

>> [Background music] Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Listen to this news clip from 1984. You'll probably identify the voice, but you might have trouble recognizing the political party.

>> PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: The preservation of our environment is not a partisan challenge. It's common sense. Our physical health, our social happiness, and our economic well-being will be sustained only by all of us working in partnership.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: My name is Catherine Riihimaki and that of course was Republican President Ronald Reagan. He didn't sound too different from Republican President Richard Nixon in 1972.

>> PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON: Water pollution, pesticide hazards, careless land development and many other environmental problems will not stand still for partisanship.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Fast forward to the present day and we're hearing a world of difference from the right side of the political aisle.

>> PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: They want to stop coal, they want to stop oil, they want to stop nuclear, they want to stop practically anything. On my watch, we will never let radical activists, special interests, and out-of-control bureaucrats wreck our economy, eliminate our jobs, or destroy your future. We won't let it happen and these people will not let it happen.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Welcome to All for Earth. That last clip was Republican President Donald Trump. My guest today will help us understand how we got from then to now and where we go from here. Author Fred Rich describes the growing partisan divide between environmentalists and conservatives as The Great Estrangement. His book is Getting to Green: A Search for Bipartisan Solutions to Environmental Issues. Fred, thank you for talking to me.

>> FRED RICH: You're welcome.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You have some tough love for both the environmental movement and American conservatives. Tell us a little bit about what that tough love looks like.

>> FRED RICH: Well, you know, by tough by tough love, when it comes to the environmental movement, you know, it means that I come from a place of complete solidarity with their goals. I've been an environmentalist almost all my adult life and I want to see the movement succeed. I want to see the agenda implemented virtually in its entirety. And, you know, the tough love grows out of frustration that although the environmental movement has had a lot of great successes, its number one

priority since 1980, which is to do something to mitigate climate change, has been an area where it's achieved virtually nothing, at least in the US domestic context. So by tough love, you know, my message to the movement is, you know, let's, let's take a hard look at where we succeeded and why and where we failed and why. And really reconfigure our movement for success in the 21st century. So, that's the sort of tough love for the movement itself. Now, conservatives, you know, the tough love is based on an equal frustration, that a movement in America which had its roots and, on the right. I mean, you know, conservation is a conservative idea, the idea of stewardship and intergenerational responsibility is something that conservatives have embraced for a long time. And if you go back in the history of the United States and you look at Teddy Roosevelt and so forth, there's ample evidence for that and the clips that you play, I mean, this is not ancient history, right? I mean, we're talking about, you know, Richard Nixon created the EPA on his own, not being pressured by Democrats. He created it on his own and then in the last cycle we had virtually ag and coal, but one Republican candidate wanted to eliminate the, the EPA. So clearly conservatives have lost their way on the environment and so the tough love that's aimed at them is aimed at getting them back on a path. And, and my thesis Catherine, and this is really important, is that what's happened since 1994 is an aberration.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: You know, you have some very specific advice for the Green movement and some criticisms for why this shift has happened. What is it that the Green movement gets wrong about conservatives?

>> FRED RICH: This was not a bottoms-up phenomenon. This is what I call the great estrangement, how the right was kind of split off from the movement. It was top down. It was tactical, right. It was a very deliberate wedge that was driven in the electorate as a part of a political strategy implemented through Fox News, aided by, you know, the Koch brothers and corporate money. We all know all about that. But that's very good news, because it also means it's reversible, right? There is nothing about the conservative mindset, right, that dictates that you oppose progress on environmental issues, right? So, so the question then is, is, is how do you, how do you reengage with those people and it has a lot to do with communications and it has a lot to do with our understanding, you know, our understanding of cognitive science has developed to this state where we have a much deeper understanding of where our political opinions come from. Same place our moral opinions come from and they come largely out of a sense of identity. You sort of decide your identity first and then you tend to acquire political opinions and beliefs that go with that identity. And so when you want to change those things, it requires leadership from the right. It requires leadership from within the community of belief. When the Pope stands up and says climate is a moral issue, when Bob Inglis, who's a conservative congressman from South Carolina, stands up and says wait a second, my values as a Christian mandate that I act, right? Not, not, you know, not that I wish it weren't so. Now they're talking in the language of the right and, and so that type of leadership has to be encouraged. Those people have to be embraced in the movement and, and welcomed in the movement, even if they don't subscribe to the rest of the progressive agenda, which they may not.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: I think one of my climate communications heroes is Katharine Hayhoe, who's a climate scientist and an evangelical, and she's really made it her mission to go to the evangelical communities and talk with them as a peer to talk about climate change and why it matters to them. Really, from a values origin.

>> FRED RICH: Exactly. There's been this, the environmental movement, one of, one of its problems

is it's always set up a dichotomy between science and values, right? So well wait a second. No, no, we have to be science-based. If we're not science based we'll fail. As if, you know, you, you, you couldn't be science-based and also talk about values. So part of it is getting rid of that dichotomy. Obviously we have to be science-based and we embrace science, but you know, the, the people who have doubts about environmental issues, they didn't get those doubts through science and reason and, you know, empirical analysis. They got it because in their community of identity, this was an opinion that was one of the markers of that identity. And, and it's the people within that community who can change that. So it means that we need those allies, we need those people from within that community to assume leadership positions in the environmental movement and help us learn how to talk to the others. Nothing of this is surrender or sacrifice or compromise. It's simply, you know, we're in a, you know, in a battle, as I said earlier. It's an epic battle and we, we need to bring in, the one thing we've learned in the last four years is we need to bring in a broader base of, of allies who are committed to action. Remember, it's not just about understanding and accepting. It's about action, right, and in particular it's about political action, right? It's not just recycling. I mean, we've done a great, one thing the environmental movement has done is done a pretty good job about changing personal behaviors, you know, people are turning off light switches. That doesn't really depend on their political view. That, that's been a great success. But what we're really talking about is political action to take, you know, as an economy, as a nation, very, very tough steps. So, that requires a different type of motivation.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: How do you avoid sort of making this a this side versus that side, both sides are equally to blame false equivalence discussion? Because it is sort of hard from where I sit, which is as an environmental scientist who very much knows the scientific data look grim, to feel like I need to have discourse with someone who is completely rejecting empirical evidence. And is therefore, you know, not coming to the table in good faith in the place where at least I think the discussion needs to be to come up with meaningful solutions that are bipartisan.

>> FRED RICH: If you're asking who's to blame in terms of who engineered this great estrangement, I mean, it was engineered by movement conservatism, right? But there were contributing factors. You know, I'm the lawyer, you know? When there's a when there's an accident, you know, there's usually a complex, well, you're a scientist, you know, causation is complex, right? And you know, the environmental movement, for example, from its earliest days has been very apocalyptic, right? It's been very prone to apocalyptic talk. It, there's a, there's a wonderful quote in the book somebody said that, you know, Martin Luther King in 1963 stood up and said I have a dream, and he articulated this beautiful vision of a kind of post-racial America. And 40 years later, we had an African-American president. The environmentalist got up and said we have a nightmare, right? And we tried to sell a nightmare and, you know, positive vision is what motivates change. So we were negative, we were exaggerating the, and I don't mean exaggerating the science but the rhetoric of that, you know, we got to do this in the next two years or it's too late. Well, we didn't act. Well, we've got to do it in the next five years or it's too late. We didn't act. You know, we were preaching, right? People didn't like the environmentalists. We're always, you know, wagging our fingers and telling what people to do. So this isn't a question of who's to blame or false equivalent and you have to draw a line, I think Catherine, there's a confusion between the science and the policy. So, the science, we, we, we listen, we understand, we accept. But we haven't-

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Who's we?

>> FRED RICH: Everybody.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: We should accept.

>> FRED RICH: We should.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Okay. Because we don't yet.

>> FRED RICH: We don't yet, right, but we should, right? And the politicization of science is a much broader question than environment. I mean, look at what's happening with vaccines and medicine. I mean, it's a catastrophe. I mean, what I'm saying is that what, what has happened is the political debate has been dumbed down into, you know, is it real, is it not, is it a hoax, right? That's not what we should be debating. When we did, you mentioned earlier the Clean Air Act Amendments and for example the work that was done to solve the acid rain problem. Everybody accepted the science, including the piece of the science that told us how much we had to reduce the sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions from the plants in order to deacidify the rain and restore the forest. Nobody debated that. The Democrats came in and said therefore we'll just cap and, cap sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions in the plants. Republicans came in and said well, I think we should, we should do it as cheaply as we can and that means finding some mechanism that the plants that can reduce it cheaply do the most reductions and the plants where it's expensive and that's how cap-and-trade came in. And that's the kind of debate we should be having. What tools do we use, what degree of government intervention, what degree of market, how much do we spend. At the same time, environmentalists were slow to recognize the human factor. I quote in the book a wonderful thing from the chief conservation scientist at the Nature Conservancy and he had been out working on the logging in the Pacific and the species preservation. And he went to a hearing and, and, where family after family got up and said if I lose this job, there's nothing else. You know, my family's lived here for three generations, that actually matters too, right? We can't ignore that that's not part of the equation, so we need to do better at acknowledging economic impacts and, and, and advocating for people who are adversely affected.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: It seems like as an environmental movement, you have to acknowledge that some actions may hurt people and that there needs to be a way to help support them.

>> FRED RICH: Absolutely. I think that there's an excellent example. If eight or ten years ago when we started talking about clean energy and the, and coal obviously was the lowest hanging fruit. If the environmental movement had said we need a, you know, 10-year economic plan, right? To help the coal miners in these communities transition so, you know, we've got to spend. We've got to spend. That's part of the cost. It would have been a very different conversation than simply, you know, oh my god, coal is dirty and we've got to put a cap on it. That's something that the, the environmental movement I hope has learned. One of the things I would say to the college audiences was that when I was, you know, in earlier in my life, conservatives were Southern Democrats in the Congress. Segregation was an established practice in America that nobody could imagine changing. And then I give them a more, in a more recent example which was gay marriage. I mean, 2010, it looked so dark. It

looked so dreary. The referendums, that everything was going wrong. Two years later we hit a tipping point and this is how, you know, politics does not change gradually. It changes in these great seismic shifts, these great earthquakes. And the first thing you have to convince, especially young people, that change is possible, that the political landscape which you've grown up seen and knowing, it's not forever. And once you kind of get that message down, that big change can happen, then people seem to be more willing to engage with the possibility that we can build new types of coalitions in favor of doing what we need to do to save the planet.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: So are we at that moment of big change? You wrote your book prior to, *Getting to Green*, prior to President Trump. How would you update it today?

>> FRED RICH: It's a, it's a tough question because, you know, demagogic populism, you know, it's a hand grenade. It just, it just blows up politics as usual and before the 2016 election, there were eight to twelve Republican senators ready to take the leap on climate change. There was a huge network of, you know, center-right people in Congress who understood that the future of a center-right party in America depended on abandoning, you know, climate skepticism and this broad anti-Green movement. Even, even Karl Rove, you know who wrote the, the, the diagnosis and agenda, after, you know, he said okay, you know, the convenience of climate ridicule to mobilize our base is now outweighed by the way it repels, you know, women, suburban voters, young people, all the people we need to be a viable party in the 21st century. So, you know, there had been this consensus, really. That was the moment, that was the tipping point. I was ready to go to the Republican convention, to the energy and environment platform committee. And it all got blown up. So I don't know the answer to your question. There certainly are many people thinking about how to reinvent a center, a center-right party that can contest national elections, you know, in the 21st century post Trump. But, you know, post Trump is the, is the word. They can't stick their, you know, head above the parapet. And so I, I think that if we see a massive repudiation of, of, you know, Trumpism in 2020, which you know, on balance, I'm afraid to say is, is, as much as I fantasize about it, is, you know, it's not a sure thing. If that happens, then absolutely I think environment and climate change will be front and center and I think we'll see many Republicans immediately re-engage. In fact, they're already or have been a number of voices, even in the current Congress which is amazing, starting to talk about we need to have a Republican, a kind of conservative-based plan. Having said that, I don't support the Green New Deal as it's been described. I support its goals, I support its drama, I support its, its communicated, I love the fact that it's a way to put the issue front and center. It's not well designed to, to get the centrist supported it needs.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Because it's unrealistic?

>> FRED RICH: Because it's a little bit too ambitious and a little bit too mixed up with some other progressive ideas about income equality and stuff. Which is, you know, important in my personal view, but complicated. You know, we have to, one of the problems the environmental movement has, has had in the--, once the sort of right dropped out and then there was a little bit of soul-searching being done but one of the bits of soul-searching was, you know, shouldn't, why do we think the environment is something separate? Shouldn't we put our all our chips into an undifferentiated progressive agenda, right? Why are we talking about climate change without talking about housing justice and race and, and so on and so forth. And I, you know, I, I got that and it was a, it was a legitimate point of view. The problem was it made it harder, not easier, for centrists on the right to come back in. And I

think-

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Well and then it's an all-or-nothing kind of thing and unfortunately the answer seems to be nothing.

>> FRED RICH: That's right, and you know, when we, when we slice it up into bits, you know, we find a whole different set of allies for each bit. There are allies we're going to get, who are going to come in on environment. There are allies who are going to come in on, on race. There are allies, you know, who are going to come in on, you know, economic justice. And to get them done individually, it's all about maximizing the number of supporters outside of the core, you know, progressive group that you can get to move it across. So I think that's why it's a mistake to bundle them. But that's just my view and, you know, after 2020, we could go in a different direction. But yes, so I can't predict the timing, Catherine, to go back to your original question. I wish I could but I do think that if you, part of the reason I wrote that book and it's interesting that you started this with, you know, with Reagan and, and, and Nixon. You've got to look at this historically. You've got to zoom out. We're not, you, you have to have perspective. And that's really one of the things I ask people, is zoom out, have a little perspective. Look at what history teaches about how we make progress on the environment and let that inform, you know, the politics at the moment.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: And, and part of that zooming out I think is recognizing that Reagan and Nixon are from California and Lyndon B Johnson was from Texas, and so not that long ago, California was the conservative state and Texas was the liberal state. Which I think is, you know, again, the epitome of maybe how things can change in surprising ways that perhaps younger generations don't have that longer-term perspective on.

>> FRED RICH: There are so many different ways into the environmental agenda. I mean, one of the things that's very powerful on the right is the national security aspect. There are a whole, whole host of conservative Republican former generals who think that continued reliance on fossil fuels is simply not consistent with American national security going forward. And they campaigned against it and said this is what I mean about collecting allies, that, that we, we need to, you know, we need to stick to our knitting. You know, focus on the environmental agenda, focus on climate, and find, and, and, and, and, and treat everybody as if their path to our way of thinking was legitimate path, right? Not, not say everybody must come to it through the same path and once you're there, we want your support. You know, you remember the team let's, let's work together.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Yeah. Now let me come back to the Trump issue. Your website has blog postings that you have done periodically. The last blog post that you had that was about the environment was June 1st 2017 and since then you've posted 18 times-

>> FRED RICH: Right.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Pretty much all about authoritarianism and Trump and so he seems to have this dynamic of sucking the air out of the room for any other discussion other than about him.

So, how do we kind of move forward in the next two years before 2020?

>> FRED RICH: I mean, there are a lot of sort of questions embedded in that. But the one then the reason that I blog about Trump is that it's absolute, the clearest barrier to progress is Trump. So my view is if you believe in climate, you believe in the environment. Defeating Trump and definitively defeating that kind of Trumpian populism is job one. So that's the reason. There's no, there's no there's no path to progress at the federal level while Trump is in office. There is no path. So that's the explanation for that. Now having said I said there's no path for progress at the federal level, it's very interesting what else is happening because there's a lot of action at the state and local level. Sea level rise in particular and the rise of adverse weather conditions has changed the political dynamic. There are Republican mayors of coastal cities who are leading advocates. Nobody's, nobody's a Democrat or a Republican when your town is under ten feet of water. We're seeing a tremendous progress in the corporate space. It's really fascinating. I don't know whether you know about the risky business report which was done by Mayor Bloomberg and a whole group of former Secretaries of the Treasury, you know, basically say what you know what business does is, what good business is to do is identify, quantify, and manage risk. And the biggest risk on the horizon and let's be granular, let's look at which businesses are most affected by the climate crisis. And I mean, look what's happening with agriculture. So the corporate sector is engaging in a way. So I don't, I don't mean to say that everything is stalled but at the end of the day, I think if you look around the world, a national policy to reduce and eliminate greenhouse gas is required. It's not going to happen without it.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: So I want to just wrap up by talking about some of the practical advice. So part of it is to be pragmatic, to, you know, find the good, not just the perfect, and to be okay with compromise. I thought you finished your book in a really interesting place as well, which was to encourage people just to get involved and to join a local hiking club or fishing group or something to get outside. Why did you finish it there?

>> FRED RICH: Well, you know, I'm a child of the of the '70s, you know. The first Earth Day in 1970, 20 million people took part in the first Earth Day. The environmental movement got its energy, it was a mass movement. It was from the ground up. We couldn't turn out, you know, 200,000 people for a climate march in New York. The environmental movement became, you know, hijacked as they say by, you know, white guys in suits working an inside game inside the beltway. That's what it became. You know, that is not the recipe for political success in the 21st century. We have to be a mass political movement. We have to, you know, in, in Pew polling over 20 years, everybody says yeah, I care about clean air and water. And then they say rank how much you care about the things you say you care about, environment comes in dead last. That's got to change, right? Unless we can say it's a public health issue and it goes up on that list, it won't be politically potent. So I'm, I'm a huge believer in finding a path to that kind of activism and I happen to believe a lot in place-based activism. People of all political persuasions love the places they are. They love the places they recreate. They love pieces of land. They love forests. They love their children. They're starting to understand that their children need parks. I'm just saying find whatever that path is, start to develop a personal sensibility where your whole moral sense of self includes stewardship of natures. Not the whole thing, right? You can't be sitting in Kansas and say I'm responsible for the coral reefs. Be responsible for the wetland next door that's threatened with development or I do something to get that sense of personal responsibility. It will elevate it and, and then start collective action. You know, it's bowling alone, you know. We, we sit in, inside and we write our blogs and you know, the, the environmental movement got its strength through its collective action, people getting together. So don't do it alone. Go to that Saturday

`morning meeting, you know, with everybody trying to save that wetland. And that's, that's where you get the roots of action. So yes, I absolutely believe it starts, you know, with that connection with nature and then a sense of personal responsibility, and then a commitment to, to, to group and collective action. And that's where the future movement is going to come from. And unless politicians sitting in Washington, you know, look out at the country and see that, they won't act.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Well, I think that's a great call to action for all of us and a wonderful place to end. So Fred, thank you so much for joining us. I wish you the best of luck bringing, bridging the partisan gaps in American environmentalism and good luck with your next book, which I think is already underway.

>> FRED RICH: Yes it is.

>> CATHERINE RIIHIMAKI: Fred Rich is a former lawyer and current author. You can read more about his work on his website Fredericrich.com, that's F R E D E R I C R I C H. To our listeners, please subscribe to our podcast feed wherever you get your podcasts. I also hope to see you in person October 24th and 25th at Princeton University for a celebration of 25 years of the Princeton Environmental Institute. Several of our podcast guests including Fred Rich will be speaking at the forum and there will be many more experts in all aspects of the environment and sustainability. Until then, be well.

>> FRED RICH: All for Earth is a production of the Princeton Environmental Institute and the Princeton University Office of Communications in collaboration with Princeton's Council on Science and Technology and assistance from the Office of Instructional Support Services and the Office of Information Technology. Our executive producer is Margaret Koval and our audio engineer and editor is Daniel Kearns. The opinions expressed here represent the views of the individuals involved and not those of the university. Princeton podcasts are available on all major distribution channels including Spotify and Apple and Google podcast apps.

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