

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

"THE BRIDGE AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD":

A Discussion with James Gustave Speth

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Welcome and Introduction:

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. SANDALOW: Hello, everyone. My name is David Sandalow. Welcome to Brookings. On a day in which you could be watching the Pope, you have some here to see Gus Speth. It's not often that I get to introduce one of my heroes, and I can tell from the reactions of people who have been walking into the room that I don't stand alone in thinking of Gus Speth that way. Gus Speth was present at the creation of the environmental movement. He was I think as many people here know one of the early chairs of the Council on Environmental Quality, a founder of World Resources Institute, a founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council, later the administrator at UNDP in the 1990s, and for the past decade of course the Dean at the Yale School of Environment and Forestry.

More than that, I think Gus's clear thinking, his beautiful writing, have inspired and challenged many of us and shaped our careers for a long, long time, so it's with enormous delight that we welcome Gus back here to talk about his new book "The Bridge at the Edge of the World."

(Applause)

MR. SPETH: Thank you, David, and thank all of you for coming out today. It is a beautiful day. I found a bench down a few

buildings down in somebody else's front yard. There were tulips and pansies growing all around it under a big magnolia tree and it was hard to come in, so I know it's hard for all of you to get here on such a lovely day also.

It's great to be back in Washington. We were here for 25 years but we've been gone now for 15 and I want to thank the good people at Brookings and others for keeping this block more or less recognizable. The rest of the city I get lost in. I don't know where I am anymore it changes so fast.

I began thinking about the talk and making some notes about this talk in a place that my wife and I go to quite often that's quite beautiful like many places in this city in fact, and it's hard to believe when we're in these beautiful spots how serious the environmental threats that we face really are. But the truth is that if we don't appreciate how serious those threats are, we'll never take the steps that we do need to take. So unpleasant though it may be, I want to begin by dragging you through some of the unfortunate statistics about where we are in protecting our planet.

Half the world's tropical and temperate forests are gone now. Deforestation in the tropics since I was the CEU in the Carter administration has continued at about an acre a second. Half the planet's

wetlands are gone. Ninety percent of the large predator fish in the oceans are gone. Seventy-five percent of the marine fisheries are fished to capacity or are overfished. That's up from just 5 percent a few decades ago. Twenty percent of the coral is gone, another 20 percent severely threatened and going fast. Species are disappearing at a rate of about a thousand times the rate that species do go extinct normally. We haven't seen such an extinction spasm since we lost the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. We're losing productive capacity in arid and semiarid areas of land about the size of Nebraska every year. And persistent toxic chemicals can be found literally by the dozens in each and every one of us. We truly don't know the full consequences, but some of you may remember a great *New York Times* reporter Phil Shebecoff who is recently completing a book on the effects of this chemical cocktail on our children particularly in neonatal and prenatal contexts.

Going on, the human impacts are now quite large relative to natural systems. We severely depleted the Earth's stratospheric ozone layer without knowing that we were doing it. We pushed up the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere by 33 percent and started in earnest the dangerous process of warming the planet and disrupting climate. Everywhere we look with very few exceptions the Earth's ice fields are melting. We just lost another Manhattan-sized ice shelf on the

Antarctic Peninsula breaking off. We are fixing nitrogen and making it biologically active at about the same rate that nature fixes nitrogen or doubling this fertilizer in the environment and that is one of the main reasons that we now have identified literally hundreds of dead zones in the oceans.

Each year we consume or otherwise destroy about 40 percent of nature's photosynthetic output leaving far too little for other species. Fresh water withdrawals not exceed half of the accessible supply, and soon to be 70 percent. As a result of this, some of our major rivers no longer reach the oceans in the dry seasons, the Colorado, the Yellow, the Ganges, the Nile, among numerous others that are running dry in the summer.

Of course our country is deeply complicit in these global trends. We can just recall that about 30 percent of the CO₂ in the atmosphere is from us alone. But even if we focus on those more local issues that launched the first Earth Day in 1970, we can see that four decades of environmental effort have stemmed the tide of environmental loss. We're losing 6,000 acres a day of open space in the United States, 100,000 acres of wetlands every year, about 40 percent of our fish species are threatened with extinction, a third of the plants and amphibians, and about 20 percent of the birds and mammals.

Since the first Earth Day, we've increased the miles of paved roads in our country by about 50 percent, and almost tripled the total miles that we drive. Even where we have some of the toughest laws in the world on air and water pollution, we still have real challenges. Only about half the lakes and about a third of the streams in our country still do not meet the standard that was set in the 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Act to be achieved by 1983, a third of Americans still live in countries that EPA classifies as unhealthy air, of course we've done next to nothing to curb our wasteful energy habits or even talk about our population problem, and we're spewing out constantly vast quantities of toxic chemicals into the environment and really aren't even following Europe's lead in getting around to testing most of them.

So we're traveling together as human societies in the midst of an unfolding calamity down a path that links two worlds, the world that we've lost behind us where nature was quite large and we were not, the world of Lewis and Clark, the world of Audubon, and ahead the world that we are making, and the movement down this path between the two worlds began quite slowly but is now moving very rapidly, hurtling ahead.

Here's one measure of the problem. All we have to do to destroy the planet's climate and its biota and leave a ruined world to our children and grandchildren is to just keep what we're going today, just

keep releasing greenhouse gases at current rates, just keep degrading and homogenizing and destroying our biological resources, just continue releasing toxic chemicals at current rates, and by the latter part of this century, the world won't be fit to live in.

But of course human activities aren't holding constant.

We're accelerating dramatically. The size of the world economy doubled since 1960 and then doubled, it's quadrupled, and it's slated to quadruple again by the middle of this century. At recent growth rates, the size of the world economy is going to double in somewhere between 15 and 20 years, an enormous extra potential for burdening the planet's environment. The size of the world economy in 1950 when I was a little kid was \$7 trillion. It had of course taken all of history to build up this \$7 trillion world economy. How long does it take to add another \$7 trillion now to the world economy? Less than a decade. So we face the prospect of enormous environmental deterioration just when we need to be reducing those impacts and moving in the opposite direction.

These escalating processes of climate disruption, of biotic impoverishment, of toxification, constitute a severe indictment don't they? We've had decades now of warnings and earnest effort and when you don't get a response, something is badly wrong. And if we want to reverse today's destructive trends, we've got to go back to fundamentals I submit

and try to understand the underlying forces that are driving this destruction and also to understand the economic and political system that gives these forces such free rein, and then we can ask what we need to do to change that system.

Many people have looked at the underlying drivers of environmental deterioration. They've been identified. They of course range from immediate things like the enormous growth of the human population and the dominant technologies that we deploy in the economy, and they range into deeper things like the values that shape our behavior and determine what we consider important in life. But most basically what we know is that environmental deterioration is driven by the economic activity of human beings, and the largest and most threatening of the impacts stem from our economic activity, those of us participating in the modern and increasingly prosperous world economy.

This activity is now consuming vast quantities of resources from the environment both renewable and nonrenewable, occupying the land and returning truly vast quantities of waste products of many, many types to the environment, many of them highly dangerous to living things. The damages are already huge and are now on a path to be ruinous in the future. So the fundamental question facing societies today I believe, the fundamental question, is how can we change the operating instructions of

this modern world economy so that economic activity both protects and restores the natural world.

This the punch line I guess. With increasingly few exceptions, modern capitalism is the operating system of today's world economy, and I use modern capitalism here in a very broad sense as an actual existing system of political economy not as an idealized model. I know some here and certainly others have said communism was worse, and indeed that's true, but it's largely irrelevant because communism is largely irrelevant.

This capitalism as we know it today encompasses first the core concept of private employers operating with the intention of making a profit, the larger the better. But it includes also market competition and the price mechanism, the modern corporation as its principal institution, the consumer society and the materialistic values that sustain it, and the administrative state, the government, actively promoting economic strength and growth for a wide variety of reasons. Inherent in the dynamics of today's capitalism is the powerful drive to earn profits, to reinvest them, and to innovate and to grow the economy typically at exponential rates. The result has been that the capitalist era has in fact been characterized by a remarkable exponential expansion. As distinguished economist William Baumol wrote recently, "The capitalist

economy can usefully be viewed as a machine whose primary product is economic growth."

These features of today's capitalism as they are constituted in the real world work together to produce an economic and a political reality that's highly destructive of environment. First, an unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at any cost, enormous investment in technologies originally designed with little or no regard for the environment, powerful corporate interests whose overriding objective is to grow by generating a profit including profit from avoiding the environmental costs those companies create, markets have systematically failed to recognize environmental costs unless corrected by government, government that's subservient to corporate interests and the growth imperative, rampant consumerism spurred by sophisticated advertising and marketing, and economic activity now so large in scale that its impacts alter the fundamental biophysical operations of the planet. All of these things to me constitute the capitalism that we have today and know today and they combine to deliver that ever-growing world economy that's undermining the ability of the planet to sustain life.

So we live in a world where economic growth is seen as both beneficent and necessary, the more the better, where past growth as brought us to a perilous state environmentally, and we are poised for

unprecedented increments in growth, where this growth is proceeding with wildly wrong market signals including prices that do not incorporate the environmental costs or reflect the needs of future generations, where a failed politics has not meaningfully corrected the market's obliviousness to environmental needs, and where there is no hidden hand or inherent mechanism adequate to correct these destructive tendencies. So right now one can only conclude that growth is the enemy of environment, the economy and environment remain in collision, and of course the engine of this growth is capitalism or better, a variety of capitalisms.

We've created a huge economic machine that is profoundly committed to profits and growth and profoundly indifferent to nature and society. Left uncorrected it's an inherently ruthless and rapacious system and it's up to us then acting mainly through government to inject and natural values into this system. But mainly we've failed at this because our politics today are so enfeebled and the government is increasingly in the hands of powerful economic interests and concentrations of great wealth.

So where do those us who've worked in the environmental area now for four decades, many of us, fit into this unfortunate picture? Mainstream environmentalism of the type that I've participated in all my life concentrates on raising public awareness, making intelligent, plausible

proposals for sensitive action, lobbying to get these proposals adopted, litigating where necessary to get the laws enforced. And we've now ran a 40-year experiment on whether this mainstream environmentalism works, and results are now in.

I submit that it works based on the evidence poorly, selectively, and too slowly to keep up. The full burden of managing accumulating environmental threats and addressing the powerful forces of modern capitalism driving those threats have fallen to the environmental community, those people in government and those outside, but that burden is too great. The system as modern capitalism as it operates today will grow in size and complexity and will generate ever larger environmental consequences, overwhelming and outstripping the efforts to cope with them, and that I think indeed has been the dominant pattern.

Indeed, the system will seek to undermine those environmental efforts and to constrain them within narrow limits. We mainstream environmentalists have worked within the system, but that has put off limits major efforts to correct many of the underlying drivers of deterioration. Working within the system in the end is not going to succeed if what you need is transformative change in the system itself. It's a bit like swimming upstream in a river. I think when we started out in the 1970s we assumed that we would go grow stronger and more

sophisticated and more powerful and we would be able to overcome that current, and what we have found is that the current is a strange current, it gets stronger the longer it operates and we are not making headway against it, we are drifting away with the current. So it's time that we address the current rather than always trying to swim harder against it.

My conclusion after a lot of thinking, reading, and reflecting on those 40 years, and I reached this conclusion with considerable reluctance because it's not going to be easy to do anything about these issues, but my conclusion is that is that most environmental deterioration today is the result of systematic failures of capitalism, the capitalism that we have today, and that long-term solutions if we are sincere have got to seek transformative changes in the key features of this contemporary capitalism. If you have good people trapped in a bad system, what do you do? You change the system. So I think the fundamental question that I posed earlier can be rephrased as one of transforming the capitalism that we know today. Can it be done, if so, now, and if not, what?

I think there's a lot of good news, really, because the more I looked at these issues the more I found a wide variety of prescriptions to take the economy and the environment off collision course and to try to shift to an economic activity that's more benign and restorative, but a lot of the prescriptions lie outside of the environmental agenda as it's been

framed so far. I think most obviously we've got to start by trying to transform the way markets work by insisting on environmentally honest prices, prices that sustain natural capital and human health. We should also insist that the laws and incentives and governance structures under which corporations operate be transformed so that the corporation is much different, a much different and a more public spirited creature. Groups like Corporation 2020 and others are looking now at how to move beyond the idea that the corporation exists overwhelmingly to maximize the wealth of its shareholders. Others are challenging corporate personhood.

But today instead of focusing on getting the prices corrected in the market economy or the changes that could be made to redesign the corporation for the 21st century, I want to focus on a different area, perhaps more controversial area, and that is the need to challenge economic growth itself and to challenge the consumption on which it depends. I believe that the new environmentalism has got to challenge the overriding primacy accorded economic growth. We need to explore instead moving to a post-growth society. The never-ending drive to grow the overall economy can undermine our families, our jobs, our community, the environment, our sense of place and continuity, even our mental health because in the end it's says always that somehow this growth is

going to make us better off with better lives. I think there's now good reason to doubt that this is so at least in the well-to-do countries.

Some ecologically minded economists have said that what we have in our affluent world today could be called uneconomic growth where the costs if you could measure them, the environmental costs, the social costs, all of the costs of additional increment of growth, are so great that they outweigh the measured benefits in GDP. And many studies now show that in affluent societies, increased income is not being translated into greater satisfaction with life, greater sense of well-being, or happiness among the people. I know that Brookings has a role in some studies which were noted in today's "New York Times" that take a somewhat different look at some of the issues about happiness and growth and life satisfaction and growth. I haven't had time to see the studies, but I think the most compelling evidence is the work that has been reported in a number of countries, advanced affluent countries, which looks at the progress or lack thereof of life satisfaction, or subjective well-being, of happiness, in one country as GDP per capita has gone up. In my book I present data from Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, which shows that during this past few decades as GDP per capita has

skyrocketed in all of our countries, satisfaction with life, subjective well-being, sense of personal happiness, has flat-lined.

So in the end, what I think we need to begin to think about modifying is the overriding commitment to aggregate economic growth, mere GDP growth, that's consuming environment and social capital at high rates and while both are in increasingly short supply. In the affluent countries we need instead to move to a post-growth society where our working life, our natural environment, our communities, and the public sector are no longer sacrificed in order to push up the rate of GDP growth. There are many steps I submit that we could take and should take that would both slow growth and improve social and environmental well-being. They include measures such as more leisure time to enjoy life including a shorter work week and longer vacations, greater labor protections, job security and benefits, restrictions on advertising, new ground rules for corporations, strong social and environmental provisions in trade agreements, rigorous environmental and consumer protection including that for climate, greater economic and social equality including a genuinely progressive tax for the rich and greater income support for the poor, major spending on public sector services and environmental amenities, a huge investment in education and skills and new technologies, and initiatives to halt population growth.

A post-growth society need not be a stagnant one of course. It should include dynamic initiatives that recognize the real sources of human well-being. Mere GDP growth is a poor, even counterproductive way to generate real solutions to our social needs. This pursuit can even deflect us away from the real problems. So we need instead to address these social needs directly with compassion and generosity. There's a whole world of new and stronger policies that are desirable, measures that strengthen our families and our communities and address the breakdown of social connectedness and the erosion of social capital. A third of Americans say that they no one to go to talk about the serious problems in their lives. Measures that guarantee good, well-paying jobs including green-collar ones. Measures that provide for universal health care and alleviate the devastating effects of mental illness. Measures that provide everyone with a good education. Measures that ensure care and companionship for the chronically ill and incapacitated. And measures that recognize our responsibilities to the half of the world that lives in poverty.

While the sum of all these measures and others that I discuss the book would undoubtedly slow GDP growth considerably in the United States, over time perhaps the economy would evolve to a steady state where a declining labor force and shorter work hours are offset by

rising productivity. But as Lord Keynes and John Kenneth Galbraith and many others have noted, that would not be the end of the world, but the beginning of a new one. As John Stewart Milne noted long ago, there would still be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture and moral and social progress, and as much room for improving the art of living, and a much greater likelihood of it actually being improved.

A parallel objective has got to be to move beyond our runaway consumerism and hyperventilating lifestyles. In the modern environmental era there has been too little focus on consumption as a key issue. I think this situation is changing, but most mainstream environmentalists today prefer to suggest that the positions they advocate would not require serious lifestyle changes. I think this reluctance to challenge consumerism directly has been a mistake. Just consider the mounting environmental and social cost of our affluence, our extravagance, our wastefulness. Since 1970 when we had Earth Day, electricity consumption per person has gone up more than 70 percent, solid-waste generation per person, up by 33 percent, 80 percent of all the new homes since 1994 have been ex-urban and a large percentage of them have been on lots of 10 acres or more. So we have these gigantic new homes on gigantic new lots. The self-storage industry didn't begin until the early 1970s, but we have so much stuff now despite the home

sizes going up 50 percent and lot sizes skyrocketing, that the square footage of the self-story industry in the United States would now cover the entire island of Manhattan and city of San Francisco. So we have the disease of affluenza from which we need a speedy recovery.

The good news is that more and more people are coming to this realization or at least sensing that there's a great misdirection of life's energy. We have channeled our desires, our insecurities, our need to demonstrate our worth and our success, wanting to fit in and also to stand out increasingly into material things, into bigger homes and fancier cars and grander appliances and exotic vacations, but at some level we know that we are slighting the most precious things of all, things that make life truly worthwhile. We sense that we are hollowing out whole areas of life, of individual and social autonomy and of nature, and that if we don't wake up we'll soon lose the chance to return to reclaim ourselves and our neglected society, our battered world, because if we're not more careful, there will be nothing left to reclaim, nothing left to return to. I think we sense this as a possibility, we reject it, and at least in our better moments we aspire to transcend it.

In one survey, 83 percent of Americans say that society is not focused on the right priorities, 81 percent say that we're too focused on shopping and spending, 88 percent say that we're too materialistic. If

these numbers are even half right, there's a powerful base on which to build change. Our bookstores now are full of books about how to take back your life, how to cope with spiritual hunger in an age of plenty, how to overcome nature deficit disorder, how to live more simply, more slowly, and of course the internet is full of advice on how to do all those and more. Psychological studies show that materialism is indeed toxic to happiness and that more income and more possessions don't lead to lasting increases in our sense of well-being and in the satisfaction we have in our lives. What does make us happy are warm personal relationships and giving rather than getting.

You may have seen the revolutionary new product that's trying to make it on the marketplace: nothing. It's guaranteed not to put you in debt, 100 percent nontoxic, sweatshop free, zero waste, doesn't contribute to global warming, it's family friendly, and fun and creative. Young women who tried to sell nothing in the shopping mall refused to leave and were promptly arrested. So there are many now trying to fight back against consumerism and commercialization. They invite all of us to a new struggle. They say to us confront consumption, practice efficiency, create social environments where overconsumption is viewed as silly and wasteful and ostentatious, create commercial-free zones, buy local, eat slow food, simplify your life, downshift. Dream on, maybe. Let's hope.

Taken together, the changes that I've discussed here and others that I discuss in the book would indeed take us beyond the capitalism that we know today. Personally I have no interest in socialism or centralized planning or other paradigms of the past. The search that we need to be engaging in intensively now is the search for a non-socialist alternative to today's capitalism and part of that search has got to discover how to harness economic forces, market forces, business enterprises, for sustainability and for sufficiency.

Thus far in the talk I've sought to identify some of the changes that will be needed to sustain human and natural communities. Most of these prescriptions are difficult by today's standards, they seem a bridge too far, and we have to ask then what circumstances might make these seemingly impossible steps more likely or perhaps even inevitable. If I had to guess, I would guess there are three things that could drive real change. The first would be an upwelling of a powerful grassroots movement led initially by young people and religious organizations, spurred by the climate issue at the beginning, but growing to embrace a broad spectrum of environmental, community, and social justice and other concerns.

The second thing where I think there's real hope is to see the increasing proliferation of small innovative departures that break the mold.

Two recent books are full of these innovative steps, William Greider's *The Soul of Capitalism*, and Gar Alperovitz's *Beyond Capitalism* if you want to see what they have to say.

The third driver of real change of course could be a crisis or a series of crises. I didn't agree with Milton Friedman about a lot of things, but I think he was right when he said that only a crisis actual or perceived produces real change. I hate to say it, but if we continue down the business-as-usual track that we're on, we will have crises. The best hope I think for real change is for people to come to see a mounting threat before there's a real crisis, an accumulation of evidence that convinces people that things have to change and change soon. If that virtual crisis occurs in a time of wise leadership and leaders can articulate a new story, a new narrative, that draws on the best of our traditions and aspirations but points to a new and better future, a new American dream, occurring simultaneously with this growing social movement that I mentioned, occurring simultaneously with a proliferation of right examples springing up across the landscape, fueled further and pushed further by sophisticated social marketing, I think if we can bring those things together, and there's no reason that we can't, we can create real change in America.

We urgently need a new environmental politics, one that is less wonkish, one that is focused on broader issues and broader constituencies, and one that's focused on electoral politics where the environmental community has been weak and largely absent. In particular, environmentalists have got to join with social progressives in addressing the crisis of inequality that's now unraveling America's social fabric and undermining our democracy. It's a crisis of soaring executive pay, huge incomes and increasingly concentrated wealth for a very small minority occurring simultaneously with poverty rates that are new a 30-year high, stagnant wages despite rising productivity, declining social mobility and opportunity, record levels of people without health insurance, failing schools, increased job insecurity. Multinational corporations have taken 2 million jobs out of the United States in the first 5 years of this decade, swelling jails, shrinking safety nets, and the longest work hours among all the OECD countries. This cannot be the America that we want. It's not the America that we have to have.

So we've also got to join forces with those seeking to reform our politics and to strengthen our democracy who will never solve the environmental problems with the politics that we have today. America's gaping social and economic inequality poses a grave threat to our democracy. America's senior political scientist Bob Dahl believes it's

highly plausible that powerful international and domestic forces could push us toward an irreversible level of political inequality that so greatly impairs our present democratic institutions as to render the ideals of democracy and political equality virtually irrelevant. What we're seeing is the emergence of a vicious cycle. Income disparities shift political access and influence to the wealthy constituencies and to large business and that further imperils the potential of the democratic process to act to correct the growing income disparities.

So here are some environmental issues, public financing of elections, regulation of lobbying, nonpartisan redistricting, bringing back the Fairness Doctrine, passing an interstate treaty that ensures that the popular vote elects the president. You'll notice that I started today by talking about the momentous environmental challenges we face, but I've come in the end to stress that today's environmental reality is powerfully linked to other realities including growing social inequality and the neglect and erosion of our democracy and popular control. So the conclusion that I've come to is that we as citizens have now got to mobilize our spiritual and our political resources for transformative changes on all of these fronts.

We've created a very large and rapidly growing economic machine that cares profoundly about profits and its continuing growth, and

it cares about society and the natural world in which it operates only to the extent that it's required to do so. It's up to us to inject human and natural values into this system, government is the primary vehicle we have for accomplishing this, and that's our job as citizens. But we've mainly failed because our politics is too enfeebled and the resistance of vested interests is too strong. So our best hope for real change is a powerful fusion of those who are concerned about the environment, social justice, and political democracy into one progressive force in our country. If you raise these types of issues in the board meetings of today's environmental organizations you will most likely be told those are great issues, Gus, but they are not environmental issues, they are somebody else's job, and that is wrong. So all of those communities are trying basically to do the same thing and that is to put human values into this system, and so we are communities of shared fate and right now we're all suffering and we'll rise or fall together.

We all live lives that are powerfully shaped by a complex system that rewards as well as destroys and that system is now giving rise to a undesirable reality environmentally, socially, politically. If we want to transform this system for the better we've got to stop being so predictable and become agents of real change. To do that we've got to understand the structures that influence us, to identify the new directions that are

needed, and to build on-the-ground strengths to pursue them. George Bernard Shaw famously said that all progress depends on not being reasonable, and I think it's time for a large amount of civic unreasonableness. If there's one period in recent memory to look for guidance, I think it's the 1960s and the civil rights movement. People struggled. People took risks. And after 40 years, it's high time for us to march again in the footsteps of Dr. King. There's a lot at stake. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. SANDALOW: Gus, that was inspiring and challenging, and I'm going ask Gus a few questions and then throw it open to a few of you. I just want to probe a little into the premises of some of your arguments with a few things that I'm sure have come at you before. First, in your litany at the beginning of your talk you relate the environmental problems that we continue to experience that are indeed so sobering, but you touch on but don't dwell on the progress that's been made over the course of the past 30 or 40 years in local air pollution in the United States, water pollution in the United States, which has truly been considerable. And we have over the course of the past 30 years effectively cleaned most of the toxic waste sites so they don't present significant human health risks in this country. And there is a strong line of thought that in fact there's a

lot to be learned from the environmental successes. What do you say in response to that?

MR. SPETH: I tried to address that a bit in my comments. I do think there have been real successes in conventional environmentalism and I shudder to think what the world would like if we hadn't had them and if we hadn't been working for all of this time. But I think it's a very mixed picture even on the air and water issues, very mixed I would say. A job that we should have accomplished a long time ago, jobs are still a persistent problem. In my book in chapter 3 has a sort of recounting of where I think we stand in terms of just the traditional issues much less these global scale issues. So I think our record is very mixed even on issues where we started out with a great burst of strong law and enthusiasm in the early 1970s, but it's getting to the point now that that system is so complicated, there are so many problems, that only the really in-depth specialists, only the air pollution people, know what's going on with prevention of significant deterioration, only the water pollution people know what's going on with whether we're going to get maximum daily loads, and on and on. The system is throwing more and more problems at us, it's getting larger and larger, and basically we're not winning. On the global scale issues, we're heavily responsible for them and we're on the verge of ruining the planet, the climate issue alone, but nobody is even

talking much about the water issue or the biotic impoverishment issue and the loss of ecosystem services and the loss of American land, et cetera.

MR. SANDALOW: There's a related line of thought which runs directly contrary to the argument you were making which is that economic growth creates environmental quality and the standard progress of extremely dirty air in London during the last century, but as the U.K. developed sufficient wealth to control emissions in the production of energy, the air in London clears and that that pattern has been replicated in countries around the world. You touched on this some in your book, but how do you respond to that line of thought?

MR. SPETH: I think people have a way of protecting themselves from the most obvious and abusive things and creating almost a fool's paradise because the bigger problems are proceeding apace. I talk in the book about the so-called environmental Kuznets curve in which pollution goes up with development and wealth and then begins to go down, and there have been more articles, and I've reviewed about 15 or so major articles that have examined that and it really holds up for a few things and does not hold true for lots of other things where the effects are more remote, for example, and then there are curves where it goes down and then comes back up. It's very complicated, but the general idea that

somehow you can grow out of environmental problems I think is very hard to imagine.

The basic issue to me is that economic activity in every way that we've ever seen it is environmentally destructive and as it grows it becomes more destructive. If you have a really terrible situation on your hands as they do in China today, you can for a while reduce the environmental impacts and still grow, but ultimately it's a process of putting major stresses on environmental resources, and you can get better and better, but as Herman Daily says, you can't eat menus.

MR. SANDALOW: Let me ask just a couple more questions, and then I know there are other folks who want to ask. First on places in the world that you think are models, and I wonder to what extent your critique is American as opposed to global in terms of the political culture. Let me actually put a fine point on it and you could respond to the particular point here. In my experience, there's a very big difference between Europe and the United States in terms of attachment to consumer culture and every time I'm in Europe talking to media for example about environmental issues I am struck at the critique in Europe of American consumer culture. That said, the environmental quality in Europe with the exception of energy efficiency and greenhouse gases which are the big exception, but the environmental quality in Europe is

often worse than it is here in the U.S. In general the water is dirtier, the air is dirtier, less open space. Does that suggest that there may not be a powerful link between the consumer culture and environmental quality or is the example wrong?

MR. SPETH: I would tend to cite European countries more for their social programs than for their environmental programs. They're doing some interesting things now particularly through the E.U. which are new and really haven't had a chance to have a big impact yet. They're taking the precautionary principle a lot more seriously, pollute apace principle more seriously, than we do, and in their reach program they're beginning to test all the toxic chemicals and pesticides that we have not tested, and there are other interesting things. They have a much better program of extended producer responsibility where companies are required to take back products, consumer durables. In general I don't think that their environmental performance is a great model, but I do think that the best of the European social democracy has produced some things that we could learn from in this country in dealing with the tremendous insecurity of the average American where we really have a desperate situation on our hands.

MR. SANDALOW: My last question. Let's talk about how those of us who would like to follow your lead do it best particularly with

regards to the rhetoric and the language that we can use best. I get concerned hearing advice about being opposed to growth because growth is such a positive connotation type of word.

MR. SPETH: Growth is not the way to grow.

MR. SANDALOW: How do we talk about this? What's the positive vision to hold out there? You got into it a little bit, but what's the most powerful way to talk about this that will lead people down the path?

MR. SPETH: I'm not sure. I wrote the book and I hope it helps with that, but I think that there are undoubtedly better people to articulate this in a way that is motivational to large numbers of people. I think things will move toward a localization of life. I think we should be advocating trying to strengthen our communities, putting more resources. There is very disturbing data on people's exposure to nature and to the natural world. National Park visitation is down, the amount of time people are spending in connecting with nature is down. So we need programs like No Child Left Inside and begin to reconnect people with the natural world and let nature nurture. So I think on all three dimensions, reclaiming our communities and our relationship to our communities, building up social capital, having more time with our families for leisure, for lots of all the things you can do with leisure. We're just hyperactive and overworked today. So I would look for a slower world, a more gentle world, a world

where it was more localized, and people had much stronger and more resonant connections with the natural world.

MR. SANDALOW: Questions for Gus? And please identify yourself.

MR. MALLOY: Ken Malloy, Center for the Study of Carbon and Energy Markets. Mr. Speth, I was very moved by your discussion of the fact that when you broaden environmental concerns to all of these other social and economic issues you need a change of the heart in order to be able to contemplate doing that. Once a week I sit before someone who tells me about those kinds of concerns, it's my preacher, yet when you talk about broadening the coalition, there's no discussion of religion or religious organizations and I wonder why that's absent in your book. Then I also wonder how it might be possible to reconcile progressivism's hostility to religion as a force for good within the environmental movement.

MR. SPETH: It's certainly not absent from the book. I talk at several places about the extraordinary potential of religious organizations and to driving major changes and reaching people in a way that no other institutions in our society can. Indeed, I did talk about it in my talk when I talked about young people and religious organizations being two places that I see the most hopeful changes occurring today. We just had a conference at Yale on religion and ecology. We produced for that

conference I think a major film called "Renewal" which goes through a series of vignettes with different religious organizations taking up the environmental issue and it begins with a group of evangelicals going to inspect mountaintop removal and has them commenting on this destruction of the creation as being something that's very different from what their religious views call for in our society. So I'm with you. If I didn't say it enough I apologize.

MR. CODY: Patrick Cody. I was wondering if you could comment on the seeming lack of the environment being a major part of the presidential campaign. And an adjunct to that is do you think leading environmental organizations or are doing the right thing in trying to make that an important issue?

MR. SPETH: It is distressing. Once again we have position papers from candidates that are very good on these issues but not enough discourse about the issue. Someone said, and perhaps people here can quote this number than I can, but that there were more questions and discussion in the debates so far about UFOs than about climate change. So I think that this is a serious issue because coming into office with a mandate to deal with these problems particularly the climate issue in a new way is extremely important, so we've got to put it into the agenda. I'm working with a group called the Presidential Climate Action Plan and

another group called One Sky. One Sky is trying to mobilize a grassroots movement. It's really young people trying to mobilize a grassroots movement in the country to build up the type of political support that can allow these proposals, very far-reaching proposals, not to be shredded in Washington's process.

I go into this in the book, but historically I think it's been a huge mistake for the environmental community in the largest sense to not be a more political movement or political force. I wonder sometimes if the very successes that we had in the 1970s didn't make us think that if we just kept doing this and going it better somehow we would succeed in the end. In fact, we became a pretty wonkish crowd, very inside the Beltway for the most part and not nearly enough real building of political strength in the country and not seriously becoming a political movement. Most environmentalists that I know and have worked with are much more comfortable framing policy proposals than they are framing inspirational messages and we've lost a lot of the public with this in terms of in-depth support. So I think we've really got to go back and try to build a political movement.

You can't say to a group that was set up to be a think tank you should be the folks who go out and do the street organizing and the block-by-block building up of support and doing things in all the

communities of our country. But I do fault the organized environmental community for not doing more to ensure that other groups were able to do that and that these other things were to be done. So I don't agree so much directly with the sort of death of environmentalism critique, but I agree with it sort of indirectly that as an environmental community we allowed these huge areas of neglect to grow, the building of bridges to other communities which is almost nowhere today, the building up of a popular movement which we have badly neglected, and the building up of real strength in electoral politics which has also been neglected. That was a mistake.

MR. SANDALOW: Is there any place in the world that you think of as particularly well?

MR. SPETH: We don't have a system that encourages the green parties to do well here, but I think they've had a real effect in some areas in Europe politically.

QUESTIONER: My name is Mohammad. I'm actually a former student, so I have a question for you. It's about framing and rhetoric, and one positive comment and then a question about an issue that I think is a negative. You kind of said that you don't know the answer to the question about how to frame these things but I think in your overarching metaphor about the river there is something to ecological

language. I think this is the point in that nature deficit disorder book, that if we go back to those profound experiences we had in nature and pull from the insight that we had there that that could be inspiring and there's a lot to say about how nature problem solves. So I just wanted to throw out that ecological language for framing.

Then the negative is an issue of how America's energy policy is being framed. As Muslim Middle Eastern American, one of my concerns is "America's energy independence" or "freeing America from its addiction to foreign oil." So that raises red flags.

MR. SPETH: David wrote the book on that.

QUESTIONER: That wasn't your title. Your title is -- the distinction is subtle but I think it's important, freedom from oil versus freedom from foreign oil. My point is how can you be energy independent and then increasing the interdependent role? So again this is ecological language that I'm asking about.

MR. SPETH: Do you want to answer that? You're here with me and you're in a better position to answer that.

MR. SANDALOW: You can here to hear Gus, so I will answer that by saying there's a really good back out back which has a chapter on exactly that question. I think you're exactly right, the premise

of your question is exactly right, we live in an interdependent world and the real issue is our dependence on oil.

MS. KEATON: Thank you. I'm Nancy Keaton. Gus, I think you're exactly right that the fundamental change at least in the U.S. has to go back to campaign finance law being reformed and the links between money and politics. I was wondering how much do you see a shift or an inflection point happening in the early 1990s, like say 1994, and how much do you think this has been through ever since the 1970s when the big environmental laws were passed and we started getting into this sort of managerial mode. I want to get a sense of is this a steady curve or do you see an inflection point?

MR. SPETH: What would the inflection point be, Nancy?

MS. KEATON: I think it really changed a lot in 1994 when the Republican Congress came in and kind of had this notion of how government should change and then there were a lot of wholesale changes on the Hill. I think the Hill staff became less professional for a while, and then there was a big campaign to change how K Street worked and money came in through K Street. I see that as a major inflection point. And I've just recently started really looking at the climate bill because I don't do this anymore and looking at the transportation bill and it looks more and more than our legislation is all pork, no matter what bill

you look at it's all pork, compared to early legislation that wasn't. If you even look at ISTEA in 1991 compared to the past two transportation bills, look at the climate bill compared to earlier Clean Air Acts, and that's what I'm questioning.

MR. SPETH: Last year, I think it was last year, there were \$2 billion spent on lobbying Congress and we're on track now this year for the 527 groups in this election year to have I think a billion dollars of spending so we just have this infusion of a tremendous amount of money. The corporations and the folks who have the big resources are now not just the predominant economic actors, they're the predominant political actors in our society. So I think we'll never succeed.

At least in the periods I've observed the environment community, I've never seen a sufficient interest in electoral politics, and as I say, I think we probably need a new organization to deal with that issue and that means somebody's going to have to find some new resources or we're going to have to shift resources away from some of the things we've been doing now and into these other things that need attention.

MR. SANDALOW: We have time for a few more questions -- and then Dan Speth is going to sign books after this. Let me go to the back of the room.

QUESTIONER: I'm with the DOD. My name is Chris -- so don't tell my bosses that I'm over here because I'm probably one of the few closet environmentalists over there in that building. The question I've got is piggybacking on the whole electoral politics issue. People like myself and more conservative people that I deal with, they don't really like environmentalists very much. I just wrote some words down of what I think of environmentalists a lot of times even though I'm one of them, radical, uncooperative, unrealistic, non-main-stream. So my question is, and I haven't read the book yet, so forgive me, but how do you bridge that gap into making environmentalism more appropriate? Face it, the people who run American don't care about environmentalists and how do you get there from here?

MR. SPETH: I've had ambiguous views about this issue all my life and have struggled until I finally decided now that I'm finished.

MR. SANDALOW: You'd better not be.

MR. SPETH: One model is that the environmental community should try to be a very mainstream organization, very mainstream cause, with a really bit tent, because a lot of people who are very conservative in a lot of ways indeed turn out to be the major supporters of environmental organizations. So that's one concept, to create this really big tent that embraces everybody except the extremes.

A different model, and it's the one I talked about today, which is there are a family of causes and concerns and issues in our society that are pretty much shut out of this political process in terms of real influence and that we need to form a coalition of people who have that same concern and we're in the same boat. To me the big pieces of that are people who are concerned about the environment, people who are concerned about social justice or the social agenda if you will, the labor agenda if you will, and people who are concerned about political reform and moving from a very weak democracy to a very strong one. That ends up being kind of a coalition that is not terribly centric, it's a coalition that's more to the left, and so that's where I've come out and that doesn't help you a bit.

MR. SANDALOW: I'm going to offer two quick commercials and then maybe take a few questions and Gus can answer them together. The first commercial which I'm probably negligent in not providing earlier is for the Brookings Institution where we're sitting right here. This is part of a series of lots and lots of activity and energy on the environment that we have underway over the course of the past couple of months. Some of the people behind that are sitting in the front row right here, Lee and -- should raise their hands. I used to say if you have ideas, come talk to them, but now they're so flooded with ideas, I probably shouldn't say that, but we're thrilled to have Dean Speth as part of this.

Second, for an institution that I've been part of for years which I am particularly thrilled to be able to say that the Goldman Environment Prize announcements are going to be happening in an hour and a half at National Geographic auditorium about 90 minutes now, my guess is that half this audience is going to be over there, but if you're in the half that wasn't otherwise planning on going over to National Geographic, you will see over there one environmental hero from each continent who is fighting hard on exactly the issues that Gus has been talking about for the past hour.

MR. SPETH: By the way, if you ever get discouraged, take a look at what's going on with this burgeoning movement of movements that's been captured pretty well in Paul Hawken's book *Blessed Unrest*, a huge proliferation of groups internationally that come together periodically, many of them at the World Social Forum, and that is going to make the world different one day.

MR. SANDALOW: We have a couple questions. Down here, the green coat, and then here, and up this row and take three or four and then you can all accost Gus after this.

MR. PERLMAN: Lew Perlman, Risk Analysis Center. Two front-page stories in Monday's *Wall Street Journal* seem pertinent to this. At the top of the page, IMF ministers met in Washington last weekend and

the hottest issue on their table was the food crisis riots, starvation, inflation of food prices all over the world particularly in the Third World, resulting as they noted primarily from the diversion of foods to produce biofuels for vehicles all pushed by environmental zealots claiming that this will help prevent climate change. At the bottom of the page there was another story about a company called Eco Securities, European-based, that is leading vendor of carbon credits created to help implement the Kyoto Treaty. Its stock collapsed past week by 70 percent because a U.N. regulatory committee discovered that 30 percent of the carbon credits it had sold already really didn't represent any carbon saved.

So my question for you is when are environmental zealots going to apply the precautionary principle to themselves and take responsibility for the destructive consequences of the policies that they advocate?

MR. SANDALOW: Let's take three or four questions together and then let Gus come back to them.

MR. BAKER: My name is George Baker. I am an independent scientist. The author of *Collapse* posits that essentially two types of societies exist. One, that the extreme reach does not recognize the signs of collapse, social collapse, and the others where the rich and the poor live in the same environment. My question is are we at the point

where this society where this inequality exists between the very rich and the politically powerful and the rest of society, are we at a point where we really don't recognize that we are already over the tipping point or are we still having some sort of a hope that we can pull ourselves out from this situation?

MR. SPETH: And what happens when you reach that tipping point?

MR. BAKER: When you reach that tipping point, essentially society collapses. And the author talks about several different societies where they essentially collapsed.

MR. SANDALOW: Thank you, and then Gary for the last question.

MR. PRESTON: Todd Preston, Population Action International. There was an article in *The Washington Post* last year that quoted former President Clinton speaking to a group of prominent philanthropists and saying that he views the single greatest issue confronting the planet was population growth and then he went on to kind of allude to the fact that because he was no longer an elected official that it was okay for him to talk about population. You've mentioned population growth in your remarks, but I'd be curious if you could expand upon that a little bit further having been involved in these issues for so many years

and if you agree with that, why has population become somewhat of a taboo topic.

MR. SANDALOW: One more.

MR. MITCHELL: And you'll wish you'd held it at three. Gary Mitchell from "The Mitchell Report." Gus, I want to start in sort of an expected place which is Queen Elizabeth II said some years go that grief is the price we pay for love, and as I listened to you today I wondered if one could make the argument that economic growth is the price we pay for personal and political freedom. As an example, when we look at growth we look at the obscenities of growth, today's "New York Times" talking about personal pay packages on Wall Street in the billions, we can do a litany of those things. But it also occurs to me as I look up on this stage that economic growth has made it possible for Brookings to bring people like David Sandalow here to be able to write books called *Freedom from Oil* on sale in the bookstore, and for you to build and develop the School of Forestry and Natural Resources at Yale by bringing in good people and bringing the resources.

So I think I want to hear a little bit more about this paradox of growth from which we really can't just simply skate away.

MR. SANDALOW: We have four questions. That should give you ample leeway to duck whatever you'd like. And some great plugs for these books. I don't want to stop them from coming.

MR. SPETH: I don't know about the whole environmental community, but I can tell you that from the day that people started talking about corn based ethanol and using food for fuel, most people I know in the environmental community were deeply concerned and began raising red flags. And the studies that go back quite a while now because this is not a new issue, we've had ethanol around for quite a while, so I don't think it's a fair statement to blame the biofuels issue on environmentalists because people from the very earliest points were pointing out that the climate benefits were small, negligible, negative even, depending on how it's done.

On the collapse issue, I talk about in my book a rather long series of other books now that have projected current trends out to the point that they see real collapse happening including people like Sir Martin Rees who's the President of the Royal Academy in the United Kingdom, the National Academy of Sciences there, with a book called *The Final Hour*. There's a whole spate of these books that put our chances of moving into some type of collapse or breakdown or calamity type situation pretty high and they're all issued as warnings. We have a way of not

heeding warnings though. One of the most interesting of these books is a book by Thomas Homer-Dixon called *The Upside of Down* which is an effort to try to tell us how to anticipate calamities and to take foreshocks and breakdowns that he says are inevitable and then them into learning opportunities. So the gist of these books is that we're not there yet, most of them. There are some like -- book which seems to say that we are.

The population issue, we really don't even know how to talk about this issue in our country without sounding like people thinking that you're border vigilantes which is too bad. We have the world's third-largest population and it's growing fairly fast, each of us has a huge environmental footprint, and 60 percent of that growth is internal. There was a time that many of you will remember in the 1970s when there was an effort to promote the idea of stop at two children and my wife and I'd signed that pledge and we were doing real well until we had our third child. But I think that we need to revisit this issue and learn how to talk about it in a civil way and to really analyze the effects.

Internationally it's just deplorable that we're not funding even the Cairo Plan of Action that was forged in the early 1990s and we're underfunding it severely, and there's so much now that we know how to deal with population issues so much better in terms of focusing on reproductive health and maternal and child health care, noncoercive family

planning services, education for girls, employment for women, women's rights. You put that package together with adequate funding and fertility rates go down and it makes a huge difference environmentally whether we end up with 8-1/2 or 9 billion people or go scooting way beyond that.

Growth is the price we pay for political and personal freedom. I don't believe it. There's a book that basically says that and it's written by a guy named Benjamin Friedman, a professor at Harvard, who looks at a lot of history and points out all the bad things that happen when growth isn't happening. But I wasn't persuaded by his analysis and I tend to agree more with -- can I maybe conclude by reading a passage? Is that my prerogative, to read a passage?

MR. SANDALOW: You bet.

MR. SPETH: From Lord Keynes, not from me. Lord Keynes is my hero. Writing 80 years ago, this is maybe the greatest economist of all, he said, "Suppose that 100 years hence we are eight times better off than today. Assuming no important wars and no important increases in population, the economic problem may be solved. This means that the economic problem is not if we look into the future the permanent problem of the human race. Why you may ask is this so startling? It's startling because the economic problem, the struggle for subsistence, always has hitherto been the primary most pressing problem of the human race. Thus

for the first time since his creation, man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem, how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy leisure, how to live wisely and agreeably and well. There are changes in other spheres also which we must expect to come. When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals. The love of money as a possession as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyment in the realities of life will be recognized for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialist in mental disease. I see us free then therefore to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue, that avarice is a vice, that the extraction is usury is misdemeanor, that the love of money is detestable, and that those that walk most truly in the paths of virtue and seeing wisdom are those who take the least thought for tomorrow. We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful, we shall honor those who can teach us how to plot the hour and the day virtuously and well, the delightful people who are capable of taking direct enjoyment in things, the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin. But beware, the time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to

everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair, for foul is useful and fair is not, avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. Only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight. Meanwhile, there will be no harm in making mild preparations for our destiny in encouraging and experimenting with the arts of life as well as the activities of purpose. But chiefly do not let us overestimate the importance of the economic problem or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance. It should be a matter for specialists like dentistry. If economists could manage to get themselves thought of as humble, competent people on a level with dentists, that would be splendid."

MR. SANDALOW: Thank you. Gus will be signing books right out front. We have a table set up out there.

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