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## 'Patriotism' is redefined by environmental conservation

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Americans are facing an extraordinary moment, as we begin to re-examine the meaning of patriotism, not in terms of the [Iraq](#) war or homeland security, but - surprisingly - in terms of environmental conservation.

In early April, two major pieces of environmental news grabbed headlines:

First, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the EPA already has authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted by motor vehicles, rejecting Bush Administration arguments to the contrary.

Soon after, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a prestigious group of 2,500 scientists, released a report based on some 29,000 sets of real data, finding that climate change, if left unchecked and unmitigated, will affect billions of people this century. Likely impacts include more (and more severe) hurricanes, floods, droughts, heat waves, and wildfires.

The increased storm danger is particularly alarming in Florida, where no place is more than 80 miles from a coastline and where more than 75 percent of the population lives in coastal communities. Vast swaths of coastline may be flooded by rising seas, including a large chunk of south Florida.

Perhaps even more significant is that a genuine groundswell of concern about climate change has begun. Millions of Americans are awakening to a new sense of environmental patriotism. Polls show growing concern about the problem, and support for action is coming from unexpected places - like the Evangelical Climate Initiative and Fortune 500 corporations.

Americans have always been fiercely patriotic, willing to work hard and sacrifice to pursue shared goals. Indeed, throughout history, we've been at our best when we work and sacrifice together for causes greater than ourselves. But in the case of global climate change, our leaders have so far refused to lead. Seeing no farther than the next election, they are afraid to ask us to take on this important challenge, and reluctant to ask us to give up anything.

As a result, we've lost our way. We rely heavily upon an unsustainable source of fuel: petroleum. We continue to drive inefficient vehicles, having few alternatives available to us. We continue to build in vulnerable coastal areas. We subsidize expensive beach homes with national flood insurance at the same time we turn our backs on the poor of [New Orleans](#) whose low-lying homes were washed away by [Hurricane Katrina](#). We foul our nest at home, gobbling up irreplaceable natural resources and polluting the atmosphere that belongs to our children, and to their children.

Environmental patriotism may help us find our way back to being the best America that we can be.

Popular culture has already begun to recognize this, in fits and starts. For example, this month's edition of "Outside Magazine" urges readers to tackle the Earth's biggest problems (perhaps at a profit), asserting that "Green is the new black (referring to the bottom line). The new red, white, and blue."

Corporations are playing to this growing audience, too, such as General Electric's "ecomagination" advertising campaign, Honda's "Environmentology" commitment to environmentally-responsible technology, and British Petroleum's promise to help reduce our "carbon footprint" as it morphs into the new "Beyond Petroleum."

Now it's time for elected leaders to show real leadership and real patriotism - not just the superficial, flag-waving kind of patriotism, but the roll-up-our-sleeves-and-get-in-the-trenches kind.

We need legislation capping our greenhouse gas emissions and technology-forcing laws demanding more from the auto industry and allowing innovators to move forward. And we need to view our remaining wild lands as sanctuaries to revitalize the human spirit, not as potential sites for yet more unsustainable coal, oil, and gas production.

And by the way, it's not all about sacrifice. Such laws could also spawn a vastly profitable third industrial revolution in green technology. Someone is sure to make money designing technologies, products and services aimed at preventing or mitigating climate change. Who will it be?

More than 85 major corporations, including Alcoa, Duke Energy, and DuPont, are betting that it will be them, joining together as the United States Climate Action Partnership (USCAP) to lobby the federal government for strong legislation to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Preserving our planetary homeland is the most essential family value, the most convincing expression of pro-life sentiment, and the surest path to homeland security. It makes for good politics and good marketing, and in the end, it's the patriotic thing to do. Christine A. Klein is a professor of law at the University of Florida and a member scholar of the Center for Progressive Reform, a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of university-affiliated academics dedicated to protecting health, safety, and the environment through analysis and commentary.

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