

RICHARD: For decades, environmental activists have cast themselves as defenders of the planet against greedy, profit-hungry corporations. At the same time, many conservatives are skeptical of the science of climate change and have warned against the economic costs of the Green New Deal and other proposals to limit pollution and cut carbon emissions. Can we get both sides on the same page?

This is Let's Find Common Ground. I'm Richard Davies.

ASHLEY: And I'm Ashley Milne-Tyte. In this episode, we speak with Bill Shireman and Trammell Crow, authors of the new book, *In This Together: How Republicans, Democrats, Capitalists, and Activists Are Uniting to Tackle Climate Change and More*.

RICHARD: Bill Shireman is President of the nonprofit Future 500, which brings together people of all points of view to discuss environmental reform.

ASHLEY: Trammell Crow is a business leader and developer who founded Texas Business for Clean Air, and he's a member of the Clean Capitalist Leadership Council. Both men are Republicans who believe much more needs to be done to reduce climate change.

RICHARD: An opinion poll showed that 70% of Americans agree with them. We spoke with Bill Shireman in early December about what's changed since the election.

BILL: We have an opportunity. That's what's new. We haven't had a chance in the last four years to bring the Left and the Right together on anything. We have an opportunity to do that right now. The environment is the most unifying issue across partisan boundaries. So protecting the environment is a way not only to save the planet but also to save democracy here in the States. Our choice is whether to intensify the partisan divide. If we simply hope that things get better, then I see us getting more and more divided, no solution to the environmental issues, and a continuing decline in the effectiveness of democracy and a celebration of authoritarianism instead.

However, if about five million of us from across the Left to the Right step up—and we're folks who aren't quite as sure, aren't quite as ideological, aren't quite as certain as the warriors or the soldiers, I guess, on each side—if we step up, then we have the opportunity to unite the country, prove that democracy can work. But it takes real democracy. That means people lead, not the billionaires, not the big corporations, actual people.

RICHARD: You said something that may really surprise people there, and that is that the environment is a unifying issue. Right now, it seems to be a pretty divisive issue.

BILL: It's a divisive issue because it's highly profitable for media and for politics to make it a divided issue, to just take the most extreme views and associate them with one side and then the other side. We've had a division between what used to be called

the environmental movement and the conservation movement. The environmental movement tended to be on the Left. It was more preservationist, keep people out of nature, and the conservation movement was more on the Right. It was more about protecting lands and being stewards of nature.

ASHLEY: So what could happen next with this divide over how we talk about the environment? Is there hope for a breakthrough?

BILL: There are a couple of ways that we can go. We can see a continued gridlock over environmental issues. That will come if the progressive wing of the party does what the establishment of the Republican party wants, and that is to demand a hardcore, big-government, expensive solution to environmental challenges. That feeds into this political industry that thrives by promoting to the Right the most extreme views of the Left and promoting to the Left the most extreme views of the Right. The effect of that is to divide the country into these two extremes, each believing that they are the reasonable ones and the other side are the extremists.

RICHARD: And you say, Bill, that the political industry profits from this division.

BILL: There's no middle majority to dictate what has to happen, and that gives them the market leverage to extract money from vested interests in exchange for providing them with protection from the extreme Left and the extreme Right. The other thing that it does that's more disturbing in the longterm is that it creates a Radical Left and a Radical Right that, at some point, discover that they share some things in common. First of all, they're authoritarians. They don't like democracy. They know that they're in the minority, and they know that to have power, they need to overcome democracy. Then they discover that there are certain issues that unite them. They would like the government to provide them all with free things.

So the Left and the Right extremes can join together. That's the most dangerous outcome from where we are right now, and it's dangerous to the environment because by putting false solutions, big government mandates, really corporatist mandates on, we create the illusion that we've acted to protect the environment. But, in actuality, what we need to do is drive down carbon emissions and drive down the destruction of biodiversity and the destruction of natural systems all over the world, and you can't do that with an authoritarian approach in one country. We can do that by bringing businesspeople, activists, and everyday citizens together to say, "We're going to use," from a citizen's perspective, "our dollars and our votes to drive the changes that we want," and that's our objective. In This Together is to motivate citizens in that middle 70% to get together and use their dollars and their votes to make change.

ASHLEY: Do you have any hope at all something like that could happen with John Kerry in this sort of Climate Czar role that he's been appointed to?

BILL: I do. I think that is a possibility. Here's the challenge right now, is we have a system that represents either the extremes on the Left and Right or the establishment status quo, and those are not acceptable choices for us. But that's the only place that moderate voters can go right now, go with the establishment, go with the status quo. That's not good enough. We need the moderates, and I'm talking about the broad moderates, the 70% in the middle, to lead this battle.

RICHARD: In what ways can they lead that battle?

BILL: They can lead the battle by stepping up as consumers and as voters. As consumers, and this is their greatest power, a few million of us can motivate the biggest brands on the planet, and they can, in turn, motivate all of the suppliers across the planet to take about 10 steps that are necessary to protect the planet's ecosystems.

ASHLEY: What are some of those steps? Could you list them?

BILL: Shifting to regenerative agriculture; restoring soil as a living thing on a global basis; reducing the pollution of the oceans from agricultural runoff, from cargo ship pollution; putting a price on carbon; but we're not focusing on those 10 steps. We're focusing on this war for the planet, and that's what's taking us down.

ASHLEY: Joe Biden has a reputation as a broker of compromise. Do you think there is a bit more hope that what you want to see happen, that it's likelier to happen under him as President despite the extremes that you described earlier?

BILL: Certainly his demeanor and his approach would make it more likely. Donald Trump was not the guy to produce that. Politically, he had the opportunity, but he was obviously exploiting the issue in the opposing way. John Kerry creates an opportunity, but he is not a messiah for this. So far, we don't know that this will be different from the dynamic under the Obama administration.

Under the Obama administration, I remember acutely this extremely informative day that I spent in Washington, D.C. I was probably the only person to go to these two events. On the one side of town was the Power Shift conference, 10,000 climate champions cheering in the new Obama administration with the full expectation that the administration would act on its own to advance climate protection. They were celebrating their victory and leaving it up to the politicians to seal the deal. Across town was CPAC, the conservative political organization, and 8,000 people there. I went in there. They were armed for battle. They were going to destroy that administration from the very beginning, and the folks on the Left had no idea what was going to hit them. If we had had an actual conversation at that time between the Left and the Right, we could've had solutions to the climate challenge. In fact, they were right there on the table.

RICHARD: So that raises the question: could it be different this time? Could there be a conversation between Left and Right?

BILL: Yes, absolutely, and that's kind of what I'm living for right now, is there can be a conversation. We have to avoid the impulse on the Right to just attack and destroy any possibility of change, and we have to avoid the impulse on the Left to declare that the change is inevitable, and we don't have to work for it; now our politicians will do the job. That requires a different set of people stepping forward. It requires the problem-solvers and the bridge-builders and the peacemakers to step forward, but they are relatively inactive in environmental leadership because they believe that we are at political war. And they're stepping back and allowing the political warriors to lead the charge, which falls into the trap that the media sets, which is that those warriors then define the agenda. They keep the Left and the Right divided, and the status quo keeps its power.

ASHLEY: Do you think some of this could trickle down to normal people, whether you're in farming country or you live in a part of the country that's been flooding a lot, people whose lives are affected by what's happening with the climate but who, in many cases, don't call it climate change?

BILL: Yes, yes. Most definitely, people can see that the weather is changing. People can see that there are more extremes that we're experiencing. People can see the effects of climate change whether they call it climate change or not. To create positive change, we have to actually work at it, and it's going to take effort. It's not just going to happen because everyday people realize that we have to take action for climate. 70%, 80% of the population across partisan bounds already believes that. The problem is in who's stepping up to lead, and the only way to get around that is for individuals that are listening to this program to say, "I'm going to step up. I'm going to reach across the aisle, and I'm going to be a problem-solver." Those are the folks that we need to bring into the movement across the political boundaries.

RICHARD: So how do you do that? How does a citizen take action?

BILL: Well, number one, you go to inthistgetheramerica.org, and you sign up for In This Together. We are dedicated to bringing the citizens on the Right and the Left together for real, genuine climate and environmental solutions. We have 15 partner organizations. We've got nearly two million Americans that are part of our alliance already. We need five million. So that's number one. Number two, you join with groups like Unite America, with Bridge USA, with Bridge Alliance. You begin to get your news from sources like allsides.com where you can live in the real world rather than the created media world that is self-generated by our clicks on what is most provocative and scary to us.

RICHARD: Bill, you're a Republican. Trammell Crow, your coauthor of In This Together, is a Republican. How do you talk to fellow Republicans who are climate doubters? How do you change their minds?

BILL: The main thing is not to begin on the issue of climate itself but to begin where they are motivated to doubt climate science, and the reason they are motivated to doubt climate science is because the solutions that they've been given to climate change are frightening to them. Now, Trammell and I both champion the spirit behind the Green New Deal but not the methods that already proposed, heavy-handed government mandates that would simply generate more corporate feeding frenzy to carry these big things out.

The Right is concerned about the loss of personal freedom. The right is concerned about encroaching socialism. The Right is concerned that folks on the Left have forgotten that socialism is not just a pleasant word; it's a system that has consistently oppressed people. So they're scared of that. They are scared that the Left is going to force that upon them. So, when they hear that that's what we need to do to save the planet, they're predisposed to doubt climate science. Once we begin to put solutions on the table that will actually work, that will maintain free markets, then we'll see the Left and the Right are able to unite. Give them reasonable solutions, and suddenly climate science will become very real for them.

ASHLEY: Bill Shireman speaking to us days ago. More from both Bill and Trammell coming up.

RICHARD: Let's Find Common Ground is produced by Common Ground Committee. If you want to learn more about what we're discussing, join our Facebook group. It's an insider's look at Common Ground Committee's thinking on future projects.

ASHLEY: You can join the conversation. Our Facebook group is distinct from Common Ground Committee's Facebook page. In the group, we comment and discuss ideas and suggestions.

RICHARD: And now back to our interview, and this is really the second part because, during the summer, we caught up with Bill Shireman and Trammell Crow, coauthors of In This Together.

ASHLEY: Together, they set up the annual EarthX Future 500 conference in Dallas, which brings together environmental activists and nonprofit leaders with business leaders. Usually, the annual conference is held to mark Earth Day, but as with everything else, this year was different, with an online gathering instead.

RICHARD: In our first interview, we asked Bill and Trammell about how America is divided. Trammell, you want to start?

TRAMMELL: It's an easy one. So I guess I could help out. Usually, I'm the fall guy, the straight man in the Trammell and Bill Show, and he'd answer it better. But the first thing that comes to anybody's mind is haves and have-nots nowadays.

RICHARD: Haves and have-nots?

TRAMMELL: Yeah. I think that rural and urban is still a split, but what we're talking about here is politics, and it's just getting polarized, isn't it?

BILL: We are much more completely divided by media and politics than we actually organically are divided. Our divisions are actually just forms of diversity. When we bring ourselves together across all these boundaries, that's what makes us a healthy community. But our media and our politics are built on a business model that is based on dividing us, and it's very profitable to divide us into silos. So we have the urban silo and the rural silo. We have the coastal silo and the inland silo. We've got Conservatives, and we've got Progressives. We've got men, and we've got women. We've got Black and white and people of color and religious, nonreligious, various religions.

All of these are set against each other by a data-driven political and media business model that profits by putting like people together because it's more efficient to maneuver us to vote as a group, to maneuver us to buy as a group. People didn't intend, originally, to do this to keep us hating each other. That's just an unfortunate outcome of the because model.

ASHLEY: You came together with the first big EarthX event in Dallas, which included thousands of people: businesses, political leaders, and lots of activists and nonprofit groups. Trammell?

TRAMMELL: The first event in 2011 on Earth Day, a two-day thing with the exhibitors out on the street, after the event, we had 40,000 people and 200 entities. After the very first event, an exhibitor came to me, some environmental group there in Texas, a local one, and said, "Trammell, you put us right next to a corporation." I said, "I'm so sorry. I won't do that again. Who was it?" He went, "No, no, no, no. This is great. We always wanted to know those people. So now we do. Thank you."

Another one was all types of environmental groups. That means conservation groups, ocean, forest, smart city, and they don't do that. First of all, there aren't any big, amorphous Earth Days at all, but what does happen in the environmental world is the ocean people will all get together or the green attorneys will all get together. And we mixed them together. They've never been in that milieu.

BILL: That's what Trammell's created, and that is magical. That ecosystem that Trammell's created there is a magical one, and it leads to outcomes. So that's the theme of In This Together, that when you bring all of these diverse kinds of

people together with all these diverse kinds of resources, we can accomplish much more together than we ever can apart.

ASHLEY: In your book, *In This Together*, you talk about the barriers to change in the political system. Can you give us an example?

BILL: Well, we have been able to, through this process of EarthX, of bringing people together, make great progress on recycling, make great progress on forest protection. But where we haven't made great progress is on climate. What we realized over time, as we're going from group to group to group, and each group is blaming the next one for not solving the climate problem, and it all comes down to, "Well, it's the oil companies. It's the energy companies." So we talk to the energy companies and say, "Well, why are you blocking climate protection," and they begin to tell us stories.

We heard a story from multiple CEOs of top energy companies of having gone to lawmakers to say, during the Obama administration, "We're okay with the clean power plant," for example, "We're okay with cap and trade. We're okay even with the Paris Accords." And they are shuttled off into a room with political strategists, and they're told, "That's okay that you're supportive of that, but in order for us to be able to protect your priority issues, you've got to be on-board with us with the mantra: job-killing EPA. We can't have you out there talking about, 'It's okay to regulate,' and so on because we need you on-point, on-message with job-killing EPA." The reason is because climate is a wedge issue that's used by the Left to animate catastrophists and by the Right to animate deniers so that the issue is not resolved.

TRAMMELL: Can you all believe that? I've been in meetings, informal meetings with senators and oil company CEOs, and I've heard the oil companies say, "We just want the rule. We just want to know what it is. Carbon tax, that's okay. We just want to know the rules." But Bill, why in the hell would the politicians oppose that?

BILL: Politicians don't really oppose that. The politicians just take what's available to them. It's the political industry that is auctioning off public policy, but you can extract a lot of money in the war on climate on both sides. There are billions of dollars being spent against each other in the war on climate, and all those dollars go to the political industry, lobbyists and consultants and pollsters and so on, and on to the media who profit from the war itself.

RICHARD: Trammell and Bill, you are both Republicans. How do you convince fellow conservatives that the environment is important and requires changes in the law?

TRAMMELL: Well, I have learned that the main goal should not be to try to convince them on climate. That's something that's kind of ideologies and [inaudible 00:23:02] and that or the other. These are culture wars and tribal wars, and you can't really do too much with logic on that. But over the years, I've learned from Bill and this experience, that the vocabularies in which we speak talk about the economic

possibilities and the job possibilities, a free enterprise approach to climate solutions with startups.

RICHARD: So, Trammell, you talk to people in their own language.

TRAMMELL: Right.

RICHARD: And for instance, when it comes to Republicans, perhaps the language of free enterprise or the language of creating wealth, yes?

TRAMMELL: Yeah, and also conservation is much more meaningful than environmentalism, which sounds radical.

BILL: Conservation is something that's practiced by hunters and ranchers and farmers, and these have been traditional leaders in the conservation and environmental community, but they've been shunned and divided by a political system and by environmentalists who come primarily from the Left.

TRAMMELL: Also because they've been trained now by the media, so there are large environmental groups that are much more conservative than they appear to be because their donors can't bear the thought of them getting involved in some of these more conservation and conservative approaches.

BILL: We don't have to convince the Right to be environmentalists. They're naturally that way. The very word conservative is about conserving things.

ASHLEY: Something that I was really glad you wrote about this in the book, that often in this battle against climate change, there's this strategy of selling catastrophe. It's sort of doom-and-gloomism, and that may fire up the base on the Left perhaps, but it can leave other people feeling incredibly powerless.

BILL: I think that the focus on catastrophe and war as a metaphor—this is a way to protect climate from the evil corporations, and if we don't, catastrophe is just around the corner—that's the biggest negative in this campaign because what it does is, first, it alienates the other side. Second, it exhausts the supporters, people who care about the environment and become worried and concerned about approaching catastrophe, lose faith and lose energy at a certain time and become more apathetic. And we can't afford to do that. We need to have a positive, optimistic environmental community.

ASHLEY: Bill Shireman with Trammell Crow.

RICHARD: And in that interview, Bill mentioned the web address of their movement. It's inthistgetheramerica.org.

ASHLEY: Let's Find Common Ground is produced by Common Ground Committee. Our team includes Editor and Sound Producer Miranda Shafer, as well as Erik Olsen, Bruce Bond, Donna Vislocky, Mary Anglade, Jonathan Wells, and Olivia Adams.

RICHARD: I'm Richard Davies.

ASHLEY: I'm Ashley Milne-Tyte.

RICHARD: Thanks for listening.