

ENVIRONMENTALISTS FOR BERNIE

A LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR BERNIE FROM BILL MCKIBBEN

After lunch, right about the time that Bernie Sanders was actually announcing his run for president, I went for a walk in the woods, and polled three chickadees, two wild turkeys, one vernal pool of chirping wood frogs and a random sample of several tree species. You have to bear in mind that this is in Vermont, so there may be a favorite-son effect, but all of them were overjoyed that Sanders was in the race.

And I think I might speak for at least a few other environmentalists who feel the same way. Here's why.

First, he's a stand-up guy. When we told him about the Keystone Pipeline in the summer of 2011, he immediately set to work helping us block it. He strategized, he used his bully pulpit in the Senate to spread the word, and he devoted staff time to pressuring the State Department. Contrast that with, say, Barack Obama who was mostly silent about climate change his whole first term, and managed to make it all the way through the 2012 campaign without discussing it. Or Hillary Clinton, who after initially saying she was "inclined" to approve Keystone has gone entirely mum on the most iconic environmental issue of our time. Who showed up in New York for the People's Climate March? Bernie Sanders. Who said, straightforwardly in today's official announcement, "the peril of global climate change, with catastrophic consequences, is the central challenge of our times and our planet." That would be Bernie Sanders.

But what makes that really remarkable is, it's not his defining issue. Everyone in Vermont knows Bernie pretty well (it's that kind of state) and so I can say he fits no one's stereotype of an enviro. He doesn't put on a spandex suit and go cross-country skiing; he doesn't, I'm guessing, meditate to reduce his stress levels. He doesn't go on and on about the woods and the rivers -- he goes on and on about working class Vermonters who can't afford health care and heating oil. His issue is inequality and unfairness, and it has been from the start.

And for those of us who do work mostly on the environment, that's just the kind of ally we need. Because it's a constant reminder that this battle is for people, who need renewable energy so they can break the constant cycle of struggling to pay the fuel bill, and because it will be the source of good jobs. And because it will be one of the chief ways we break with the plutocrats, many of them in the fossil fuel industry, who are ruining both our atmosphere and our democracy.

Make no mistake -- Bernie Sanders isn't really running against Hillary Clinton. He's running against the Koch Brothers, and all that they represent: taken together they're the richest man on earth. They've made their money in oil and gas (they're the largest leaseholders in the Alberta tar sands, on the far end of the Keystone Pipeline). They spend their money

to break unions, to shut out solar power, to further concentrate America's wealth. They'll spend at least \$900 million on the next election, and my guess is that if Bernie Sanders catches fire they'll spend far more than that -- because he knows he's got their number. They know, in their heart of hearts, that there's two of them and hundreds of millions of us, and that's got to be a little scary.

According to my small survey, America's wildlife loathe the Koch Brothers. And like vulnerable people across the country, they're awfully happy to have a loud Brooklyn-accented voice demanding real, fundamental change. Run Bernie run!