



Written by [James Heiser](#) on April 22, 2010

Have You Hugged Your Planet Today?

Be nice to the tree huggers today: It has been a rough year for the jolly green juggernaut since the last Earth Day, and like something out of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, the extreme edge of the environmental movement has been throwing itself beneath the wheels of climate change.



And some of them fall down under the wheels of the car, and let the car go over them, so that they be dead anon. And some have their arms or their limbs all to-broken, and some the sides. And all this do they for love of their god, in great devotion. And them thinketh that the more pain, and the more tribulation that they suffer for love of their god, the more joy they shall have in another world. And, shortly to say you, they suffer so great pains, and so hard martyrdoms for love of their idol, that a Christian man, I trow, durst not take upon him the tenth part the pain for love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A few months ago, they tried to throw the global economy beneath the wheels, but that did not work out according to plan. Perhaps the Leader may still salvage “cap and trade” for them, and their juggernaut will finally run on [\\$9.22 a gallon gasoline](#).

This now marks the fortieth anniversary of Earth Day, and so we should not be overly surprised by this ersatz holy day entering a state similar to a midlife crisis. [As Ronald Bailey noted at Reason.com](#),

Earth Day was the brainchild of Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisc.) who conceived of it as he was flying back from seeing the damage done by the Santa Barbara offshore oil well blowout in 1969. Nelson aimed to make Earth Day a national ecological teach-in modeled on the anti-war events then popular on college campuses. In January 1970, Nelson gave a major speech in the U.S. Senate outlining his environmental concerns. From the perspective of today, that speech set most of the environmentalist agenda for the next 40 years and, for good or ill, most of that agenda has been fulfilled.

Nelson opened by advocating a new constitutional amendment: “Every person has the inalienable right to a decent environment. The United States and every State shall guarantee this right.” So far there is no such amendment. But Nelson went on to set out five immediate action areas that aimed to “rid America in the 1970s of the massive pollution from five of the most heavily used products of our affluent age.” The five areas were the internal combustion engine, hard



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pesticides, detergent pollution, aircraft pollution, and non-returnable containers.

Nelson's proposed amendment was probably not the loopiest one every proposed, and at least it does not share the distinction of the so-called "Noble Experiment" — embodied in the 18th Amendment — of actually becoming the law of the land. Efforts to purge vices of the land by force of law have a habit of falling victim to the law of unintended consequences. If the Volstead Act unintentionally fueled the influence of organized crime, one can only shudder to think what wonders could have been unleashed by an environmental amendment.

Of course, the swiftest route to law is not found in the labyrinth of amending the constitution, but in the heady rush to treaty proposed by last year's UN Conference on Climate Change.

Bailey's article does highlight the fact that the war against the internal combustion engine is nothing new; [Gore's comments in *Earth in the Balance*](#) tapped into a theme stretching back to the beginning of this annual observance. It's almost enough to make me break out the self-propelled lawnmower and get the yard done this evening.

On a more serious note, the environmental policies which have been implemented have still brought with them their unintended consequences. As the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) observed in a press release ("Keep Humanity in Earth Day") today:

"In the forty years since the first Earth Day, many well-intentioned environmental policies have racked up a shocking butcher's bill of unintended consequences," said CEI Vice President for Strategy Iain Murray. "From the ban on DDT which led to millions of unnecessary deaths from malaria to ethanol mandates which have increased food prices and led to starvation around the world, the human impact of green policies often go unacknowledged - and unaddressed."

What's more, now there are reports that some scientists believe that cleaning up atmospheric pollution could actually hasten global warming. According to an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*:

But even as industrialized and developing nations alike steadily reduce aerosol pollution — caused primarily by burning coal — climate scientists are beginning to understand just how much these tiny particles have helped keep the planet cool. A silent benefit of sulfates, in fact, is that they've been helpfully blocking sunlight from striking the Earth for many decades, by brightening clouds and expanding their coverage. Emerging science suggests that their underappreciated impact has been incredible.

Researchers believe greenhouse gases such as CO₂ have committed the Earth to an eventual warming of roughly 4 degrees Fahrenheit, a quarter of which the planet has already experienced. Thanks to cooling by aerosols starting in the 1940s, however, the planet has only felt a portion of that greenhouse warming. In the 1980s, sulfate pollution dropped as Western nations enhanced pollution controls, and as a result, global warming accelerated.

There's hot debate over the size of what amounts to a cooling mask, but there's no question that it will diminish as industries continue to clean traditional pollutants from their smokestacks. Unlike CO₂, which persists in the atmosphere for centuries, aerosols last for a week at most in the air. So cutting them would probably accelerate global warming rapidly.

Who could have dreamed all those cans of hairspray were saving the planet from burning to a cinder? Most American holidays have become little more than occasions to spend and consume, and certainly one hears on occasion the invocation of our 'right' to observe various anniversaries or holidays "in our



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own way.” In that light, one might begin to imagine a properly American way of marking the next 40 years of Earth Days. Start your planning for next year now, and unlike green martinetts who want to manage our world, mark your next Earth Day with a creativity which truly keeps humanity—and human freedom—at the forefront.

Photo: New York Gov. David Paterson speaks at an Earth Day event at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, N.Y., on April 20, 2010.: AP Images



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