

# The Chatham Courier

Chatham, NJ

## Out of sync

10/13/2005

About a month ago, this newspaper quoted N.J. Audubon zoologist Eric Stiles making the point that the Bush administration's record on the environment is abysmal. This sparked an email charging the paper with journalistic inaccuracy in referring to Stiles as "non-partisan." But Stiles was not making a partisan or far-fetched point. Our own ex-governor, Republican Christine Todd Whitman, left the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) after the administration would not back her cries for tougher enforcement of chemical company emissions standards. There's the administration's persistent push to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. Then there's the so-called "Endangered Species Recovery Act," authored by a Californian with ties to big development, which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, and which the Bush administration supports. The bill would overhaul the Endangered Species Act and concentrate greater power in the hands of political appointees, as opposed to experts in biology and ecology. There was the administration turning its back on the Kyoto Treaty, which places tougher international standards on emissions. Maybe it's the oil industry connection, we don't know, but the administration happens to be a disaster from a conservation standpoint.

The Democrats can be just as unnerving. We remember former U.S. Sen. Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., attaching an 11th hour rider to a bill driving through a cellular phone tower in the federal Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. Daschle had received a ton of money from the cellular phone industry. And he was wrong. We need to get beyond partisanship to reach the heart of our ecological crisis – and that's going to require our collective resistance to politicians who are so blatantly in the pockets of special interest groups, be they big oil or cellular telephones. It's going to require widening the way in which we practice conservation, and in this regard the Chathams particularly, are a working model.

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus wrote a piece a couple of years ago called "The Death of Environmentalism, Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World," which makes the point that environmentalism has become just another hat-in-hand special interest group. "Over the last 15 years, environmental foundations and organizations have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into combating global warming," write Shellenberger and Nordhaus. "We have strikingly little to show for it. From the battles over higher fuel efficiency for cars and trucks to the attempts to reduce carbon emissions through international treaties, environmental groups repeatedly have tried and failed to win national legislation that would reduce the threat of global warming."

This newspaper for months has attempted to focus on the work of citizens engaged in local stewardship, exemplified by people like Chatham Borough Mayor Richard Plambeck, former Chatham Township Mayor Susan Hoag, and former Chatham Township Mayor Abigail Fair. To interpret their work, and the work of the Friends of the Swamp, the Great Swamp Watershed Association and the shade tree and environmental commissions and public works departments and local biologists and ecologists as lefty partisanship is laughable, and wrong. Mayor Dick Plambeck, a retired engineer with Exxon Mobil, has parlayed his expertise into land acquisition along the Passaic River and employed conservation measures to sewer rates with a pay as you go rate structure, which the council is currently re-examining with public input. They ought to leave it alone. It's a good conservation measure. Another key element to Plambeck's tenure has been his search for more wells to improve the borough's access to the Buried Water Aquifer. Central to the borough's work of the past two years has been the Department of Public Works' compliance with new stormwater management rules.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Douglas Forrester was quoted last week as saying that he disagrees with most of what Bradley Campbell does in his job as commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection. We'd like to know what he means. Campbell helped establish buffer zones for our waterways as part of a broad ranging stormwater protection plan for New Jersey. Forrester made the right call when he disparaged the Endangered Species Recovery Act, but if he is close to Bush or the Bush attitudes regarding the environment, voters should keep that in mind, in a post-Katrina world.