

# Freedom Matters

A Weekly Newsletter

Dane County, Wisconsin

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

## Environmental Extremists Don't Represent Most Americans Sunday, March 24, 2002 BY JAMES V. HANSEN

Most Americans consider themselves environmentalists and conservationists. We all want clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife and wilderness to which we can escape.

I want those. I have worked hard to create and preserve these things. But in recent years, I have watched the environmental movement become more extreme in its demands. To hear environmental groups these days, everything should be untouched wilderness. Public lands should be left wild and untouched. Dams should be busted and reservoirs drained. Mineral and energy development on public lands should be stopped. Cattle and sheep should be shooed from public lands on which herds have grazed for 150 years.

Much of the public, lured by the glossy ad campaigns and the romantic notion of wilderness, has bought into these notions without considering the costs. Extremism in any area of our lives comes at a price. Environmental extremism is no different.

I smile when some people write to me about wanting more wilderness. In their letters, they talk about loading their families up in the RV and going up to these new wilderness areas to get away from it all, smell the pines, enjoy campfire-roasted food and reconnect with each other.

They don't understand what "wilderness" means. They don't understand these lands will be closed to all but the hardest hiker. No roads. No vehicles, not even a mountain bike.

In embracing the romantic idea of millions and millions of acres of more wilderness, people don't understand that closing off our public lands to recreation, grazing, resource development and even efforts to prevent wildfires has staggering implications. Such a move would hobble our economy and our national security.

It would even affect our ability to do something as simple as switch on the light in the kitchen. Right now, Los Angeles' electricity comes from clean Utah coal that is within a 9 million-acre swath of land some environmental groups want to put into wilderness. If that happens, Los Angeles loses its abundant electricity and joins the rest of California on the roller coaster of fluctuating price and availability.

If we stop grazing on public lands, the price of meat would skyrocket. Pull out the dams and electricity bills would go up sharply while the reliability of power would nose-dive. Stop the development of oil and natural gas on public lands and you would see the result in your heat bill and the prices at the gas pump. Stop mineral development and the cost of the thousands of things in our daily lives with metal in them would climb.

Close down all our military training ranges on public lands and our national security would falter. Prohibit wildfire prevention on public lands and you would watch summer wildfires eat millions of acres of pristine forests each year.

Even urban transportation would become a nightmare. As we discovered with the Sierra Club's lawsuit over the Legacy Parkway, its extreme agenda even prohibits building needed highways on public lands near urban areas.

So the question becomes: Where do we draw the line? How do we protect our wild places, wildlife, clean air and clean water and still enjoy a strong economy and the ease of modern life?

Congress and the White House work every day to strike this balance. So do tens of thousands of public policy leaders around the country. We work to preserve the many good things about the American way of life -- including our prosperity, safety and beautiful public lands -- without sacrificing one for the other.

Some day I'd like to see a glossy calendar reflecting that hard reality.

Rep. James V. Hansen represents Utah's 1st Congressional District.

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