'Local Control' Is A Beard For Environmentalists Blocking Energy Progress

By Hank Campbell — January 11, 2017

Terms like "local control" and "best practices" are sure to warm the hearts of any evidence-based libertarian. To the more libertarian mindset, government centralization is inherently bad; it too often leads to corruption and inefficiency. We don't have a United States Police Force, for example, because we want people who understand the local community to be handling local crime, and we want education to be local so that school districts represent the teaching values of the diverse communities across our nation.

In opposition to freedom, the social authoritarian mindset starts at the top, lobbying and donating to federal government officials (and going to parties and buying overpriced t-shirts from appointed government bureaucrats who don't take donations [2]) to implement blanket laws that may not be relevant at all to giant sections of the country. When they get the law they just lobbied for, they often sue the same government that just helped them. Sometimes the federal government has even negotiated the settlement with the activists behind the lawsuit in advance [3], leaving the local government footing the bill.

Lobbying for centralized control has clearly worked well for activists yet now those anti-science groups have taken to co-opting the local control concept too, knowing they defuse objection from a giant chunk of the public that believes in a more decentralized approach. Yet its intent is still nefarious, not beneficial, to those local citizens. Instead of wanting real local input, these groups seek to create a bureaucratic "patchwork" of local laws and incite demonstrations that will bog down any company doing business in individual communities because of cost-prohibitive customization.
That poor people invariably suffer the burden of higher costs for such ideology doesn't factor into their equation.

And it worked, they got Vermont to do just that when it came to labeling GMO ingredients on grocery store products (1), though it is too soon to tell who is suffering more, Vermont consumers or national businesses who stopped selling there. Environmentalists have now transported their Local Control Strategy from food to another basic need, energy.

If you know anything at all about recent history, you know we went through arguably the most anti-science period in American history in the 1990s. Led by a President who didn't think much of research, applied or basic, we pulled the plug on high-energy physics (2), on nuclear energy, NIH funding limped along with tepid support, and NASA funding was cut. In deference to his environmental supporters, President Clinton declared that any nuclear energy could be weaponized and true nuclear R&D was basically halted. We now have smart phones that are more powerful than the computers that sent us to the Moon, thanks to unfettered American technology and engineering, but we can only dream about the 4th generation nuclear plants we would have in the works if progress had not been halted by centralized government catering to an environmental agenda.

What happened due to scuttling nuclear energy is well-known. Coal usage went way up, carbon dioxide emissions increased, and anti-science groups went after that problem next, suggesting that America was going to kill the planet unless even more centralized government came to the rescue.

Yet once again American ingenuity and engineering solved the problem while environmental lobbyists were buying expensive dinners and asking for subsidized ethanol and Chinese solar panels. A Texas wildcatter named George P. Mitchell did something that neither Big Oil nor government scientists in the U.S. Department of Energy had been unable to do despite trying since the 1940s; extract natural gas from shale rock formations safely and economically.(3)

The research cost him a fortune, he didn't even break even until after the 36th well [4]. It also set off a boom in cleaner energy, while keeping costs low. Natural gas, which environmentalists had supported for decades in their war on coal and nuclear, was suddenly demonized as "fracking" that was poisoning water wells.

The relationships that environmentalist had long developed offered some support - the EPA had to be told in federal court to stop blaming natural gas for problems without actually doing any studies [5] - but the public loved this cheap, cleaner way to power homes. Energy is a basic need in a developed society, and when people spend less on basic needs there are improvements in culture across the board. Pennsylvania has seen a huge Renaissance while New York faces critical funding shortfalls. (4)

Though protests in North Dakota and previously along the Keystone XL pipeline get lots of mainstream media attention, the public is unfazed about natural gas. The last thing citizens want is more top-down regulation of their energy and the resulting higher costs.
When it comes to energy science, do you trust tens of thousands of scientists in government, academia and the private sector, or do you trust environmental employees dressed as lizards?

That is why activists have nimbly embraced "local control" as a new marketing tactic. A recent report investigated the efforts by anti-energy groups to rebrand themselves as fans of local control in Texas. Obviously trying to ban energy is a non-starter in a state like Texas, but their ideological proclivities make them fans of independence and freedom compared to states on the coast that are more sympathetic to the centralized ideology of traditional environmental efforts. So activists have reframed their goals using the kind of populism that swept President Trump to the White House; local control, power to the people. And they groom local people to take a stand against Big Oil.

This kind of greenwashing is not new. Organic Consumers Association pays to prop up 300 "small" groups that were created to look like a grass roots movement opposed to conventional agriculture. In Texas, the strategy is the same. But if you are really a local activist, you haven't even heard of New York's Park Foundation, which has become focused on creating a 13th century future for energy production in America. Tiny groups also don't get funding from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation or Tides Foundation. Environment Texas is controlled by carpetbaggers from Boston. Who also funds them? The Park Foundation, along with Sea Change, which is a foundation that exists to support causes that will enrich the alternative energy businesses of the venture capitalist behind it. In addition to being a corporate front, 40 percent of Sea Change's donations are "dark money" from offshore shell accounts.

Are true environmentalists actually in favor of dark money-funded business interests exploiting their belief system for profit and gain? Of course not, that is how you know these are not real environmental groups, they are instead manufactured public relations efforts created to dupe real environmentalists into working for free.

These critics of energy are not really fans of local control, they are instead the opposite, they believe in absolute central control; the fewer politicians they have to lobby, the better. The last
thing they want is the public thinking for themselves. And so local control is just a beard for their real agenda, which is raising money by scaring people - and denying the poor an affordable basic need so that they need to ask big centralized groups for help.

NOTES:

(1) They failed spectacularly even in the most progressive larger states where citizens actually read the plan; Californians wondered why restaurants would be exempt, and alcohol too, and why a cupcake purchased at a store, double the fat and calories of a store-bought mix, would be exempt because it was supposedly healthier than the one with a warning label on a store shelf. In Vermont, the organic yogurt maker behind the Just Label It campaign also made sure his products were exempt - cows can still eat GMO feed.

(2) Arguably it was far too aggressive a plan. Pres. Reagan was very pro-science, and very optimistic about our engineering capability, but we couldn't build the specification of the Superconducting Super Collider even now.

(3) Mitchell was also the driving force behind convincing President Reagan that the SSC and the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer should be in Texas. He created the Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics and Astronomy at Texas A & M, and his contributions to basic physics were so well-regarded that Professor Stephen Hawking eulogized him.

(4) The governor of New York is even promising to close the Indian Point nuclear energy facility 18 years early, which provides 236 times more power than all of New York’s solar [8]. His idea for a replacement? A natural gas scheme he advocated that is now under criminal investigation. In reality, it will mean more buying of natural gas derived from Pennsylvania fracking across the border (New York bans it), and therefore 29 percent higher emissions than the green energy the state has now. So much for green policies.

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