



Delivering conservative leadership on climate change | Opinion

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By David Jenkins

As Americans, we have a common interest in safeguarding our life-sustaining natural environment. The hopes and dreams of this and future generations of Americans depend on us doing our duty to protect and preserve this shared natural heritage.

As President Reagan once wisely pointed out, *“The preservation of our environment is not a partisan challenge, it’s common sense.”* He went on to note that our health, social happiness, and economic well-being, all hinge on us being *“thoughtful, effective stewards of our natural resources.”*

It is no accident that “conservative” and “conservation” are both derived from the word conserve. That is why throughout our history—from Theodore Roosevelt to Nixon, Reagan, and Bush—we have seen conservatives advance some of the most effective and innovative environmental policies.

Pennsylvania’s own Gifford Pinchot and John Saylor are also among America’s greatest conservative/Republican conservation leaders.

Today, as we witness the adverse impacts of climate change, it is time for conservatives to stop ceding this issue to folks on the other side of the aisle and lead once again. In fact, there has never been a more opportune—and politically favorable—time to do so.

There was a time when addressing climate change was a daunting prospect that seemed certain to raise the cost of energy, but the energy market has changed dramatically in recent years. Now the cleanest, most climate-friendly sources of energy are also the cheapest.

This means that we can—by firmly leaning into the current energy market—address climate change and lower utility bills at the same time.

Unfortunately, some of Pennsylvania’s Republican lawmakers are doing the opposite. Instead of adhering to the long-time conservative creed to “follow the market,” they are ignoring the market as they work to block this state from joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

Perhaps they don’t realize that RGGI is a market-based program with a distinctly Republican heritage. It emulates the Reagan/Bush approach for addressing acid rain that culminated in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments.

Or maybe, they have failed to keep up with a rapidly changing energy market where aging, costly to maintain coal and gas plants can no longer generate electricity as cheaply and reliably as solar and wind.

Also being overlooked is the fact that RGGI and other market-based answers to climate change offer the best opportunity to head off untested and expansive *Green New Deal* type approaches.

If they don't know any of those things, then perhaps it's time to look beyond the talking points being fed to them by special interest lobbyists and once again embrace a market-based solution that will safeguard our planet and our wallets.

It is heartening that several Republicans in the state legislature are doing just that, by supporting rational policies to reduce pollution and address climate change. They are the true conservatives who are heeding President Reagan's advice—and following in his footsteps.

You see, Ronald Reagan is America's original climate champion. He enacted the first-ever legislation addressing climate change. He also pushed through a landmark treaty to protect our atmosphere from harmful chemicals. That treaty, the Montreal Protocol, while designed to address ozone depletion, has also significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

We are in desperate need of that stewardship-minded conservative leadership today.

A proven solution like RGGI that leverages market forces to fix a serious problem is exactly the kind of policy conservative leaders should be rallying behind. One that creates jobs, bolsters the state's economy, and works in conjunction with today's energy market to lower electricity bills.

It is no wonder that RGGI enjoys the support of utility companies.

States that are quickest to respond to new energy market realities will be the ones that are most successful in attracting new businesses. And not just from the clean energy industries, but also the large share of companies today that have established their own internal clean energy goals.

The future of Pennsylvania's nuclear plants, which provide carbon free power, will also be more secure if this state is part of RGGI.

True conservative leaders do not turn their backs on real problems, nor do they dismiss proven, market-friendly solutions to those problems. Most Pennsylvanians—a bipartisan majority—want action on climate change. So, not only is RGGI the right thing to do, it is the politically smart thing to do.

It's time this state's Republican leaders stop fighting the market and follow President Reagan's great example.

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