Tell you why I think those folks are wrong. When I attend meetings science; non-thinking liberals and unthinking conservatives? Let me environmentalist be a political conservative? Sure. Why not? Who So -- can a political conservative be an environmentalist? Can an west side of Indianapolis might wonder what are the benefits of environmental standard against the costs. But the parents on the our constitutional right to freely practice our religion in today's most flagrant violation of our individual rights? Conservatives believe in individual rights. We believe in the right to own private property, and to use it as we see fit. Private dry lands should not be deemed to be wet by a remote government. Such actions violate our basic constitutional rights. But is not the insidious invasion of our bodies by harmful unsolicited chemicals the most flagrant violation of our individual rights? We conservatives bemoan the decline in values that has besieged our present day society. We abhor government and media assaults on our constitutional right to freely practice our religion in today's value neutral, politically correct society. Why then should we not abhor the lack of morality involved in discharging untreated chemicals into the air, ground and water to alter and harm, to whatever degree, human life and wildlife? We conservatives preach out against the decline in learning in our schools; the increased incidence of juvenile crime; we worry about abnormal sexual practices and preferences. Should there be evidence (as there is) that some of those things are being caused by chemicals tested and untested flowing into our environment, should we not of the [National] Wildlife Federation, and other environmental groups, even Greenpeace, I have people up to me after my speech telling me that they are Republicans and political conservatives. They thank me for giving them an excuse to come out of the closet, so to speak. Why are they at those meetings? It is simple. They have experienced an environmental problem; they or someone in their family or neighborhood have been an environmental victim and they are trying to learn more. Such environmental groups are often the only source of environmental information, especially information about adverse human health effects, available to average people. For them their political philosophy is not a barrier to learning.

It is important to point out that most environmentalists I have met are not organized by any large group. Most are environmental victims, relatives of environmental victims or friends of environmental victims. Their numbers are growing in the same proportion as is breast cancer, testicular cancer, reproductive problems, learning problems, juvenile crime and hyperactivity. A lot of those environmental victims are Republicans.... Let's wrap up this discussion with some practical reasons why conservatives should be interested in and leaders for environmental protection; interested in what we are doing to ourselves and to our children with some of the chemicals we use and the processes we employ. I start with the presumption that all reasonable people prefer clean air and clean water; that such people are opposed to unnecessary exposure to various persons to our children, our families and our friends. So where do we start? The best way, the least expensive way, the conservative way and the least painful way to accomplish the goal of protection from the most onerous pollutants is prevention. Just don't do it in the first place. Governments, jointly or singularly, will never have sufficient funds to continue cleaning up all those onerous substances lying on the bottom of lakes or working their way through the ground. So for economic reasons and for health reasons, prevention is a conservative solution. Let's not continue to put in what we now are paying to clean up.

Conservatives want lower taxes. Conservatives want smaller government, with less regulations and fewer regulators. Pollution prevention, instead of all the high-cost bureaucratic mandates and regulatory harassment at the tail end of the pollution trail, can achieve those conservative purposes. If you don't make an onerous substance in the first place, you won't later need to regulate it; you won't need regulators or the increased taxes and fees to pay their expenses. If you don't discharge it, you don't need to buy a government permit with all the attendant red tape and bureaucratic nonsense to which businesses are now subjected. Pollution prevention corrects not just the physical health of our society, it promotes economic health.

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add them to our litany of concerns?

We preach self-reliance, but can we be that if unbeknown to us mysterious chemicals are affecting our ability to be reliant upon ourselves?

We conservatives believe it unconscionable that government programs such as welfare are tearing at the fabric of the family. We are upset with the growing incidence of birth out of wedlock, of single parent families; with children bearing children. Why then are we not so concerned with the causes, and the increased incidence, of childhood cancers? Why not visit the local children's hospital and visit with those brave youngsters with ineffective immune systems trying to fight off the devastating evils of cancer? Observe the parental pain. See how that circumstance tears at the family. Why not add childhood cancer to our concerns about the family; asking why the emphasis is still on how to cure it, instead of on how to prevent it?

These are grim matters, but I am optimistic about the future. I have always been an optimist. I always believe things will turn out as they should. Oh, it might require an extraordinary effort by me, and you, but given the desire and a willingness to work, things in my life normally turn out okay. I believe that about the environment. The symmetry of nature is loaned to us for human use over relatively short periods of time; seventy or eighty years, if we are fortunate. Each of us has a moral duty to not disrupt that balance. For centuries humans met that moral duty, but over the past one half century we have become just too urbane to worry about such mundane things. We have unknowingly done with chemicals what we would never have intentionally done had we pursued the moral basis of the conservative philosophy I described earlier.

Daily we are being exposed to more and more information about the need for environmental stewardship; about the need to exercise precaution before putting harmful chemicals into the environment. I would just ask that you pay a little more attention to what is being said. Don't immediately dismiss worrisome words. Investigate the facts on your own. Don't be diverted by the formalized concentration of attention on trash. Don't demand 100% proof of harm before acting. Think about morality and the Golden Rule. Set priorities, make some decisions and then act on those decisions. I have done that and I have come to the conclusion that we are unintentionally putting our children and our grandchildren in harm's way. And I have concluded that we need a basic change of direction.

[1] In 1994, the International Joint Commission (IJC) issued its SEVENTH BIENNIAL REPORT ON GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY, the third such report to advocate new approaches to environmental protection. (See REHW #284, #319, and #378.) The IJC's recommendations are summarized in Peter Montague, "Our Greatest Accomplishment: Grass-roots Action Has Forced a Major Shift in Thinking." THE WORKBOOK Vol. 19 No. 2 (Summer 1994), pgs. 86-90. Paper reprints available for $2.00; electronic copy available free (email your request to erf@igc.apc.org). In the fall of 1995, Indiana University Press [phone: 800/842-6796] will publish Mr. Durnil's book, THE MAKING OF A CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST.

Descriptor terms: ijc; pollution prevention; religion; environmentalism; david crombie; ethics; morality; wildlife; human health; children; chlorine; republican party; in; conservation; cost-benefit analysis; nwf; greenpeace; taxation; economy; economic development; growth; chemical trespass; golden rule; gordon durnil; great lakes; philosophy;