difficult to tie changing public opinion directly to rhetorical choices of both Kennedy and Johnson, the mix of both public pressure and their strategies produced a truly progressive environmental presidency.

While Johnson is not widely remembered for environmental rhetoric that is distinct from Kennedy's approach, his legacy lies with the formal declaration of the war on poverty:

This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America...It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy

will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won....But this attack, to be effective, must also be organized at the State and the local level....For the war against poverty will not be won here in Washington. It must be won in the field, in every private home, in every public office, from the courthouse to the White House....[W]hatever the cause, our joint Federal-local effort must pursue poverty, pursue it wherever it exists (L.B. Johnson “1964 State of Union”).

Subsequently, Johnson declared a war on crime, which was expanded during the Nixon and Reagan administrations (Elkins 3-4). The implications of the choice to represent social policies through military metaphor are worthy of investigation, given the similar metaphoric justifications used by several presidents to justify environmental policy.

Johnson’s war on poverty, while unsuccessful at alleviating poverty in the long-term, was certainly not without its shining moments:

This broader set of programs—including Medicare and Medicaid, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and tuition subsidies for higher education—helped to reduce poverty in the United States. But the war on poverty failed to confront, and was unable or unwilling to take on, some of the deepest structural conditions that created and maintained poverty (Elkins 14).

While poverty rates were significantly reduced, Johnson refused to take significant steps necessary to help overcome structural inequality. Once the poverty rate declined, the government had “won the war” and chose to forgo broader changes to alleviate poverty (Devine and Wright 31).

Although the argument is often made that the war on poverty became victim to the Vietnam conflict, blaming the military conflict alone oversimplifies the nature of the problem (Zarefsky “President Johnson” xi). Instead, “many of the difficulties plaguing the antipoverty effort not only were unrelated to the military escalation in Southeast Asia but actually preceded it” (Zarefsky “President Johnson” xi). While there were certain tradeoffs between the Vietnam conflict and the war on poverty in terms of presidential political capital, White House focus, and governmental resources, the problem with the war on poverty resides more in discursive framing. Rather, Johnson’s rhetorical choice permeated the public sphere to limit the success of the war on poverty as Americans were called to “enlist as volunteers in the war against poverty” (L.B. Johnson “Special Message to Congress”) and “weapons and tactics” were chosen by the government to defeat the (impoverished) enemy (Zarefsky “President Johnson” 31). In this militarized environment, empirical statistical analysis became unfortunately irrelevant; “if Congress judged the program to be a success, then a success it was” (Zarefsky “President Johnson” 79).

Even worse, the militarized approach to poverty policy transitioned into a violent war on the poor. The middle and upper class began to view those in poverty as enemy to the nation, which justified escalating violence in response to the militancy of the black poor (Elkins 18). Rhetorical slippage occurred as, “[p]overty as an enemy of the nation had become the poor as an enemy of the nation” (Elkins 18). Through enemyship, the government was able to dichotomize the body politic and stigmatize the lower class. The government became so concerned with eradicating the condition of poverty that they lost sight of the negative implications that the war on poverty was creating.

Johnson also rhetorically depicted the governmental response to crime through military metaphor as a component of his “Great Society” (Simon “Governing Through Crime” 93). Johnson’s war on crime denoted an enemy within our territory; one that must be eradicated at all costs. Criminals, within this framework, were neatly separated as non-citizens, which justified violence and significant rights violations in response to crime: “crime [was] made to appear not as an individual act, at all, but as part of a collective invasion” (Elkins 23). Not surprisingly, this otherization was disproportionately laid upon racial minorities:

The unfortunate and unintended consequences of the war on crime, however, extend far beyond the criminal justice system itself. Crackdowns on crime are directed at those populations considered to be most dangerous to society. This implies that minority groups will be affected disproportionately by these efforts. As we have seen, this has been precisely the case for black Americans, many of whom quite understandably resent the differential treatment imposed on them by vigorous law enforcement efforts. It should come as little surprise, therefore, that police-citizen confrontation involving minority group members are likely to be filled with tension and hostility, and can ignite episodes of collective disorder. (Crutchfield, Kubrin and Bridges 428)

Thus, a vicious circle was created – anti-crime strategies were targeted at a subjugated class, which revolted violently, and then fell victim to even stricter legal penalty.

This feedback continues today as poor communities lack strong family support because of incarceration techniques used during the war on crime:

The large-scale removal of young males from the general population depletes the supply of potential marriage partners for young females. In so doing, expansive incarceration policies impede the formation of traditional families and thereby encourage, indirectly, higher rates of...family conditions that have been linked with high rates of crime. Thus the war on crime has not only failed to realize the goal of significant crime reduction: it has exacerbated the very problems that it is supposed to solve...the war on crime is more than just a rhetorical device: it is a classic instance of the sociological self-fulfilling prophecy. (Crutchfield, Kubrin and Bridges 428)

The militancy of the war on crime caused a backlash among the most at risk populations, failed to reduce crime and created unanticipated externalities that led to increased violence.

Richard Nixon, the second Republican since Roosevelt, is perhaps the most enigmatic environmentalist president. Some of the most important environmental legislation was signed under his tenure: the Endangered Species Act, the Safe Water Drinking Act, the legislation that established the Environmental Protection Agency, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Ocean Dumping Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, and the Toxic Substances Control Act. However, this achievement is largely because of Congress' liberal make-up during Nixon's tenure, and happened *despite* Nixon's relative ambivalence towards environmental sustainability. Congress' environmental record under Nixon's tenure is unmatched; however, "it seems that the environment mattered only as a political issue to Nixon and mattered not much at all to his advisers" (Vickery 127).

Continuing with the pre-Kennedy tradition of presidential environmental rhetoric, Nixon's environmental advocacy relied heavily on economic justifications. Calls to "limit growth" were politically impossible; therefore, Nixon inoculated opponents of environmentalism by claiming that economic growth and environmental protection go hand-in-hand:

Now, I realize that the argument is often made that there is a fundamental contradiction between economic growth and the quality of life, so that to have one we must forsake the other. The answer is not to abandon growth but to redirect it...Continuous vigorous economic growth provides us with the means to enrich life itself. (Nixon "1970 State of the Union")

Given that the value of the environment, to Nixon, was economic and political then it became very difficult for Nixon to propose policies that limited economic growth. Therefore, Nixon's policies were compromised and piecemeal. He did not want to bankrupt society by imposing significant regulation; instead, he believed that having both unrestrained economic growth and a healthy environment was a priority. Given this set of priorities and the overwhelming emphasis on economic growth, Nixon's legacy is one of half-hearted environmentalism:

Nixon established the EPA in a way that guaranteed no federal regulatory action regarding natural resource conservation and pollution control could be taken without being disciplined by the capitalist political economy. This was the political elegance with which the ideals of ecological philosophy were co-opted by embedding them in the coordinating bureaucratic structure of the EPA. (Vickery 127)

Nixon's economic justification became a constraint on environmental activists. If it were true that unlimited consumption and rigorous economic growth were compatible with environmental protection, arguments in favor of protection and regulation were disregarded once it was understood that environmental policy might in some ways hurt the economy.

Nixon was president during the peak of the environmental movement. Once *Silent Spring* was widely read, there was enormous public pressure for environmental regulation and protection. From 1968-1970, "press coverage of the environment in the New York times quadrupled" (Cannon and Riehl 206). In this way, Nixon's environmentalism was much more a *response* to public pressure, than a *motivator* of public opinion:

Presidential rhetoric defines a discourse of its own; it is also part of the larger national discourse that is part of - some might argue, is - our political life. Its dialogic, or interactive, qualities are pervasive, even when the form of the discourse is a presidential speech or statement. In preparing and delivering a speech, the president and his advisors have done their best to anticipate and shape the public's reactions, using the results of focus groups, polls, and their own political instincts and judgment. After the speech, the president's staff will assess those reactions for future planning. Thus, presidential rhetoric has the quality of both pushing and being pushed by the public's views. (Cannon and Riehl 201)

Similarly, environmental progress made during Nixon's tenure can be found in legislative gains made by a Democratic Congress, not because of Nixon's rhetorical dedication to environmentalism.

Nixon was the first president to integrate oil independence into his rhetorical strategies. Nixon began the enthymematic appeal to both economic and national security by arguing that United States' dependence on Middle Eastern countries for oil would significantly hinder the ability of our country to function during conflict. Nixon, presiding over the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) oil embargo of 1973, emphatically called to end dependence on oil:

Just as 1970 was the year in which we began a full-scale effort to protect the environment, 1974 must be the year in which we organize a full-scale effort to provide for our energy needs, not only in this decade but through the 21st century. As we move toward the celebration 2 years from now of the 200th anniversary of this Nation's independence, let us press vigorously on toward the goal I announced last November for Project Independence. Let this be our national goal: At the end of this decade, in the year 1980, the United States will not be dependent on any other country for the energy we need to provide our jobs, to heat our homes, and to keep our transportation moving. (Nixon "1974 State of Union")

Nixon, largely apathetic to environmental concerns, justified his energy policy on national security grounds, not on "ecological values" (Vickery 123). The appeal to national security happened enthymematically through references to oil dependence and energy security. It was not necessary, in 1973, to belabor the disadvantages of oil dependence because the crisis made the average American feel held hostage to "economic blackmail" from foreign oil sources (Mieczkowski 224). Thus, the statement "oil dependence" implied freedom, peace and military superiority. Nixon placed the



argument for oil independence firmly into the public imagination; in fact, “[e]very President since Richard Nixon has decried our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, yet that dependence has climbed steadily for more than three decades” (Sandalow 12).

In concert with this literal appeal to national security, Nixon followed in Roosevelt’s footsteps by integrating military metaphor into his rhetorical advocacy. In his 1970 State of the Union, Nixon called for the public to “enlist in this fight” to sustain a hospitable planet (“1970 State of Union”). Nixon understood the practical utility of this militarized metaphor by arguing for a “war on pollution” (Nixon “Reorganization Plan”).

ABC News:

“[R]ejoiced that there was ‘something good about pollution. In a time of stress and strife, it has at least united the country in opposition to it. . . . Republicans and Democrats, radicals and rightists, young and old, rich and poor, finally found a war all can support—a war on pollution.’ Environmentalism, according to these reports, promised to replace the polarizing protests of the time with a consensual cause that could bring the nation together. (Dunaway 68)

In this way, a rallying cry was sent from the president, interpreted by the media, and displayed to the public.

Gerald Ford, remembered for his supply-side energy reform and his tenure as a National Park Ranger, supported conservation and protection of public lands. Similar to previous presidents, economic justification was an a priori concern for Ford’s environmental reforms. This rhetorical decision is exemplified in an address given eleven months into his presidency at the University of Cincinnati:

I cherish the out-of-doors, and I stand with those who fight to preserve what is best in our environment. But as President, I can never lose sight of another insistent aspect of our environment -- the economic needs of the American people. Your security, your well-being must enter into every decision I make -- and it does. I pursue the goal of clean air and pure water, but I must also pursue the objective of maximum jobs and continued economic progress. Unemployment is as real and as sickening a blight as any pollutant that threatens the Nation. If accomplishing every worthy environmental objective would slow down our effort to regain energy independence and a stronger economy, then of necessity I must weigh all factors involved. My decision must reflect the needs of the future but also the demands of the present. (Ford "National Environmental Research Center")

Clearly, Ford recognized an inherent value in environmental protection; however, his approach required that any growth-limiting policy be discarded in favor of more limited environmental policy. While Ford did achieve some success in his conservation efforts, both his lack of effort and his rhetorical frame of unrestrained economic growth limited any gains in the area of environmental regulation (Daynes and Sussman 154). These forty years of presidential environmental rhetoric show an emerging historical theme: if environmental policy is justified mainly in terms of promoting economic growth, then regulation that is necessary to prevent real environmental harm is more difficult to achieve because of the possible tradeoffs with economic growth.

Jimmy Carter was elected, along with a Democratic Congress, after eight years of conservative environmentalism on a platform of environmental and energy policy

change. During his tenure as Governor of Georgia, he publicly advocated environmental protection and achieved significant successes. However, two constraints limited Carter's ability to achieve environmental reform as president. First, Carter followed historical precedent by emphasizing environmental policy that would not restrain the economy (Daynes and Sussman 87). Moreover, the "tension between environmentalism and economic growth was cast in sharper terms since the country was suffering through a sustained period of stagflation" (Tatalovich and Wattier 155). Therefore, any growth-limiting regulation was already off the table. Second, Carter suffered notorious failures in his ability to mobilize public opinion. Carter, instead of lobbying Congress directly, campaigned through television and radio, which was not received well by legislators. His disregard for direct interaction with Congress substantially hindered his environmental policy:

Carter, unlike Nixon, did not use his power to propose legislation to Congress. Instead, he made public speeches, suggested measures he hoped Congress would consider and tried to put environmental concerns on the public agenda through general speeches. (Hunter and Noonan 317)

Carter, instead of supporting specific proposals through horse-trading and expenditure of political capital, provided sweeping comprehensive legislation to Congress without consultation or presidential leadership (Daynes and Sussman 90). His failure to consult and cooperate with Congress over his environmental policy resulted in much of his legislation never getting out of committee (Daynes and Sussman 90). Therefore, Carter's inattention to the intricacies of environmental policy symbolized a failure of the president to motivate via the bully pulpit.

Carter, four months before the second oil crisis caused by strikes at Iran's national oil refineries, gave an impassioned address formally titled the "Crisis of Confidence" speech – often referenced as the "malaise" speech. In this address, Carter argued that the oil crisis was the "moral equivalent of war" and he promised an end to the growth in foreign oil dependence:

This intolerable dependence on foreign oil threatens our economic independence and the very security of our Nation. The energy crisis is real. It is worldwide. It is a clear and present danger to our Nation. These are facts and we simply must face them...Beginning this moment, this Nation will never use more foreign oil than we did in 1977 – never. From now on, every new addition to our demand for energy will be met from our own production and our own conservation. The generation-long growth in our dependence on foreign oil will be stopped dead in its tracks right now and then reversed as we move through the 1980's. (Carter "Crisis of Confidence")

In this way, Carter integrated both literal and metaphorical arguments for environmental policy. Carter noted that individual sacrifice produced "freedom" and the ability to sustain a peaceful American future.

Every gallon of oil each one of us saves is a new form of production. It gives us more freedom, more confidence, that much more control over our own lives. So, the solution of our energy crisis can also help us to conquer the crisis of the spirit in our country. It can rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose. You know we can do it. We have the natural resources. We have more oil in our shale alone than

several Saudi Arabias. We have more coal than any nation on Earth. We have the world's highest level of technology. We have the most skilled work force, with innovative genius, and I firmly believe that we have the national will to win this war. (Carter "Crisis of Confidence")

By noting both the reality of the effects of the energy crisis on national security and metaphorically equating the fight for oil independence as a "war," Carter depicted the American people at risk from both foreign blackmail and foreign invasion. Despite the rhetorical dedication to decrease consumption, oil imports have increased under every presidency since Carter, and 2010 levels are set to double the amount imported during the Carter administration.

In concert with the rhetorical transition from *environmental* policy to *energy* policy, "media attention to environmental problems began to decline after 1970, and such problems were eclipsed" by the energy crisis (Dunlap 96). During this period, the percentage of people who thought that environmental concerns were America's "most important problem" dropped from ten percent to two percent (Dunlap 96). Similarly, the percentage of people that believing that "environmental protection laws and regulations have gone too far" increased from 13 percent to 25 percent between 1973 and 1980 (Dunlap 98). Over twice as many Americans thought that the U.S. was spending too much money protecting the environment between 1973 and 1980 (Dunlap 98). Despite this, the public motivation for having "adequate energy" as opposed to "protecting the environment" increased from 37 percent to 45 percent between 1973 and 1980 (Dunlap 98). Finally, at the end of the Carter administration, 32 percent of Americans thought that if posed with a choice, they would rather "sacrifice environmental quality" than

“sacrifice economic growth” – a jump of 11 percent from the beginning of his administration (Dunlap 98).

Ronald Reagan, taking a similarly conservative rhetorical approach, purported that: “[t]he best answer, while conservation is worthy in itself, is to try to make us independent of outside sources to the greatest extent possible for our energy” (Reagan “Q and A”). However, his oil and environmental rhetoric is sparse; and, when he did choose to speak about the environment, his rhetoric certainly did not match his policy in the environmental arena. In fact, throughout this tenure, he “exceeded environmentalists worst fears” and “sought to eliminate virtually every government program aimed at reducing oil dependence” (Dunlap 102; Hjorth 72).

A search for Ronald Reagan’s environmental rhetoric yields few results. Most of Reagan’s environmental rhetoric centers on energy and fossil fuel consumption, not on environmental consequences of energy consumption. Before his tenure as president, Reagan delivered a nomination acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention. In this address, Reagan posited his environmental policy as one of increased consumption and economic growth. While Carter’s plea for oil independence focused on domestic development of both renewable and non-renewable sources, Reagan focused much more on the latter:

Large amounts of oil and natural gas lay beneath our land and off our shores, untouched because the present administration seems to believe the American people would rather see more regulation, taxes, and controls than more energy...Coal offers great potential...it must not be thwarted by a tiny minority opposed to economic growth which often finds friendly ears in regulatory

agencies for its obstructionist campaigns...we are going to reaffirm that the economic prosperity is a fundamental part of our environment. Our problems are both acute and chronic; yet all we hear from those in positions of leadership are the same tired proposals for government tinkering, more meddling and more control – all of which led us to this state in the first place. (Reagan “1980 Acceptance Speech”)

As President, Reagan admitted that environmental policies were not as relevant as many of his other domestic and foreign initiatives; instead, he was “disinterested in environmental policymaking” (Short 137). Martin Anderson, Reagan’s economic adviser, appealed to Reagan that: “Having clean air and low gasoline prices will be of small consolation in the midst of rolling blackouts, rising unemployment and mile-long gasoline lines” (Anderson 461). Since the “Reagan revolution” was one of domestic energy development and economic prosperity, the nation’s environmental policy “had to be consistent” with these pillars. Thus, mass de-regulation and devolution of environmental authority occurred – all to the detriment of environmental sustainability (Short 138).

Analysis of public environmentalism during the Reagan period provides an important counterexample to presidential environmentalism up to this point. While presidents surely are influential in shaping public opinion:

Reagan was not at all successful in lower the public’s commitment to environmental protection. In fact, quite the contrary seems to have occurred. In each case there is a pattern of increasing commitment to environmental protection

during the Reagan administration, often followed by further increase during the first 2 years of the Bush administration. (Dunlap 103)

Public opinion polling from 1981-1989 shows an increase in support for environmental protection by 12 percentage points (Dunlap 104). A Roper poll indicates that 71 percent of the public thought that the government was spending too little to protect the environment, as opposed to 4 percent who believed that the government was spending too much (Dunlap 104). The number of people willing to sacrifice economic growth for environmental quality increased from 41 to 64 percent during the Reagan onslaught against environmental protection (Dunlap 104). The explanation, ironically, may still be found in Reagan's rhetorical approach:

[M]uch of the increased support for environmental protection in the 1980s probably stemmed from the public's apprehension that, unlike its predecessors, the Reagan administration could not be trusted to protect the environment...Indeed, large numbers of people became sufficiently concerned that they joined environmental organizations for the first time, producing sizable membership gains for many of the national organizations in the 1980s...This interpretation is strengthened by considerable evidence that the public was aware of the administration's poor environmental record and that, in general, the public believes that the government should assume responsibility for environmental protection. (Dunlap 106)

Public sentiment during the 1980s provides strong evidence that one motivating factor for rising public concern is the increased awareness of ecological problems, not simply presidential rhetoric (Dunlap 106).



Even though environmentalism was not Reagan's primary concern, his rhetorical commitment to the war on drugs provides important historical insight. Reagan substantially escalated (both rhetorically and politically) the metaphorical war on drugs:

My generation will remember how America swung into action when we were attacked in World War II. The war was not just fought by the fellows flying the planes or driving the tanks. It was fought at home by a mobilized nation...now we're in another war for our freedom, and it's time for all of us to pull together again....When we all come together, united, striving for this cause, then those who are killing America and terrorizing it with slow but sure chemical destruction will see that they are up against the mightiest force for good that we know. Then they will have no dark alleyways to hide in...We Americans have never been morally neutral against any form of tyranny. Tonight we're asking no more than that we honor what we have been and what we are by standing together. Now we go on to the next stop: making a final commitment not to tolerate drugs by anyone, anytime, anyplace. So, won't you join us in this great, new national crusade (Reagan "Speech from the White House").

Unlike most military conflicts in which the United States had been involved up to that point, the problem of rampant drug addiction required decades of progressive social change. Winning small battles was no guarantor of success in the "war on drugs." Drug use actually began to decline before the "war" was declared, which made gains difficult to attribute to policy changes (Best 152). Moreover, "drug warriors [found] themselves sandwiched between pessimists who insist[ed] that no punitive policy [could] succeed and antidrug enthusiasts arguing for escalation because the existing forces, tactics and so

on [weren't] enough to win" (Best 152). Much like in times of literal war, winning battles only encouraged more force and escalation because advocates could point to supposed proof that the war could be won. Ironically, "winning" the war on drugs was largely assumed to mean the *eradication* of drug use, not mere reductions; therefore, the war was lost before it was even started (Best 152).

Not only did the war on drugs fail in creating a sustainable base of support, it failed to prevent illicit drug use, is wildly expensive, and clogs our justice system; but, it is politically untouchable largely because "America doesn't lose wars:"

After three decades of increasingly punitive policies, illicit drugs are more easily available, drug potencies are greater, drug killings are more common, and drug barons are richer than ever. The War on Drugs costs Washington more than the Commerce, Interior, and State departments combined - and it's the one budget item whose growth is never questioned. A strangled court system, exploding prisons, and wasted lives push the cost beyond measure. What began as a flourish of campaign rhetoric in 1968 has grown into a monster. And while nobody claims that the War on Drugs is a success, nobody suggests an alternative. Because to do so, as Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders learned, is political suicide. (Baum 1)

Even worse, the propaganda campaign in support of the war on drugs was so great that many of the facts are unavailable to the broader public.

The metaphorical war on drugs became unfortunately literal. The United States military, during Reagan's second term, was provided with increased funding and responsibility to enforce the war on drugs domestically; "on April 8, 1986, President Reagan issued a National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) declaring drug trafficking

a threat to U.S. national security, thus sanctioning a more rapid expansion of U.S. military participation...” (Bagley 4). Funding was drastically increased in response to this widely popular Decision Directive, and the metaphorical war on drugs became literal.

Beyond domestic military involvement, the United States exported its war to source and transit countries, largely without foreign cooperation and against the will of the general public within those countries (Friman 3-4). The United States now provides military assistance to several Latin American countries and uses forceful interdiction to prevent illicit drugs from reaching the United States, in spite of consistent Department of Defense opposition (Mabry 76-77). Drug smuggling is so prevalent and techniques for sale are so well developed that the *only* way the military could make progress in the metaphorical war on drugs was to fight a literal war (Mabry 86). Unfortunately, the enemy is not easily identifiable, ensuring civilian casualties and backlash at the use of military force; thus, the military solution was “set up to fail” (Mabry 86).

President George H.W. Bush “entered the presidency after eight years in which the White House, citing economic concerns, attempted to dismantle, weaken, or delay efforts at improving the environment at the expense of industry and business” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 266). Interestingly, Bush chose to distance himself from Reagan’s anti-environmental stance; instead deeming himself a conservationist and an environmentalist (Daynes and Sussman 155). However, in an effort to “smooth the transition from Reagan” Bush used similar economic justifications for his environmental policy (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 266). Speaking at the swearing-in Ceremony for Bush’s EPA Administrator, William K. Reilly, Bush repeated the theme that Americans deserve both economic growth and a clean environment:

I want to broaden the consensus for a clean environment, and I believe doing that requires finding ways to clean up the environment without stifling the economy. During the campaign I noted that environmental action has too often been marked by confrontation among competing interests. Well, the fact is that more often than not there is common ground if the parties will make an effort to find it. Our great common desire is a better life for all Americans. And I believe that economic growth and a clean environment are both part of what all Americans understand a better life to mean. (George H.W. Bush)

However, the economic recession of the early 1990's brought a tone of economic nationalism to Bush's environmental rhetoric. No longer could the United States both grow economically and regulate the environment; rather, regulations were unacceptable because they would "throw an awful lot of people out of work" (Bush "Agricultural Community").

Bush also integrated justifications and appeals based on national security and oil independence to argue both for energy conservation and expanded offshore domestic oil drilling. In his 1989 State of the Union, he emphasized that:

[T]he gulfs and oceans off our shores hold the promise of oil and gas reserves which can make our nation more secure and less dependent on foreign oil. And when those with the most promise can be tapped safely, as with much of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, we should proceed. (H.W. Bush)

In 1991, towards the end of the Gulf War, H.W. Bush tied oil independence to global peace and freedom:

Most Americans know instinctively why we are in the Gulf. They know we had to stop Saddam now, not later. They know that this brutal dictator will do anything, will use any weapon, will commit any outrage, no matter how many innocents suffer. They know we must make sure that control of the world's oil resources does not fall into his hands, only to finance further aggression. They know that we need to build a new, enduring peace, based not on arms races and confrontation but on shared principles and the rule of law. (H.W. Bush “1991 State of Union”)

Oil was linked with the most rhetorically powerful components of national security rhetoric – proliferation and war. Thus, oil became a justification for the lives lost in the Gulf war, and the war became a necessary reason to limit dependence on fossil fuels.

Despite his support for deregulation of the environment, limited federal power, and unlimited economic growth, H.W. Bush’s tenure oversaw important environmental legislation. In response to the exigence created by the Exxon Valdez tanker spill, Congress passed the Oil Pollution Act and amendments to the 1990 Clean Air Act that imposed substantial regulations on pollution and environmental degradation. Two years after the Exxon tanker spill, the Energy Policy Act was enacted – a policy that included conservation and efficiency measures as well as incentives for renewable energy development (Daynes and Sussman 163). However, this “level of legislative success was minimal compared to Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter, who never claimed to be environmental presidents” (Daynes and Sussman 164). After a year of short-term and limited environmentalism:

Bush appeared to lose much of zeal for environmental reform. His concerns about the costs of environmental regulation rose sharply. The president’s rhetoric

remained benignly green, but his actions belied his speechwriters...his staff downplayed the threat of acid rain and inflated the cost of cleaning the nation's air. (Shabecoff 244)

Bush's international approach to environmentalism yielded similarly mixed results as he "failed to offer leadership regarding biodiversity and global warming" (Daynes and Sussman 167).

Public opinion polling from the first Bush administration is enigmatic. While there was a "high concern for environmental issues in general" this was not strong enough to change voting decisions (Carcasson "Prudence" 131). Thus, Bush employed rhetorical environmental strategies that were vague and supportive of the environment in general, but not in support of specific policies. Moreover, the economic decline of the early 1990s made the pursuit of strong environmental policy politically difficult (Carcasson "Prudence" 131). Linking public opinion to the H.W. Bush is difficult given the extreme disjoint between his progressive environmental rhetoric and his conservative environmental policy.

If H.W. Bush was an environmentalist running for president, Clinton was *the* environmental president. He was elected with environmentalism as a central pillar of his campaign. His choice of Al Gore as running mate was indicative of his commitment to environmental regulation and reform. However, the "core vision" of his candidacy was "the centrality of jobs, education and competitiveness in the global economy" (Cox 160). Clinton posited economic growth and environmental protection as positive-sum: "We can and we must protect the environment while advancing prosperity of the American people" (Clinton "Decision 96"). This "jobs-first policy" hindered substantial

environmental reform and left the environmental movement largely disappointed by the compromises of their environmental president (Clinton “San Diego”). Clinton argued that: “[w]e have always found a way to clean the environment and grow the economy at the same time. And when it comes to global warming, we will do it again” (Clinton “1998 State of Union”).

Clinton’s environmental policy reflected this rhetorical choice of using economics as a primary justification for environmental policy. Within months of entering the White House, Clinton allowed logging on federal lands, limited regulations on the Everglades and signed the environmentally devastating North American Free Trade Agreement (Cox 162). Clinton, secondarily to his economic justifications, used non-environmental justifications based on energy independence and national security. Clinton stated to Congress in fall of 1995 that:

“I am today concurring with the Department of Commerce’s finding that the nation’s growing reliance on imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products threaten the nation’s security because they increase U.S. vulnerability to oil supply interruptions” (Clinton “Energy Report”).

Polling data from four years later shows that this message was enduring: “an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that rising oil imports are a threat to our economic, environmental and national security” (Murkowski 116). When referencing oil independence, Clinton continuously emphasized both national security and economic security – drawing on both dominant non-environmental frames.

“The environmental president” oversaw the Congressional session that had “the worst environmental record in 25 years” (Matthews A29). The fact that his rhetoric did

not match his actions brought cries of betrayal from the environmental movement and advocacy groups like the Sierra Club and World Wildlife Fund (Cox 163).

Unexpectedly, public environmentalism declined during Clinton's tenure as well. A 1999 Gallup poll showed that fifty percent of Americans considered themselves environmentalists, a twenty-eight percent decline from 1990 and a thirteen percent decline from 1995 (Gallup "1999" q. 3). Even as the science behind the global warming hypothesis began to reach consensus, Clinton's rhetorical approach was not successfully convincing the public that global warming demanded a government response. During his second term, the number of people who thought that global warming was a "very serious" problem changed very little, from 46 to 47 percent – a small change within the margin for error (Newsweek "2000" q. 1). The same poll indicates that only 12 percent of the public viewed global warming as "the most important problem facing the world today" (Newsweek "2000" q. 2). Clinton left office with a majority of the public supporting "tax breaks to provide incentives for drilling for more oil and gas in the U.S." and overwhelming opposition to "setting legal limits on the amount of energy which average consumers can use" (Gallup "2001" q. 3).

George W. Bush, despite reaping great profit from oil subsidies directed towards subsidiaries in the Middle East during the first Bush administration, made oil independence the core concern of his environmental agenda. In his 2006 State of the Union address, he argued for the national security benefits achievable through oil independence:

Keeping America competitive requires affordable energy. And here we have a serious problem: America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from



unstable parts of the world. The best way to break this addiction is through technology...Our goal is to make this new kind of ethanol practical and competitive within 6 years. Breakthroughs on this and other new technologies will help us reach another great goal: To replace more than 75 percent of our oil imports from the Middle East by 2025. By applying the talent and technology of America, this country can dramatically improve our environment, move beyond a petroleum-based economy, and make our dependence on Middle Eastern oil a thing of the past. (Bush "2006 State of the Union")

By connecting "oil dependence" to the "Middle East," Bush hoped to associate public motivation over the wars in the Middle East with his energy policy.

Bush, much like his father, entered the White House claiming to be an environmentalist. However, Bush largely supported a Reagan-style approach that favored deregulation, devolution of authority and a "probusiness agenda" that framed environmental policies in terms of economic and national security (Daynes and Sussman 189). He rhetorically justified his environmental and energy policy with the same themes used since Roosevelt, emphasizing that the United States can both "develop our national resources and protect the environment" (Bush ix). The emphasis that development and consumption was necessary for both growth and environmental sustainability was the basis of his economic argument. He used similar arguments to justify drilling in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge and in opposition to ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. When Bush did issue policies in favor of environmental protection, they were net-negative for the environment because they included environmentally unfriendly amendments. For example, the Energy Policy Act of 2005 included incentives dedicated

towards conservation and alternative energy; however, it also included billions of dollars in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (Daynes and Sussman 199).

Bush, a self-proclaimed environmentalist, had an awfully poor environmental track record in his eight years in office. He, unlike conservative environmentalists before him, specifically ignored and discredited climate change science: “by the end of his first term in office, scientists at NASA and NOAA complained about censorship imposed at their respective agencies” over their global warming findings (Daynes and Sussman 206-207). The impact of this rhetorical choice is lasting; public skepticism of global warming science increased under the Bush presidency (Nisbet 14). Bush imposed substantial constraints on the environmental movement, left a terrible environmental legacy and spent eight years deemphasizing environmental concerns.

Public opinion polling shows a similar, yet less extreme, response to Bush’s environmental rhetoric and policy as occurred during the Reagan administration. The percentage of the public that thought that global warming was the “most important environmental problem facing the world today” increased three-fold during the Bush administration (Newsweek “2007” q. 2). This increase in public motivation in support of global warming policy coincided with an 8 percent increase in Americans who “disapproved” of the way Bush was “handling the environment” (Newsweek “2007” q. 1). However, public support for environmental policy began to slide towards the end of the Bush administration – a 6 percent decrease in his final year (ABC News q. 4). Dunlap’s explanation of public environmentalism during the Reagan administration provides a plausible explanation for public sentiment during the second Bush administration as well. While presidential support of environmental policy can act as a

motivator, rampant presidential anti-environmentalism may provoke a backlash that triggers public opinion change as well.

## **Conclusion**

The last seventy years of presidential environmental rhetoric has contained a plethora of strategies to support public environmentalism: moral, economic, national security and environmental. From Franklin Roosevelt to George W. Bush, modern environmentalism has witnessed transformation, rise and regress. Aligning presidential rhetoric with changes in public attitude may provide significant insight into the effects that presidential rhetoric has on both public motivation and environmental policy. Specifically, the rhetorical strategies used by environmental presidents like Roosevelt and Kennedy may help guide environmentalist presidents in the future. Moreover, historical presidential rhetoric that emphasizes specific justifications for environmental policy may create an antecedent genre that requires presidents of the future to use similar strategies. While it is difficult to provide a deterministic analysis of exactly how presidential environmental rhetoric is received by an audience, the premise that presidential rhetoric has influence is widely accepted (Cohen 88). Thus, analysis of the Obama administration's rhetorical tactics, as they relate to historical rhetorical strategies, may provide guidance for understanding the possible implications of Obama's policies.

## **Chapter Three – President Barack Obama’s Environmental Rhetoric**

### **Introduction**

On July 8 2008, less than four months before the presidential election, Barack Obama met with leading environmental advocates for a strategy session at his campaign headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. He summoned: “a cross section of experts, including top executives from three utilities and two oil companies, the chief energy economist of an investment bank, a climate scientist, a California energy and environment expert, an oil consultant-historian, and several campaign staffers” (Mufson and Eilperin para. 2). Obama left the strategy session hoping to make his environmental advocacy “pop more” (Mufson and Eilperin para. 5). At this time, campaign strategists argue, Obama turned from tactics of moral and environmental suasion to pragmatic and more politically salient justifications for environmental policy (Mufson and Eilperin para. 3). This strategy session determined that Obama’s primary rhetorical strategy to motivate public environmentalism should focus on “economic competitiveness” and job creation (Mufson and Eilperin para. 3). This strategy could promote environmentalism by emphasizing green jobs, economic prosperity, new incentives and tax breaks for businesses and winning the international race for green energy. “Internal polling” also revealed that Obama could successfully motivate the public to support his environmental policy through a second salient justification: national security (Mufson and Eilperin para. 3). National security justifications can be summarized as the attempt to motivate policy through appeals to primacy and human safety, specifically: winning the war on terrorism, weaning the United States from oil dependence and promoting effective military readiness. While this strategy session shows that Obama’s intention was to use

these specific thematic justifications for environmental policy, a close examination of Obama's texts is necessary to determine whether this motivation actually influenced his approach.

### **Justifications for Environmental Policy**

Upon examination, the two major themes advocated at the campaign strategy emerge: economics and national security. This section will present a substantial subsection of Obama's justifications for environmental policy to show these themes, or arguments, at work. While these arguments are noted in this section as "distinct," they are interrelated and proposed together by Obama in many instances. For example, Obama argues that "oil dependence" is both an economic and a national security threat. Therefore, I begin this section with Obama's purely economic justifications, follow with Obama's dyadic and triadic justifications, and end with Obama's arguments based solely on national security benefits.

There are two approaches Obama used, in the first seventeen months of his presidency, to emphasize economic benefits of his environmental policy. First, Obama posited his environmental policy as necessary for the United States to remain competitive in a global race for environmental and technological leadership. Second, Obama highlighted that his policies were the best route to prosperity, growth and job creation. In an address to the Department of Energy on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009, Obama made the case for both economic prosperity and competitiveness:

Our approach to energy is the right one. It's what America needs right now, and we need to move forward today. We can't keep on having the same, old arguments over and over again that lead us to the exact same spot, where we are

wasting precious energy, we're not creating jobs, we're failing to compete in the global economy, and we end up bickering at a time when the economy urgently needs action. (Obama "Energy Department")

These themes – economic growth and international competitiveness – permeate Obama's rhetorical decisions throughout the next seventeen months.

Comparing United States policy to international energy development, Obama touted the ability of American ingenuity to lead the race towards technological leadership:

Often, they take something more than imagination and dedication alone - often they take an investment from government. That's how we sent a man to the moon. That's how we were able to launch a world wide web. And it's how we'll build the clean energy economy that's the key to our competitiveness in the 21st century. We'll do this because we know that the nation that leads on energy will be the nation that leads the world in the 21st century. That's why, around the world, nations are racing to lead in these industries of the future. Germany is leading the world in solar power. Spain generates almost 30 percent of its power by harnessing the wind, while we manage less than one percent. And Japan is producing the batteries that currently power American hybrid cars. (Obama "Electric Car Plant")

To add political salience, Obama and his environmental strategists noted immediate economic and competitiveness benefits; however, this choice sidelined arguments depicting the large decline of the global environment.

An analogous prioritization of economics over environmental justifications is found in Obama's arguments for green jobs as well. Obama argues that energy is one of the main emphases of the job producing stimulus package:

And to spur hiring and sustain growth we've placed a big emphasis on energy. Just a few weeks ago, I announced a loan guarantee to break ground on the first new nuclear power plant in our country in nearly three decades -- a project right here in Georgia -- (applause) -- right here in Georgia -- a project that's going to create more than 3,000 construction jobs in the next few years and ultimately 800 permanent jobs operating the plant. We're on track to create 700,000 jobs across America building advanced batteries for hybrid cars, and modernizing our electric grid, and doubling our capacity to generate clean energy. (Obama "Remarks on the Economy")

Noticeably missing from this argument is any environmental argument. The reason to support energy development was defined as job growth and prosperity, external benefits unassociated with any environmental impact:

That's why when we fashioned the Recovery Act to get our economy moving again, we emphasized clean energy. Today, we're supporting the development of advanced battery technologies. We're doubling the capacity to generate renewable electricity. We're building a stronger, smarter electric grid, which will be essential to powering the millions of plug-in hybrids and cars and trucks that we hope to see on the roads. It is estimated that through these investments, we will create or save more than 700,000 jobs. (Obama "Presidential Memorandum")

In an address meant to commemorate the signing of a Presidential Memorandum outlining steps for cleaner energy, Obama spoke only of economic benefits. While words like “hybrid” and “clean” may connote environmental benefits, the argument for economics posits these terms as economic, not environmental, accounts.

Obama spoke with comparable sentiment in an address in Arcadia Florida to employees working at a solar energy center:

So at this moment, there's something big happening in America when it comes to creating a clean energy economy, but getting there will take a few more days like this one and more projects like this one. And I've often said that the creation of such an economy is going to require nothing less than the sustained effort of an entire nation; an all-hands-on-deck approach, similar to the mobilization that preceded World War II or the Apollo Project. And I also believe that such a comprehensive piece of legislation that is taking place right now in Congress is going to be critical. That's going to finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America: legislation that will make the best use of resources we have in abundance through clean coal technology, safe nuclear power, sustainably grown biofuels, and energy we harness from the wind, waves and sun. (Obama “Solar Energy Center”)

Obama repeated the call for biofuels in an April address in Macon, Missouri. Using similar economic strategies, Obama argued that biofuels had the potential to substantially boost job growth in the fact of the economic recession:

It's an investment that we expect will create or save up to 700,000 jobs across America by the end of 2012 -- jobs manufacturing next-generation batteries for



next-generation vehicles; jobs upgrading a smarter, stronger power grid; jobs doubling the capacity to generate renewable energy from sources like sun and wind and biofuels, just like you do here. And that investment was part of the Recovery Act. It included \$800 million in funding for ethanol fueling infrastructure, biorefinery construction, advanced biofuels research to help us reach the goal that I've set, which is to more than triple America's biofuels production in the next 12 years. (Obama "POET Biorefining")

Obama's commitment to biofuels is even larger than the previous two presidents, who oversaw the beginning of the ethanol boom. While economic growth was certainly one motivation, at stake was not just prosperity, but the very foundations of the American dream:

We also know that our economic future depends on our leadership in the industries of the future. Around the globe, countries are seeking an advantage in the global marketplace by investing in new ways of producing and saving energy. From China to Germany, these countries recognize that the nation that leads in the clean energy economy will lead the global economy, and I want America to be that nation. (Obama "Presidential Memorandum")

Inaction was not an option.

The choice between a prosperous, competitive and safe America and relative decline was best determined by an investment in a clean-energy economy:

We can cede the race for the 21st century or we can embrace the reality that our competitors already have: The nation that leads the world in creating a new clean-energy economy will be the nation that leads the 21st-century global economy.

That's our choice, between a slow decline and renewed prosperity, between the past and the future. The American people have made their choice. They expect us to move forward right now at this moment of great challenge and stake our claim on the future, a stronger, cleaner, and more prosperous future where we meet our obligations to our citizens, our children, and to God's creation, and where the United States of America leads once again. (Obama "Remarks on Energy")

A nearly identical justification is found in Obama's remarks in support of offshore oil drilling:

And while our politics has remained entrenched along worn divides, the ground has shifted beneath our feet. Around the world, countries are seeking an edge in the global marketplace by investing in new ways of producing and saving energy. From China to Germany, these nations recognize that the country that leads the clean energy economy will be the country that leads the global economy.

Meanwhile, here at home, as politicians in Washington debate endlessly whether to act, our own military has determined that we can't afford not to. (Obama "Remarks on Offshore Drilling")

Obama uses nearly indistinguishable arguments when supporting offshore drilling, nuclear power, biofuels, renewable energy and energy efficiency. This monolithic approach disregards clear environmental distinctions between these energy choices and depicts each strategy as an economic or national security boon, while glossing over the possible environmental arguments – for or against.

Relatedly, Obama's appeals to ending the international offshoring of green energy jobs rely on appeals of green jobs, technological innovation and primacy:

[M]ake no mistake. Whether it's nuclear energy or solar or wind energy, if we fail to invest in the technologies of tomorrow, then we're going to be importing those technologies instead of exporting them. We will fall behind. Jobs will be produced overseas instead of here in the United States of America. And that's not a future that I accept. (Obama “Job Training Center”)

This argument against offshoring, no matter its environmental merit, appealed to national pride, patriotism and exceptionalism, because: “whoever builds a clean energy economy, whoever is at the forefront of that, is going to own the 21st century global economy” (Obama “Governor’s Address”).

Economic justifications of competitiveness were also prevalent in Obama’s 2010 State of the Union. Arguing for policy to make the United States more competitive, Obama noted that:

China’s not waiting to revamp its economy. Germany’s not waiting. India’s not waiting. These nations aren’t standing still. These nations aren’t playing for second place. They’re putting more emphasis on math and science. They’re rebuilding their infrastructure. They are making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs. (Obama “2010 State of the Union”)

While competitiveness was one route to describe the economic benefits of environmental policy, the appeal to the unemployment concern was prevalent as well.

Given the rising unemployment facing the United States as Obama’s term developed, Obama capitalized on this salient issue by emphasizing job creation as a benefit achieved from clean energy policy:

You can see the results of last year's investment in clean energy – in the North Carolina company that will create 1200 jobs nationwide helping to make advanced batteries; or in the California business that will put 1,000 people to work making solar panels. But to create more of these clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives. (Obama “2010 State of the Union”)

In parallel form, appeals to green energy were noticeably lacking of environmental appeals; rather, the argument for job creation was dominant:

So we have the potential to create millions of jobs in this sector. These are jobs building more fuel-efficient cars and trucks to make us energy independent. These are jobs producing solar panels and erecting wind turbines. These are jobs designing and manufacturing and selling and installing more efficient building materials -- because 40 percent of the energy we use is used by our homes and buildings. Think about that. All of us know that we use a lot of gas in our cars. But in terms of energy usage, 40 percent of it goes to our homes and our buildings. (Obama “Remarks on the Economy”)

By emphasizing the plethora of uses for green energy (e.g. cars, buildings and homes) Obama appealed to a broad swath of potential consumers.

While environmental justifications can be found scattered throughout Obama's texts – Obama argues for the health of the “planet” four times in the texts analyzed – Obama's environmental arguments support economics and job creation as the a priori justification:

But *the reason we're here* [italics added] is because it also means igniting a new, clean-energy economy that generates good jobs right here in the United States. Now, we've talked about this for decades. We talked about how our dependence on fossil fuels threatened our economy. But after all the talk, a lot of times our will to act rose and fell depending on what the price of a gallon of gas was at the pump. During the summer when prices went up, everybody was all for clean energy. And when prices went back down, suddenly everybody forgot about it. (Obama "Siemens Wind Turbine")

"The reason we're here" implies a priority of job creation and economic prosperity. Notice, Obama does not say "one of the reasons we are here"; rather, Obama dissociates environmental policy from environmentalism by creating an explicit and sole association with economics.

This prioritization of economics as the leading justification is also resembled in Obama's remarks on offshore drilling:

But *the bottom line is* [italics added] this: given our energy needs, in order to sustain economic growth, produce jobs, and keep our businesses competitive, we're going to need to harness traditional sources of fuel even as we ramp up production of new sources of renewable, homegrown energy. (Obama "Offshore Drilling")

The "bottom line" is a reference to the last line of an audit that depicts whether the audit has determined profit or loss. It epitomizes the decisive point or most important place to look; in this case, that most important place was prosperity, job growth and competitiveness.

In a rhetorical move that degrades non-economic justifications for the BP response, Obama argued:

If nothing else, this disaster should serve as a wake-up call that it's time to move forward on this legislation. It's time to accelerate the competition with countries like China who have already realized the future lies in renewable energy. And it's time to seize that future ourselves.

The choice to posit the competitiveness benefits of the governmental response to the BP spill as the “if nothing else” result, ironically, models the “bottom line” approach used in Obama’s arguments *for* offshore oil drilling. “If nothing else” connotes that if politicians can agree on little about the best approach to respond to the crisis, the *one* area in which consensus can be achieved is in the economic argument.

Closely tied to some of Obama’s economic arguments is an appeal to energy independence. This appeal enthymematically ties economic security to national security:

We estimate, for example, that we can increase fuel economy by as much as 25 percent in tractor trailers, using technologies that already exist today. And just like the rule concerning cars, this standard will spur growth in the clean energy sector. We know how important that is. We know that our dependence on foreign oil endangers our security and our economy. (Obama “Presidential Memorandum”)

Notably, Obama calls for incentives for energy development, not regulations against those who degrade the environment. The potential implication of this frame and policy choice is explored in chapter four.

Soon after this plea, Obama uses almost the duplicated justifications for non-renewable energy (fossil fuels), biofuels, and renewable sources:

It means making tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development. It means continued investment in advanced biofuels and clean coal technologies. And yes, it means passing a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America. (Obama “2010 State of the Union”)

As noted above, the economic argument equates all potential energy approaches and disregards the clear environmental distinctions between energy from renewable and non-renewable sources.

In the final address listed in the Washington Post database, delivered on July 15<sup>th</sup>, Obama, yet again, used the justifications of economic growth and competitiveness to justify a transition to a clean energy economy:

[T]hese aren't just any jobs. These are jobs in the industries of the future. Just a few years ago, American businesses manufactured only 2 percent of the world's advanced batteries for electric and hybrid vehicles -- 2 percent. But because of what's happening in places like this, in just five years we'll have up to 40 percent of the world's capacity -- 40 percent. So for years you've been hearing about manufacturing jobs disappearing overseas. You are leading the way in showing how manufacturing jobs are coming right back here to the United States of America. (Obama “Investing in Clean Energy”)

The first seventeen months of Obama's presidential environmental rhetoric shows a clear theme: the privileging of the positive economic benefits of environmental policy as a dominant frame.

However, secondary and complimentary frames emerge as well. For example, while Obama often chose to privilege economic justifications, many times those were coupled with appeals to national security and energy independence:

The key is to understand that this is a key component, a key part of a comprehensive strategy to move us from an economy that just runs on fossil fuels to one that relies on more homegrown fuels and clean energy. I believe that we can come together around this issue and pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation that will ignite new industries, spark new jobs in towns just like Fort Madison, make America more energy- independent. (Obama "Siemens Wind Turbine)

At times, Obama notes economics, national security, and environmental concerns in single environmental statements. The environmental arguments, in these instances, are often passing and vague:

Moving toward clean energy is about our security. It's about our economy. And it's about the future of our planet. And what I hope is that the policies we've laid out -- from hybrid fleets to offshore drilling, from nuclear energy to wind energy - - underscore the seriousness with which my administration takes this challenge. It's a challenge that requires us to think and act anew. (Obama "Offshore Drilling")



Correspondingly, in a summer of 2009 address about “innovation and jobs” Obama used a triad of justifications for his environmental policy: economics, national security and environmental pollution:

[E]nergy is one of the pillars of this new foundation, essential both to our recovery and our long-term prosperity. I'm pleased to say that we've achieved more in the last few months to create a new clean energy economy than we had achieved in many decades before. The recovery plan will double our country's supply of renewable energy and is already creating new clean energy jobs.

Thanks to a remarkable partnership between automakers, auto workers, environmental advocates and states, we also set in motion a new national policy to increase gas mileage and decrease carbon pollution for all new cars and trucks sold in this country, which is going to save us 1.8 billion barrels of oil. And last Friday, the House of Representatives passed an extraordinary piece of legislation that would make renewable energy the profitable kind of energy in America. It will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, it will prevent the worst consequences of climate change, and above all it holds the promise of millions of new jobs; jobs, by the way, that can't be outsourced. (Obama “Innovation and Jobs”)

Despite these fleeting references to environmental sustainability, Obama relies more heavily on the national security justification, as an addition to the economic argument, in the majority of his public addresses.

In his first presidential address related to the environment, Obama pointed to legislative delay over environmental policy as the reason that the United States was “held hostage to...hostile regimes” (Obama “Energy Independence”). He argued that ending

oil dependence a necessary step to “deny leverage to dictators and dollars to terrorists (Obama “Energy Independence”). In support of the environmental components of his first stimulus package, Obama argued that:

These are extraordinary times, and it calls for swift and extraordinary action. At a time of such great challenge for America, no single issue is as fundamental to our future as energy. America's dependence on oil is one of the most serious threats that our nation has faced. It bankrolls dictators, pays for nuclear proliferation and funds both sides of our struggle against terrorism. It puts the American people at the mercy of shifting gas prices, stifles innovation, and sets back our ability to compete. (Obama “Energy Independence”)

The United States’ involvement in two wars in the Middle East added salience to Obama’s plea to limit support of dictators and enact legislation that made the war on terrorism more winnable. Throughout the next seventeen months, Obama emphasized the dependence on foreign oil as a danger to national security forty-five times, in over thirty public addresses.

Importantly, Obama used national security as a justification for his environmental policy that could be supported even absent belief in the science supporting the global warming hypothesis: “[s]o even if you don't believe in the severity of climate change, as I do, you still should want to pursue this agenda. It's good for our national security and reducing our dependence on foreign oil. It's good for our economy because it will produce jobs” (Obama “Governor’s Address”).

In a March 2010 address about offshore oil drilling, Obama stated that: “moving toward clean energy is about our security” (Obama “Offshore Drilling”). Obama

militarizes the move to clean energy by arguing that since the military is supporting the move to clean energy, it must be the right move for America as a whole:

Meanwhile, here at home, as politicians in Washington debate endlessly whether to act, our own military has determined that we can't afford not to. If there was any doubt about that, you need only look to the F-18 fighter and the light armored vehicle behind me. The Army and Marine Corps have been testing this vehicle on a mixture of biofuels. And this Navy fighter jet -- called the Green Hornet -- will be flown for the first time in just a few weeks, on Earth Day. If tests go as planned, it will be the first plane ever to fly faster than the speed of sound on a fuel mix that's half biomass. The Air Force is also testing jet engines using biofuels and had the first successful biofuel-powered test flight just last week. Though I don't want to drum up any kind of rivalry. Now, the Pentagon isn't seeking these alternative fuels just to protect our environment; they are pursuing these homegrown energy sources to protect our national security. Our military leaders recognize the security imperative of increasing the use of alternative fuels, decreasing energy use, and reducing our reliance on imported oil. (Obama "Offshore Drilling)

Obama chose to disregard the discussion of environmental sustainability by noting that the military "isn't just" developing alternative fuels for the environment; rather, they have national security concerns as an equal if not greater motivation.

Obama used a complementary rhetorical strategy of noting military responses to environmental problems when discussing the BP Oil Spill. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, Obama

argued that the “threat” from the spread of oil was being countered by a large military response:

Until the well is stopped, we'll multiply our efforts to meet the growing threat and to address the widespread and unbelievably painful losses experienced by the people along the Gulf Coast. What's being threatened; what's being lost isn't just the source of income but a way of life, not just fishable waters but a national treasure. There are now more than 20,000 men and women in the region working around the clock to contain and clean up the oil. We've authorized more than 17,000 National Guard members to respond across four states. (Obama “BP Oil Commission”)

While Obama’s choice to emphasize the military response may have been received as off-the-cuff or tangential in early June, 14 days later the transformation of his rhetorical environmental strategy became much more evident.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2010, Obama delivered an address on the BP Oil Spill – his first from the Oval Office. This address was intended to convince the public that the Obama administration understood the magnitude of the threat and was responding in kind.

Obama used the military metaphor to analogize the government response to the war on terrorism:

As we speak, our nation faces a multitude of challenges. At home, our top priority is to recover and rebuild from a recession that has touched the lives of nearly every American. Abroad, our brave men and women in uniform are taking the fight to al Qaeda wherever it exists. And tonight, I’ve returned from a trip to the

Gulf Coast to speak with you about the battle we're waging against an oil spill that is assaulting our shores and our citizens. (Obama "BP Address")

Obama promised that the government was already "fighting for months and even years" the "epidemic" of oil dependence, and argued that the administration will "fight this spill with everything we've got for as long as it takes" (Obama "BP Address"). The address laid out the "battle plan" for going forward against the spread of oil (Obama "BP Address"). Resembling earlier arguments, Obama emphasized the military response to the crisis:

I've authorized the deployment of over 17,000 National Guard members along the coast. These servicemen and women are ready to help stop the oil from coming ashore, they're ready to help clean the beaches, train response workers, or even help with processing claims -- and I urge the governors in the affected states to activate these troops as soon as possible. (Obama "BP Address")

The "fight" and "battle" references continued to emerge from Obama's addresses about the oil spill for the next month (Obama "Meeting with BP execs"; "Cabinet Meeting"; "Clean Energy"). In the days following the BP Oval Office address, Obama stated that he wanted "all Americans to know that [he] will continue to fight each and every day until the oil is contained" (Obama "Meeting with BP execs"). Obama used the "context of the oil spill" to argue that oil independence was a necessary move for the United States to achieve "national security" (Obama "Cabinet Meeting").

The BP Oil Spill offered a significant opportunity for Obama to reframe his environmental policy in favor of *environmental* justifications for his environmental policy. In some ways, Obama took this opportunity to do just that. In his Oval Office

Address on the BP Oil Spill, Obama used phrases like “clean beaches,” “environmental disaster,” and “environmental cleanup” which emphasized the environmental harm that was taking place in the Gulf (Obama “BP Address”). However, when discussing how the spill should act as an impetus for broader environmental reform, Obama deemphasized the environmental benefits of his policies by defining the problems in terms of economics and national security as well:

Now, there are costs associated with this transition. And there are some who believe that we can’t afford those costs right now. I say we can’t afford not to change how we produce and use energy — because the long-term costs to our economy, our national security, and our environment are far greater. (Obama “BP Address”).

While the BP Spill offered an avenue to tie his environmental agenda to a visible environmental concern, Obama instead chose to frame the issue in the same manner as the fifteen months of his presidency. He argued for “clean energy jobs” and claimed that since “countries like China are investing in clean energy jobs” then the United States must remain competitive:

Time and again, the path forward has been blocked -- not only by oil industry lobbyists, but also by a lack of political courage and candor. The consequences of our inaction are now in plain sight. Countries like China are investing in clean energy jobs and industries that should be right here in America. Each day, we send nearly \$1 billion of our wealth to foreign countries for their oil. And today, as we look to the Gulf, we see an entire way of life being threatened by a menacing cloud of black crude. (Obama “BP Address”)

Behind many arguments in favor of containing the BP spill is an appeal to a “national mission” and the ability for America to “seize control” of its destiny:

But the one approach I will not accept is inaction. The one answer I will not settle for is the idea that this challenge is somehow too big and too difficult to meet. You know, the same thing was said about our ability to produce enough planes and tanks in World War II. (Obama “BP Address”)

This call for a national unity is similar to presidential rhetoric during times of war (Hyde 2-3). In fact, the military enthymeme, for Obama, is completed with both literal references to military conflict and appeals that model war rhetoric.

## **Conclusion**

While there are certainly intricacies in each of Obama’s environmental addresses, two consistent themes emerge. First, the dominant argumentative justification for governmental environmental policy is that it will have a positive effect on the economy. Two strands of economic benefits are emphasized: competitiveness and job creation. Second, national security benefits are prioritized as complimentary to economic benefits. There are two approaches Obama uses to frame national security benefits: literal descriptions of military security and militarized metaphors representing environmental policy.

Obama’s rhetorical constructions have changed as his exigencies transformed. At the beginning of Obama’s presidency, his economic references consistently noted “700,000” jobs, connoting the energy components of the stimulus package. During the following year, references to the stimulus package were dropped from his rhetorical repertoire, and a broader appeal to employment and competitiveness was adopted.

Obama's national security frame also underwent temporal transformation. While "energy independence" from dictators and terrorists was a consistent theme, the addition of arguments based in the militarized metaphor occurs only in the last month of the set analyzed. It appears that the BP spill demanded a new rhetorical approach, and Obama framed the BP crisis as a siege on our shores, to be met with an equal "fight" and "battle" response from the government.

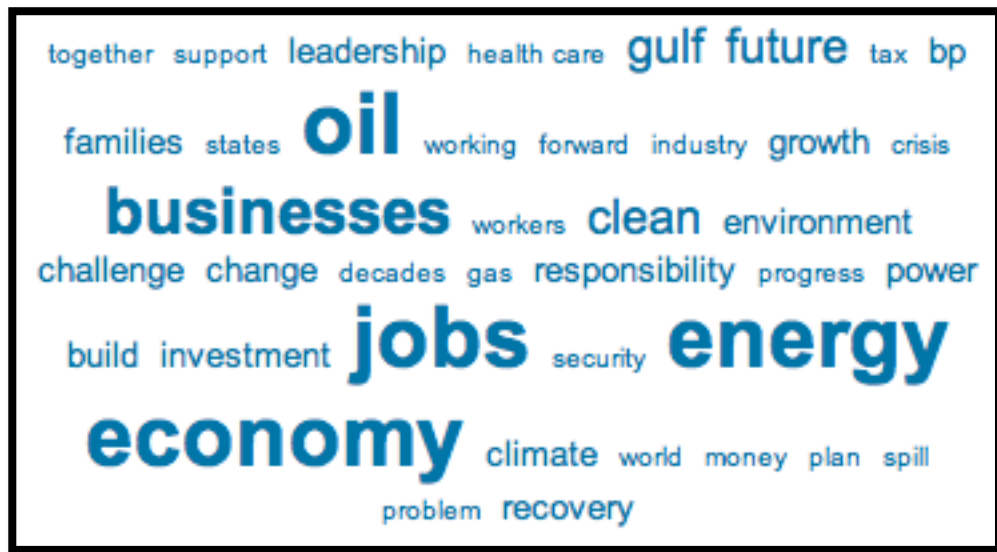
Equally as important as what Obama said, is what he did not say. In the eighteen months, forty speeches and over 63,000 words of Obama's presidential environmental rhetoric, Obama never once used the phrase "global warming" in public address. Six days into his presidency he argued that "rigid ideology has overruled sound science" but no robust defense of the science behind global warming has been mentioned since then (Obama "Energy Independence"). To the contrary, in his 2010 State of the Union, Obama specifically dodged discussion of the scientific consensus supporting his policy in arguing that:

[E]ven if you doubt the evidence, providing incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy are the right thing to do for our future – because the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. And America must be that nation. (Obama "2010 State of the Union")

Similarly, Obama chose not to emphasize the risk to the environment, biodiversity or species posed by environmental crises. In the set of speeches analyzed, his only reference to "species" comes in a passing reference to the Endangered Species Act. Instead, economic and national security benefits are portrayed as independent benefits, not associated with the environmental impact of his policies.



While Obama often referenced “the environment” it was never a robust description, and always coupled with economic and national security benefits. In the seventeen months of environmental public address, the five most commonly used terms were: jobs, energy, economy, oil and business. This word cloud, which represents the number of times each word pictured said during this period, depicts the emphasis placed on non-environmental benefits over environmental benefits:



The terms “jobs,” “economy” and “businesses” were each used well over three-times as frequently as “environment” or “climate.” Importantly, the use of the term “environment” drastically increased during the last two months of the set analyzed, largely in response to the BP crisis. Therefore, “environment” is more largely represented in the world cloud than is truly indicative of Obama’s environmental strategy. Removing these two months from the cloud analysis shows that the economic terms (jobs, economy and businesses) were used over ten-times as frequently as

environmental terms (environment and climate) in Obama's non-BP environmental addresses. Obama's choice to use economic and national security concerns as primary justifications for environmental policy is a rhetorical strategy developed to make environmental policy "pop more" (Mufson and Eiplerin para. 5). The fourth chapter will analyze the possible implications of this rhetorical approach by comparing it to historical approaches to environmental policy, and integrating rhetorical theory that provides insight into the effects of this style of presidential rhetoric.

## Chapter Four – Analysis and Evaluation

### **Introduction**

The possible implications of Obama's environmental strategy are many fold and difficult to deterministically predict. However, each rhetorical strategy influences the audience understanding of both environmental problems and Obama's proposed solutions. This chapter integrates rhetorical theory with the empirical precedent discussed in chapter two to point to the likely influence of Obama's rhetorical strategies. Two findings emerge. First, Obama's approach is extremely similar to approaches taken by other presidents historically. Therefore, evaluation of the successes and failures of their approaches may provide insight for understanding Obama's environmentalism. This finding of continuity also directly implicates Obama's ability to apply his narrative of "change" to his environmental agenda. Moreover, since the limited and piecemeal environmental policy record of the last eighty years is tied to the choice to represent environmental policies in terms of economics and national security, this provides strong evidence arguing against Obama's strategy. I use corn-based ethanol and Obama's rhetorical approach to green jobs to provide tangible examples of rhetorical framing strategies directly implicating the political agenda. Second, Obama has largely failed to exercise rhetorical environmental leadership. While his framing choices are influential, equally instrumental is what was *not* said. His lackluster devotion to environmentalist arguments for environmental policy makes pursuit of a broader environmental agenda that truly promotes sustainability much more difficult.

## **Implications of Obama's Environmental Justifications**

On November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, Barack Obama was elected by a nearly 10 million popular margin and a nearly two-hundred vote electoral college margin on a “mandate of change” (Grunwald para. 1, 2). Obama’s inauguration filled environmentalists with the “hope of new beginnings” and ignited a belief that Obama may be the first environmentalist president of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Chameides para. 1). Despite this, Obama’s environmental rhetoric more closely represents continuity with historical arguments and justifications for environmental policy than the rhetorical employment of “change.” Obama, while rhetorically purporting both rhetorical and policy change, has actually been quite conservative in his environmental approach. By using economics and national security justifications for environmental policy, Obama has not drifted far from the conservative tradition of environmental policy (Vickery 123). Politically, this strategy can be seen as pragmatic; however, the policies motivated by this frame continue with the conservative tradition of avoiding regulation necessary to protect the environment because of arguments that these policies would unnecessarily limit economic growth.

By not emphasizing the *environmentalist* justifications for his environmental policy, Obama allows other justifications to become “dominant frames.” This rhetorical construction makes the environmental impact of his policies (positive or negative) a secondary concern:

When...one frame comes to dominate debate...proponents of the losing frame...convert under their old frame. In this case, they can either adjust their rhetoric to the new frame or concede and withdraw from the policy debate. The winning frame can so dominate that others are delegitimized and given no

credence in the media and public discourse. When this occurs the dominant frame could be said to be acting hegemonically, rendering ‘natural’ the prevailing definition of the situation. (Miller and Riechert 114)

Therefore, Obama’s repeated reliance on appeals to economic and national security creates a dominant perspective that overshadows his brief mention of the environmental benefits of his policies (de Vreese 37). While several public policy scholars (Fletcher 811; Lehrer & Becker 651; Best 159; de Vreese 36; Shen 374) believe that this focus on economics and national security has the benefit of adding salience over key issues for the public, there are unforeseen disadvantages to this approach as well. In order to address the critical problem of determining the function of national security rhetoric used to justify environmental policy, Zarefsky’s theories of definition provide clarity.

Each of Obama’s rhetorical justifications for environmental policy acts to define both Obama’s environmental policy and environmental decline in the mind of the public. By using specific justifications for the environment, Obama “makes visible what had been invisible” (Zarefsky “Definitions” 2). In this way, Obama’s justifications give greater presence to the specific arguments he uses, and, therefore, dissociates the justifications for environmental policy that were not emphasized. Rhetorical justifications are “not neutral” or purely additive; rather, each justification acts as both a “selection and a deflection of reality” (Burke 45). Thus, any rhetorical construction is inherently limiting of other alternative constructions. In a practical sense, this may help explain why Obama’s environmental arguments are sidelined (even when he does mention them) because of more salient justifications of economics and national security:

“a definition of the situation commands wide adherence and hegemonically excludes alternative frames of reference” (Zarefsky “Definitions” 7).

One place to determine the possible effects of Obama’s environmental justifications can be found in a close look at Bitzer’s discussion of exigence and audience constraints. The rhetorical exigence is “an imperfection marked by urgency” where “positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (Bitzer 6,7). In the context of Obama’s environmental policy, there are multiple, yet contradictory or conflicting exigencies. For example, environmental pollution is clearly an exigence that “strongly invites the assistance of the discourse producing public awareness, indignation, and action of the right kind” (Bitzer 7). Yet, other exigences persist as well. Obama, by choosing to emphasize certain justifications in his environmental addresses, is responding to the lack of public motivation, economic stagnation, political gridlock and anti-environmental interest groups. Therefore, his response is not entirely “environmental”; thus, is inconsistent with the ideal goals of the environmental movement. Obama’s “controlling exigence” is likely the difficulty in achieving the balance between politically viable environmental policy and regulations that are strong enough to have a positive impact on the environment (Bitzer 7). In contrast, purely environmental advocates support a more idealistic view of environmental policy that, even if politically difficult, is worth significant short-term costs given the magnitude of the impact of environmental decline.

Invoking the non-environmental frames of economics and national security carries both associations and dissociations (Zarefsky “Definitions” 8). Associated with national and economic security is a feeling of military might, human strength and safety.

However, emphasizing national and economic security dissociates alternative explanatory frames (Zarefsky “Definitions” 8). Thus, the audience dissociates environmentalism from environmental policy because the argument is excluded by definition (Zarefsky “Definitions” 8). The frame created, even if done in common interest with environmentalism, influences “social formations” and public opinion towards environmental policy (Zarefsky “Definitions” 10). This dissociation surely is not deterministic, and is more usefully thought of on a continuum. For example, choosing to justify environmental policy solely in terms of economic arguments would lead to policies that place economics as the only concern – completely disregarding environmentalism. However, Obama’s passing references to environmentalism likely produce a political situation where environmentalism is a secondary (possibly tertiary or quaternary) concern, but a concern nonetheless.

### *Economic Justifications*

The historical precedent of piecemeal, negotiated and compromised environmental policy provides an ambivalent foreground for Obama’s choice to use economic prosperity as the primary justification for his environmental policy. While each presidential rhetorical situation is unique, the historic economic theme surely has significant costs as well as potential benefits that are true for Obama’s political advocacy as well. The economic frame has been somewhat effective at motivating a public to support environmental policy. Both Roosevelt and Kennedy, who are widely accepted as successful environmental presidents, used the economic frame to motivate environmentalism and translated that public support into policy. There are two reasons why the economic frame may prove useful for Obama.

First, economic prosperity and job creation are extremely salient issues for large portions of the population. Therefore, appealing to the public's motivations with economic justifications may produce an increase in public support and provide a sense of immediate relevance to the audience (de Vreese 36). Economic justifications are particularly salient because they tie macrosocial issues (economic growth) to microindividual actions (support for environmental policy) (Shen 374). This is especially true in times of limited growth and unemployment, which is exemplified by the Pew polling noted in the first chapter. Every president of the last eighty years has framed environmental policy in positive-sum terms with economic growth. Given that traditionally, "economics and the environment are considered antagonists," presidents have shown how political gains can successfully promote prosperity and job creation, while simultaneously protecting the environment (Carcasson "Global Gridlock" 276).

Second, the economic justification emphasizes the importance of technological innovation as a necessary tool for limiting environmental degradation. Green energy is at the forefront of environmental solutions in the developed world, and the benefits of technological optimism provide some hope for environmental sustainability (Carcasson "Global Gridlock" 276). For contemporary presidents, the choice to reframe environmental regulation as an avenue of promoting technological innovation often offsets opponents' arguments concerning economic cost (Fletcher 811). Technological advancement can be argued even more effectively when combined with patriotic appeals illustrating innovation as a way for America to get ahead. This rhetorical frame is seen in both Johnson's and Kennedy's rhetoric, where they use of the trope of American exceptionalism as motivation for environmental solutions. Such approaches appeal to the



myth of America as a “chosen people” who may also profit by disseminating this technology on a global level (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 280).

These benefits should not be overlooked or dismissed. Clearly, environmentalism has progressed in the last eighty years – achieving both legislative and administrative successes. Many of these accomplishments are likely associated with the president’s ability to motivate the public through economic justifications for environmental policy; however: “the economic frame...is not likely to be sufficient in the long run and on a large enough scale” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 270). Therefore, evaluating the possible disadvantages of the economic justification is necessary.

There are three disadvantages to using economics as the primary justification for environmental policy. First, prioritizing economic justifications ensures that environmental concerns remain “conceptualized as low-priority luxury items to be brushed aside when the economy falters” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 276). Since economic performance is often subjective and uncertain, “a politician would always be able to find some distressing signs of economic trouble to justify reducing environmental activism, as George W. Bush has demonstrated” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 276). A March 2009 Gallup poll found that:

For the first time in Gallup’s 25-year history of asking Americans about the trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth, a majority of Americans say economic growth should be given the priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent... The reason for this shift in priorities almost certainly has to do with the current economic recession. The findings reflect many recent Gallup results showing how primary the economy is in Americans' minds,

and help document the fact of life that in times of economic stress, the public can be persuaded to put off or ignore environmental concerns if need be in order to rejuvenate the economy. (Newport “Economy takes precedence” para. 1-3)

Over half of Americans support uncurbed economic growth, even at the expense of the environment – a truly frightening trend for environmental advocates.

This decline in public support for growth-limiting environmental policy is mirrored in an overall decline in public environmentalism. For the first sixteen months of the Obama presidency, the public saw no urgent environmental exigence, since the public failed to understand the pressing nature of species loss and global warming. A poll taken at the beginning of the Obama administration indicates that less than one percent of the population believed that global warming and environmental decline were the most pressing problems for the Obama administration (Washington Post q. 7). Surprisingly, the public became even more apathetic to environmentalism throughout Obama’s first year as president. A 2009 Pew poll indicated a sharp decline of over 15 percent from 2008 to late 2009 of individuals that believed there was “solid evidence the earth is warming” (Newport “Economy takes precedence” para. 1,2). For those who did support the global warming hypothesis, there was a nine percent drop, during Obama’s first year as president, in those that believed it was a “serious problem” (Newport “Economy takes precedence” table 1). A March 2010 Gallup poll reflects a similar public sentiment:

[R]esults show that the reversal in Americans' concerns about global warming that began last year has continued in 2010 -- in some cases reverting to the levels recorded when Gallup began tracking global warming measures more than a decade ago. For example, the percentage of Americans who now say reports of

global warming are generally exaggerated is by a significant margin the highest such reading in the 13-year history of asking the question. In 1997, 31% said global warming's effects had been exaggerated; last year, 41% said the same, and this year the number is 48%. (Newport "Global warming concerns" para. 3)

During the first fifteen months of the administration, Obama's rhetorical strategy did not lead to a shift in public opinion in favor of his policies, and failed to overcome other exigencies that were limiting public environmentalist sentiment.

The decline in public support for strict environmental policy may prove damning for any legislative gains, because, absent public support, overcoming special interest groups and big business opposition is much more difficult. A change in public opinion in favor of environmental policy is crucial:

The mere expression of support by the public in a scientific survey or an opinion poll (as are often conducted by local newspapers and politicians) can also be a vital resource of the social movement... Supportive public opinion thus not only lends legitimacy to a social movement but it provides a valuable resource in lobbying for new legislation or pressing for the effective implementation of existing legislation. (Dunlap 89-90)

Therefore, a shift in public opinion is often the precursor to a similar shift in representative components of governments.

Second, the economic justification for environmental policy ensures that any environmental policy that limits growth, or can be negatively portrayed as limiting growth, will fail. Economic prioritization creates a policy environment in which positive incentives and voluntary measures become the only possible approach, because

regulations may impose “unnecessary” costs on businesses. Environmental and rhetorical scholars have described this rhetorical frame and resulting problems as the “we can have it all theme” that “works to meld environmental quality with economic prosperity” (Cannon and Riehl 222, 226). Most certainly, this strategy is politically motivated:

'We can have it all' is an attractive theme for presidents because it allows them to declare a win-win on environmental issues. No interest has to suffer, and therefore no constituency need be disappointed. The theme also has roots in the way the public actually thinks or wants to think, about the environment. (Cannon and Riehl 228)

However, every new regulation imposes some cost, because of the inherent tradeoffs associated with government resource allocation; thus, regulation cannot win in a debate where the largest value-concern is economics. In this way, Obama let the external economic situation act as a limiting variable that allowed the situation to dictate rhetorical strategy, instead of developing a strategy that influenced and controlled the rhetorical construction of the situation.

To be sure, Obama had some limited administrative successes in the environmental arena in his first seventeen months in office. In March 2009, Obama signed the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act that set aside two million acres of public land as protected wilderness. In May 2009, Obama issued an executive order that committed the federal government to restoring health of the Chesapeake Bay. However, landmark global warming legislation and strict regulations on greenhouse gas pollution were out of reach. Noticeably missing from Obama’s environmental successes from the

first seventeen months are policies that would limit pollution or substantially regulate industry. When these policies have been enacted, often times they have been coupled with massive industry-focused tax breaks, or subsidies for non-renewable energies. Absent widespread public support, getting Congress on board for legislation that was portrayed as economically constraining and anti-business was not likely. While it is difficult to tie public opinion directly to Obama's rhetorical choices, understanding the historical precedent surrounding presidential environmental rhetoric may provide divination into the Obama's ability to motivate public opinion in favor of his environmental policy (Daynes and Sussman 238).

While presidents since Roosevelt have rhetorically constructed a positive-sum relationship between environmental sustainability and economics, new evidence is supporting the opposite argument – that humanity cannot economically “grow itself” out of the environmental crisis. James Speth, the Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, makes a compelling case that the drive for unrestrained and unlimited economic growth is the root cause of environmental decline on a global scale:

But the much larger and more threatening impacts stem from the economic activity of those of us participating in the modern, increasingly prosperous world economy. This activity is consuming vast quantities of resources from the environment and returning to the environment vast quantities of waste products. The damages are already huge and are on a path to be ruinous in the future... An unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at almost any cost; enormous investment in technologies designed with little regard for the environment; powerful corporate interests whose overriding objective is to grow

by generating profit, including profit from avoiding the environmental costs they create; markets that systematically fail to recognize environmental costs unless corrected by government; government that is subservient to corporate interests and the growth imperative; rampant consumerism spurred by a worshipping of novelty and by sophisticated advertising; economic activity so large in scale that its impacts alter the fundamental biophysical operations of the planet—all combine to deliver an ever-growing world economy that is undermining the planet's ability to sustain life. (7-8)

A research group at Schumacher College has reached similar conclusions. While economic growth combined with regulation may eventually slow the rate of environmental decline, only a less consumptive economy in the developed world is capable of preventing the worst effects of global warming and biodiversity loss (66). Environmental regulation that slows the least restrained components of the economy – mass consumption and the plundering of the environment by multinational corporations – is necessary, but current economic justifications for environmental policy make it difficult, if not impossible.

Obama's rhetorical plea for "green jobs" is a tangible example of the failure of environmentalism supported primarily by arguments for economic prosperity and job growth. The Democrats' focus on green jobs has distracted from a broader comprehensive reform because piecemeal gains in the labor arena have been depicted and accepted as sufficient (T. Johnson para. 6). Moreover, the Labor Department has developed an extremely broad definition of "green jobs" that allows virtually any job to be defined as environmentally beneficial. Thus, stimulus money designated to

legitimately green jobs has been diverted to environmentally harmful companies, largely because the justification for such funding was based on economic arguments instead of environmentalism for the sake of the environment (York para. 10).

Third, Obama's choice to emphasize the "competitiveness" benefit of environmental policy is a frame easily co-opted by anti-environmentalist factions. Less than a decade ago, George W. Bush used the *exact* same justification to oppose signing the Kyoto Protocol, arguing that it would unfairly hinder the competitiveness of businesses inside of the United States. Once again, any regulation that could hinder United States industrial competitiveness is discarded because of the undying faith in the competitive free market to solve environmental problems (Fougner 166).

The competitiveness frame also prioritizes national environmental policy over international agreements. Analogizing environmental policy to an international race to a finish line of technological superiority manifests policies of economic nationalism that serves to inhibit international environmentalism:

Playing into the self-deprecating sense of doom that has pervaded American society in the face of Asia's recent challenge to U.S. economic hegemony, such a narrative is likely to register much more powerfully with an increasingly cynical electorate than the environmentalist 'politics of limits'. What most commentators fail to appreciate, however, is that this renewed focus on growth and competitiveness is not only misleading the American public, it also poses a profound threat to the world economy and the billions of people who are still struggling to make their way out of poverty. The specter of economic nationalism

looms large behind the desperate attempt to reframe the climate crisis in terms of innovation and competitiveness. (Roos para. 1,2)

Global warming and environmental decline are transnational concerns that cannot be addressed by just the developed world – much less just the United States (Lynas 194). The continual emphasis of national competitiveness and relative prosperity discourages international cooperation that is a prerequisite to effective environmental policy.

Finally, the economic justification is constraining because the successes and failures of environmental policy must be measured based on its impact on future generations. Since the economic justification privileges the here-and-now of the public's pocketbook, large future gains are not considered nearly as attractive when compared to minimal short-term losses. Therefore, a more plural approach in the debate about environmental values may be the best approach to overcome status quo polarization over the economic impact of environmental policy.

#### *National Security Justifications*

The historical uses of literal and metaphorical national security justifications for environmental policy similarly intersect with Obama's presidential environmental rhetoric. This empirical foreground provides significant insight into the costs and benefits associated with the rhetorical approach based on national security justifications. National security justifications appeal to a shared understanding of common well being that has historically silenced democratic dissent. Thus, the "cultural resonance" of national security arguments is much greater than environmental justifications alone (Lehrer & Becker 651). Since no one can "come out against national security," opponents of environmental policy based on *environmental* concerns are portrayed as



treasonous and dangerous (Lehrer 155). Therefore, since the debate shifts from no longer being about environmental policy for the sake of environmentalism, the possibilities for error replication and poor policy choices arise. Similar concerns arise from the use of the military metaphor to describe the governmental response to social ills.

However, there is a benefit of added political saliency provided by national security justifications for environmental policy. If an environmental policy is good for the environment, environmental justifications alone do not necessarily ensure that Congress or the public will be persuaded on environmental terms alone. Therefore, even beneficial environmental policy may need the influential boost of non-environmental justifications to motivate public and congressional opinion. National security justifications may rally congressional support in favor of environmental policy, at least in the short-term: “policymakers come to favor dramatic gestures, such as declaring war. Social policy, like social problems, attracts attention when it seems new and dramatic; otherwise it gets ignored” (Best 159). The media is more likely to latch onto and replicate grandiose and seductive fear appeals than bland descriptions of environmental decline. In this way, militarization makes the complex issue of environmental sustainability easy to understand. For, the general public is left to wonder: why question the existence of the problem or the efficacy of the solution if the mere act of question may be conceived as treason in wartime?

Jonathan Simon, a professor of Law at Berkeley, in response to Obama’s Oil Spill address, argued that the virtues of employing the war metaphor are really just the “flip side” of the vices (“Governing Through War” para. 8). Just as the metaphor has the potential to “unify[] a potentially very divided nation,” it also “brings some nasty features

including intolerance, excess, tunnel vision, and a general aggrandizement of power and authority” (para. 4, 8). The advantages and disadvantages of such an approach are surely unpredictable, which in the context of the environment is extremely risky.

There are two risks associated with national security justifications. First, learning from the lessons provided by the war on poverty, there is a risk that these short-term gains will short-circuit broader reform. Once the original gains are represented as successes in the popular media, public support may unexpectedly decline. Second, taking cue from the war on drugs and the war on crime, creating politically unquestionable programs is only beneficial if such policies are in fact benign. This is a significant risk given unexpected consequences and negative externalities associated with the enactment of national security inspired social policy. While the rhetorical decision to emphasize national security benefits, while avoiding the debate about climate change, made it possible for even the political far right to support Obama’s policies, it also discarded the *environmental* impact of his environmental policy. This frame helped corn-based ethanol receive widespread support because of its influence on oil dependence and national security. Moreover, this approach avoided the debate about the negative environmental impact of monocropping corn across Midwest America.

The ethanol boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s was a political boon for both Clinton and George W. Bush. Ethanol had the advantages of being produced in the politically important agricultural Midwest and was rhetorically framed to appeal to the public’s national security concerns. Clinton supported both the tax credit and the federal excise tax exemption at the pump; and, argued that: [e]thanol production...reduces American reliance on foreign oil (Hagel “Senate Debate”). George H.W. Bush, while

generally holding virtually opposite environmental views, also avidly supported corn-based ethanol, stating that: “renewable fuels are gentle on the environment, and they are made in America so they cannot be threatened by any foreign power” (Hagel “Senate Debate”). With the Renewables Fuels Mandates of 2005 and 2007, government support jumpstarted 124 new ethanol plants, with “most located in corn-growing states” (Graham 151).

This support continued into the Obama administration when in October of 2009 Obama stated the importance of developing biofuels for both economic and national security gains (Obama “Solar Energy Center”). Four months later, Obama increased the Congressional mandate for corn-based ethanol by over two billion gallons (Fahey para. 3). While this mandate also included new incentives for second-generation cellulosic ethanol, the new incentives for corn made it extremely difficult for other renewable sources to compete. The newest environmental studies indicate that ethanol has devastated United States farm land sustainability, increased emissions that contribute to climate change and likely increased United States’ oil dependence; however government mandates ensure that “corn would play an increasing role in crop rotations” into the future (Lehrer 165).

Why did public and political support continue for an energy source that, as early as 1997, was understood to have largely negative effects on both oil consumption and the environment (Moore para. 6-8)? Biofuels were popular largely because arguments supporting national security justifications “became a strong rhetorical device for supporting biofuels development” that “overshadowed the rhetorical power” of other dissenting arguments (Lehrer 151). Despite the fact that there were “real and concrete”

differences among environmentalists over the effectiveness of corn-based ethanol, the “shared national security discourses helped create a sense of commonality among their perspectives” (Lehrer 151).

Corn ethanol supporters used national security justifications during the debate over the Farm Bill of 2008. While the Farm Bill debate was originally focused on commodity reform that would substantially limit domestic subsidies for large agricultural interests, it resulted in an increase in agricultural payments for corn ethanol. This turn occurred largely because “stakeholder consensus on the benefits of biofuels” silenced the debate about their poor environmental effect and limited influence on oil dependence (Lehrer and Becker 651). These appeals worked to “tip the scales” in favor of “the more historically embedded farm bill players” (Lehrer and Becker 651).

Patriotic discourses, both economic and security-based, “were in fact a more powerful driver of biofuels’ influence on farm and energy policies than the substantive benefits of the biofuels themselves” (Lehrer 151). Thus, the debate about environmental policy shifted to a debate about national security and energy, which allowed powerful interest groups whose interests were non-environmental, or even anti-environmental, to control the discourse of the debate (Lehrer 152). Thus, any ethanol dissenter was immediately silenced by the hegemonic discourse of national security (Lukes 30). Absent a debate solely on the grounds of environmental sustainability, environmental policy risks cooptation that may worsen the state of the environment. In this way, ethanol acts as a representative anecdote for possible future policy failure in the environmental arena.

The permutation of justifications for environmental policy reliant upon national security, war metaphor and economic nationalism is particularly dangerous. Not only does it risk policy failure and environmental harm, but also it creates the possibility for literalization of the metaphor and actual violence in the name of the “war against extinction” (Oskamp 180).

The twentieth century’s laundry list of failed wars on social ills provides a cautionary tale for Obama’s rhetorical choices. Naming a societal concern an “enemy” and declaring even metaphorical war against it risks unforeseen negative consequences. Creating a “battle plan” against the oil industry may seem a necessity in the immediate aftermath of the BP Oil Spill, and certainly has short-term rhetorical advantages; however, the “fight” may not end with the mere metaphorical representation of violence.

The lesson learned from the wars on crime, poverty and drugs shows that there is a significant risk of the military metaphor actualizing itself in violence. This risk is magnified in times of economic crisis (Roos para. 16). Similar to the war on crime, a metaphorical war against pollution will create a divided populous – the citizens being those that support the war through environmentally friendly solutions and polluters identified as non-citizens. In the war on crime and war on drugs, the enemy was easily identified by the color of their skin; in the war for the environment, the enemy may be identified by automobile choice, whether a family chooses to recycle or by visible industrial pollution.

Historical data should be troubling to those advocating the use of the war metaphor within the environmental movement. Using the metaphor of war has created a dangerous ambiguity that legitimated violence: “a war on, say, drugs (or, more

commonly, drug users, or drug sellers) can be fought with the tactics and with the logic of a traditional war, while defended when pressed and when convenient, as merely a metaphor...it can either be a literal or a metaphoric claim..." (Elkins 7). Thus, the military metaphor created the conditions for arbitrary violence and limited the democratic checks on that conflict; "The U.S. has long used "war on" metaphors to identify suitable enemies and justify extreme security measures against them: "the war on crime," "the war on drugs," and even "the war on poverty"..." are the most immediately relevant examples of the militarization of campaigns against social ills (Amore and Gooede 61).

The prospect for violence in the name of the environment does not end at individual or domestic conflicts. Given the close connections between environmental collapse and international security threats, avoiding militarization of the environmental movement is necessary to avoid pre-emptive conflict against environmental polluters. The war on drugs provides a telling example of how war against a domestic social ill can turn into foreign military adventurism. For example, the United States may view a developing nation as a risk to the success of the war for the environment and use pre-emptive military force to prevent that country from further polluting. James R. Lee, a professor at American University and the head of American University's University's Inventory of Conflict and Environment project concludes that:

[C]limate change can be a justification for a preventative war in at least three ways. First, it can be a reason to stop another country from taking harmful environmental actions that impact another, such as pollution that can cross borders. Second, it might be used to prevent countries from depriving others of their fair share of environmental resources (such as water in clouds). Third, some

may resort to it in order to acquire basic resources such as food, when state survival or a humanitarian catastrophe looms (160).

Given the high risk of military miscalculation, adding more stressors to international relationships should certainly be avoided.

Similar to militarized social movements of the past, those in support of violence within the environment movement will label these conflicts “just wars.” However, once a war against a developing nation is considered “just” it’s difficult to prevent conflict against almost every major power, and this rhetorical choice would certainly justify violence against the United States in the name of the environment. These wars would have a severe impact on the environment and divert money and attention away from preventing environmental catastrophe. Thus, violent representations that risk literal violence are certainly not warranted.

National security justifications for environmental policy carry many of the same risks associated with prioritizing economic justifications. Both justifications sideline environmental arguments as tertiary to nationalistic and patriotic concerns. The permutation of the national security and economic justifications is especially dangerous – economic nationalism, juxtaposed to threats to national security, risks a literalization of violence in the name of the environment qua national security. These primary justifications have made strong, effective environmental policy more difficult to achieve, and the continued construction of environmentalism in terms of economics and national security risks unpredictable negative results.

## **What Obama Didn't Say**

While there are costs and benefits associated with the economic and national security frames, the larger concern is that these frames have become dominant, and served to implicitly disregard the environmental arguments for environmental policy. Presidential environmental justifications of the last eighty years have been limited due to a “misdiagnosis of [the] rhetorical situation” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 282). Presidents since Roosevelt have identified salient political issues – economic prosperity and national security – and crafted rhetorical strategies to appeal to those desires. However, these rhetorical choices have constrained presidential policymaking so severely that presidents have been forced to place legislation that would have a meaningful effect on the backburner. Even worse, the dominant frame of national and economic security has created policy failures by sidestepping the debate about environmental impact: “[w]hether the dominant frames are adjusted with the current function systems or whether alternative function systems are brought into the mix, to overcome the current gridlock a significant rhetorical transformation will clearly be necessary” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 281). Specifically, there are three, potentially motivating, arguments that Obama has avoided. To be clear, no other frame will be as immediately politically salient, as jobs and economic security rank at the top of the public’s concerns at the end of 2010. Despite this constraint:

The U.S. president, more than any other political figure, can serve the role of moral leader and mythmaker, and this type of narrative could work to re-create the discourse surrounding the global environment, overcoming many of the current constraints. (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 281)



Thus, a reframing holds significant potential for motivating environmentalism into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

First, Obama has not taken the role of educator. Except for passing references from Obama, the scientific debate about global warming has been infiltrated by media punditry. Second, Obama has failed to emphasize the global nature of the problem and the necessity of moral leadership from the United States. This appeal may effectively appeal to the myth of “civil religion” that has motivated public support for social policy since the foundation of the United States. Finally, Obama has avoided noting the interdependence of environmental decline with economics and national security. Instead, Obama has argued for *separate* benefits not associated with the environment (e.g. farm land values, oil dependence, American competitiveness), while ignoring that environmental sustainability is foundational to the economic and national security benefits that Americans value most.

Several environmental scholars have argued against the use of scientific justifications to support environmental policy. Carcasson argues that since science has inherent subjectivities and is based on unpredictable variables, those opposing environmental policy can always point to other “scientific” data to support their arguments (“Global Gridlock” 277). Sarewit and Pielke argue that since individuals experience variable weather patterns then their immediate experience will contradict, and thus override, scientific musings (5). However, these scholars’ reticence towards science is misguided on two accounts. First, since environmental presidents have largely avoided the scientific debate about global warming. In doing so, they have ceded the discussion to the “countermovement opposing the efforts of the environmental movement”

(McWright and Dunlap 499). Conservative politicians, think tanks and internet-bloggers are leading the charge in the discussion of climate change science, which devastates liberal justifications for progressive environmental policy in name of the environment. Second, no president has yet made scientific justifications for environmental policy a priority. There are only two references to science in the first seventeen months of Obama's administration. Both are dismissively passive and fail to represent the scientific consensus in support of human-induced climate change. Therefore, arguments about the failure of the scientific justification are really a straw-person. Of course, the scientific frame has thus far failed for environmentalist presidents, because they have chosen not to participate in the debate at all.

The fact that climate change science has reached consensus should make the president's rhetorical job much easier. As noted in the first chapter, the most in-depth survey of peer-reviewed scientific articles concerning climate change found not a single one that doubted the fundamental assumptions that climate change was happening, human induced, and a large threat to humanity (Hendricks and Inslee 7). A 2010 report from the Environmental Protection Agency looked at twenty-two indicators of climate change (e.g. emissions, atmospheric energy, precipitation, cyclone intensity, etc.) and found "indisputable evidence" to support the basic tenants of the global warming hypothesis (1).

In similar vein, Obama's first seventeen months of rhetorical environmentalism has posited the governmental response as action against *climate change*, not action against *global warming*. This distinction may seem minor, but Obama's choice preference "climate change" rhetoric over "global warming" is problematic:

[R]esearch has shown that choice of terminology affects how the public understands and evaluates the issue. ‘Global warming’ is more often believed to have human causes and tends to be associated with ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect and heat-related impacts, such as temperature increase and melting icebergs and glaciers. The term ‘climate change’ is more readily associated with natural causes and a range of impacts. Furthermore, the term ‘global warming’ evokes significantly more concern, and is rated as ‘very important’ by more respondents, than the term ‘climate change.’ Finally, more people consider individual or public action to be an effective means of tackling ‘global warming’ than do so for ‘climate change.’ (Whitmarsh 417)

Obama’s motivation for avoiding the trope of “global warming” has not been made publicly available; but, if the choice were related to avoiding the scientific debate, invigoration of the scientific frame would absolve him of this concern.

While there are uncertainties, subjectivities and difficulties in explaining the complicated scientific concepts, avoiding this debate has been at the peril of presidential environmental agendas. Conservative think tanks, pundits and politicians have defeated the best tool environmentalists have at their disposal: truth. The need to redefine the terms of the debate is clear, and science should be at the forefront of the president’s re-education of the public motivations for environmentalism.

Second, Obama has not emphasized the global nature of the environmental problem and the necessity of moral leadership from the United States. Instead, when speaking in front of a domestic audience, he has framed environmental decline in mostly domestic terms, and argued for mostly domestic solutions. Asking the United States to

unilaterally sacrifice prosperity or security in the name of the international community may be an unachievable goal, but “the rhetorical appeal of American civil religion...seems to have remarkable staying power and could be tapped to confront these global issues” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 280). Instead of framing economic policy as a “race” or “competition,” where all gains are zero-sum and nationalistic, arguing for United States’ leadership against a common global enemy may “tap into many of the traditional American myths” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 280). Practically, this would mean working communally to solve international environmental problems, instead of trying to be the most economically competitive nation. While this frame may run counter to notions of individualism and consumerism, it may be the pre-requisite to an effective international solution. Successfully employed, this rhetorical appeal would motivate the United States to lead international campaigns like the Kyoto Protocol or the Copenhagen Climate Summit, instead of impeding progressive environmentalism.

Richard Pierard and Robert Linder provide a historical discussion of the success of the “civil religion” presidential mythos. They argue that, despite the entelechial risks:

The president played a central role in [civil religion]. The core belief was that the United States was a chosen nation, whose divinely appointed responsibility was to be a model before all the world of the benefits of right religion, individual liberty, and political democracy. Under the benevolent, superintending hand of the Almighty, its people were to practice patriotism and alleviate ills within their on society. When the nation failed to live up to its calling, prophetic leaders would invoke the transcendent power to call it to repentance and return to the paths of the righteousness. (284)

The appeal of civil religion is not necessarily sacred; it instead may draw from the secular mythos of “American exceptionalism” (Carcasson “Global Gridlock” 280). In the context of a global environmental decline, avoiding this frame has limited the depiction of the United States’ response to a national one and prevented the discussion of global environmental policies.

Finally, Obama has failed to emphasize the economic and national security consequences that will result from global warming and environmental decline. The premise that economics and national security are the most salient issues with the public is well documented, and poses a strong exigence for a non-economic policy. Despite this, Obama has emphasized the *independence* of economics, environmentalism and national security, instead of *interdependence*:

The interdependence structure frames decision making in terms of mutually agreeable principles of coordinated action that may allow people with different and often opposed value perspectives to address reciprocally related practical problems of respective concern to them...Principles of coordinated action become optimal foci for situated judgment whenever those who embrace different value perspectives need each other’s cooperation to make progress toward resolving practical problems of respective concern to them or otherwise face the prospect of practical paralysis and inaction. (Prelli 245)

A presidential emphasis on the economic and national security impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss would allow even disparate political groups to coalesce around the issue of environmental protection. This is distinct from the criticisms leveled earlier in this chapter because, in this frame, economic and national security justifications are

*derivative* of environmental protection; therefore, environmental sustainability is the core concern while economics and national security are secondary benefits.

Practically, the a priori focus on environmentalism, with added benefits of economic prosperity and national security, would not justify widespread support for corn-based ethanol, or green jobs simply for the sake of boosting employment, because social interest groups would evaluate the negative environmental impact as interdependently harmful to their core concerns – economics and national security. Moreover, more significant (costly) environmental regulation would become acceptable in this frame because the economic impact of environmental decline would enter the cost-benefit equation.

Making the case for interdependence between environmental decline and national security should not be difficult for Obama. Without widespread individual and governmental transformation, humanity risks overshooting an invisible tipping point that makes non-traditional security threats exponentially more dangerous (Speth 26). The decline in biodiversity will likely cause literal wars over both resource shortage and abundance. For example, India and Pakistan, two nuclear states, may risk conflict over dwindling water or food supplies as precipitation patterns change and the Indus river dries up (Dyer 20). Russia and the United States, with over ninety percent of the world's nuclear weapons, are in a race to secure for themselves abundant oil supplies underneath the melting arctic (Lee 6). Even absent these great power conflicts, there are other security concerns as well. Once positive feedbacks induce runaway global warming there will be a rapid shift to unregulated nuclear power, which will increase the risk of nuclear proliferation (Dyer 60). Mass human migration will occur as current agricultural hotspots

become arid. This will place increased economic strain on already fragile governments in developing countries, and risks a wave of failed states. Therefore, biodiversity loss and environmental collapse poses both economic and national security risks. Surely the public could be persuaded by these logical and scientifically supported arguments.

This strategy is most likely to succeed if presidents rhetorically tie economic and security threats to environmental decline, and not discuss them independent of any reference to sustainable environmentalism. While economic and national security justifications for environmentalism appeal to salient public concerns, this strategy may falter because it is difficult to make visible and personal the effects of environmental decline. Therefore, an additional justification – public health – may help Obama personalize environmental decline in the same way *Silent Spring* was foundational to the first wave of public environmentalism (Stevenson 51-52). The president’s ability to point specifically to health risks posed by “byproducts of industrial production” may prove to be “an effective catalyst for initiating debate on environmental issues” (Stevenson 52, 51). This new frame appeals to salient political issues, economic security and personalizes the impact of industrial pollution to the public; however, Obama’s current approach of economics and national security at all costs limits the ability for this alternative frame to reverberate.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Study**

This study offers an analysis of the historical effectiveness of economic and national security justifications for social policy. While there is no formula or method for creating or interpreting universally effective rhetoric, attention should be paid to historical effectiveness for developing rhetoric that is influential to a particular audience.

Understanding presidential environmental rhetoric through frames of social discourse provides the critic with a tool to compare the interrelationship of a plethora of different environmental justifications. Therefore, this method is effective at understanding the way political advocacy is received by, and thus influences, the audience; thus, is necessary for effective policy analysis. The specific methods of rhetorical analysis employed drew from several different rhetorical theories (frame analysis, thematic criticism, definition, etc.); therefore, the analysis emerged from immediately relevant theories, instead of relying on a formalistic singular method approach. While this may seem methodologically haphazard, each method used had a common theme: the ability to help the critic understand how rhetoric functions to influence an audience.

However, this study has limitations. First, this study is only a limited view of the world of environmental policy; therefore, it only provides politically useful advice when combined with other research. For example, this study overlooks entrenched political interest groups, constituencies and financial barriers that stand in the way of environmental policy. While rhetorical strategies can be powerful, they may not be a panacea for decades of constraints on progressive environmental policy. Moreover, while the president generally has the ability to shape public opinion, public disdain for the government during the Obama administration is at an all time high. Public backlash to Obama's health care plan may signal the political cost associated with investing political capital in a socially liberal policy during times of economic decline. Therefore, any progressive legislation runs the risk of being labeled as an incarnation of "big government" principles, and may be opposed on economic grounds. Thus, new constraints on public environmentalism are emerging and require further investigation.



Second, this study treated all presidential discourse as equal and did not prioritize rhetoric from the most widely viewed addresses. While the widely viewed “State of the Union” addresses and Obama’s “BP Oil Spill Oval Office Address” were cited as examples of Obama’s environmental rhetoric, several speeches with much fewer viewers were cited as well. In retrospect, it may have been more effective to use a certain number of viewers as a constraint on the set of environmental addresses analyzed. After substantial investigation, I believe that the economic and national security themes emerge from *all* of Obama’s presidential environmental rhetoric; however, other themes in less viewed addresses may have cluttered and confused analysis.

Finally, some parts of this study may act to conflate correlation with causality. For example, the “war on crime” metaphor was not the *singular* cause of the failure of anti-crime policy. Rather, the rhetorical choice may have helped construct a world in which literal violence became more likely. Also, national security justifications for environmental policy were not the *only* reason corn-based ethanol was widely supported, agricultural interest groups and lobbies surely had a large influence as well. However, the national security frame may have helped construct a world in which environmental arguments were sidestepped in favor of alternative justifications. While evidence presented throughout this study supports the likely possibility of rhetorical choices influencing political outcomes, some qualification is necessary.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study has generated several questions about the relationship between presidential rhetoric and environmental policy that provides ample ground for future investigation. First, while this study is helpful for understanding the first seventeen

months of Obama's presidency, a more thorough investigation of the rhetoric of other environmental advocates may prove useful. For example, rhetoric by Bono, Al Gore, and Bill Gates surely influences public support for governmental environmental policy. While this study is premised on the idea that presidential rhetoric is most influential, today's widespread internet culture makes other environmental advocates equally as accessible.

Second, a recurring theme that emerged while researching is that often time's environmental exigences, not presidential advocacy, motivate environmental policy. For example, *Silent Spring*, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, and the BP Oil Spill all created a sense of urgency in the public that translated into progressive environmental policy. Further research should investigate how presidents respond to extremely visible environmental exigences, and normatively develop strategies for the most effective responses.

Third, while this study draws heavily from comparing Obama's rhetorical choices to historically similar rhetorical constructions, the analysis of previous environmental presidents is limited. Further study should focus closely to the rhetorical situations faced by presidents in the past, not just a brief look at the successes and failures of their political agenda. In this way, a longitudinal analysis of environmental rhetoric will provide larger insight into the rhetorical choices made by future administrations. Similarly, as the Obama administration progresses into its third year, an analysis of his ability to rhetorically negotiate environmental policy with an increasingly conservative congress may prove fruitful.

## **Conclusion**

Presidential environmental rhetoric functions to define both environmental problems and solutions. This defining process creates inherent associations and dissociations, which works to screen out alternate definitions and representations of reality. Obama's choice to prioritize economic and national security justifications for his environmental policy is not unique to his administration; rather, this strategy of definition and association has been an approach used consistently throughout the last eighty years of presidential environmental rhetoric. Empirical precedent for this definition-creating sustainable environmental policy is not strong. Instead, the economic and national security frames have created piecemeal and half-hearted environmental policy that have consistently prioritized economic growth and political viability over pursuit of any regulation that may inhibit growth or spark a political backlash. Obama's inability to achieve environmental gains during his first seventeen months in office is surely caused by partisan politics, the wars abroad, unemployment and a plethora of other pressing concerns. However, both the antecedent frame, and his rhetorical frame have created further rhetorical constraints by de-emphasizing the environment as the main concern to be addressed with environmental policy. This frame poses problems for both domestic and international environmental policy, and needs to be abandoned or adjusted to avoid devastating downfalls that will only continue to produce error-prone and piecemeal environmental policy. A new strategy, foregrounding environmental impact, is necessary if environmentalism itself is ever to achieve political salience. In a sense, an environmental ethic is inevitable: either advocates will motivate policy to prevent an environmental collapse, or the collapse of the environment itself will produce visible

exigencies that motivate a reactionary response. For the sake of the environment, national security, economic prosperity and public health, a successful rhetorical change cannot come quickly enough.

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