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<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/republicans-must-return-to-their-conservation-roots>

Republicans must return to their conservation roots

by Andy Sabin
| July 01, 2018 08:20 AM

Environmental protection is a great American success story.

(AP Photo/Anna Johnson)

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The nation's economy is humming along nicely with unemployment at an all-time low. Now President Trump and Congress must unite for a clean and healthy environment, and Republicans must reclaim leadership on this critical issue.

Republicans have rightfully opposed misguided policies such as President Obama's Clean

Power Plan and the Waters of the United States rule. But for far too long, we have done little to proactively shape policy solutions, leaving a vacuum that liberal interest groups have filled with big-government solutions.

It's high time the party of Teddy Roosevelt reclaims the environment, redefines the narrative, and leverages good old-fashioned American know-how and innovation. As Roosevelt once said, "Conservation is a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation."

Environmental protection is a great American success story. The quality of our environment affects every aspect of our economy, health, and quality of life. Thanks, in large measure, to conservative leaders, including Richard Nixon, who established the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and signed into law the federal clean air and water acts, we are a healthier and more prosperous nation.

We can afford a clean environment because of a robust economy. Moreover, our energy companies, increasingly focused on cleaner energy, are poised to lead the world, creating even more American jobs.

Yet despite our environmental gains over the last 45 years, we still have a long way to go.

Environmental pollution continues to harm America's working families and communities. For example, air pollution alone causes 200,000 early deaths each year in the U.S. Children and those living in socioeconomically distressed communities continue to be disproportionately harmed by air and water pollution. Consider the tragedy in Flint, Mich., where 100,000 people were unwittingly poisoned by lead in their drinking water. As well, many of our nation's water bodies such as the Chesapeake Bay, the Great Lakes, and Gulf of Mexico continue to be impaired due to excess pollution, imposing enormous costs on communities, businesses, and the public health. And there are over 1,300 endangered or threatened species in the U.S listed under the Endangered Species Act and hundreds more are awaiting review.

While many, including myself, applaud the president's decisive actions to reform federal agencies and roll back bad regulations, a caution is in order. We can't afford to gut national safeguards to protect public health and the environment. The American public cares deeply about clean air, clean water, and our public lands.

To be great again means that our air and water are safe and clean, our streams and lakes are swimmable and fishable, our oceans are free from toxic plastic pollution, our public lands are properly maintained and accessible to all, and our natural resources are managed according to the best available science.

My party must return to its conservation roots. It is our moral and patriotic duty.

We can start to by passing important bipartisan legislation. The first, sponsored by Sens. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., would permanently authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, one of the

most important programs for protecting federal public lands and waters, including national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges.

Another bill, the WILD (Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver) Act, co-sponsored by Sens. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., and Tom Carper, D-Del., would promote wildlife conservation, fight against invasive species, and protect threatened species using U.S. technology and innovation. The National Park Restoration Act, sponsored by Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., would help reduce the growing maintenance backlog that has long plagued our national parks. And lastly, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, sponsored by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., would help proactively protect species from endangerment and being placed on the ESA list.

America is at its best when we recognize and attack common challenges. Let's put aside partisan politics and make our great outdoors great again.

Andy Sabin, a lifelong Republican, is the Chairman and President of Sabin Metal Corporation and founder of the Andrew Sabin Family Foundation, which funds global research and conservation to protect imperiled species and their habitat, environmental scholarships, and cancer research.

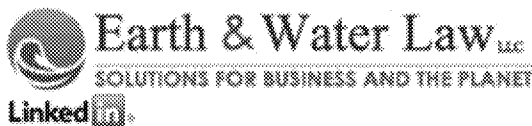
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