

## Do or Die Election

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor  
November 2018

---

### It's official: Many environmentalists don't vote



Florida's Panhandle, where I grew up, is one of the nation's richest biodiversity hotspots. I bet you didn't know that. Here live the kindest, most hard-working, generous, and misled citizenry, a majority of whom are deeply committed to supporting candidates for office who tell them they must choose between economic well-being and the environment.

I still call Panama City Beach home, but I've also lived in Coral Gables for 20 years, and in the Keys before that. As a South Floridian, I, like you, know that decisions about the environment can be acutely felt. In the Panhandle, where I am now, people haven't had to make tough decisions in favor of the environment. Our natural resources pre-Hurricane Michael were relatively abundant, our economic diversity less so.

The point is, and hear me when I say this, I wasn't surprised by Trump's election. I was surprised that *you* were surprised. And right now, only one thing is clear to me: November 6 is do or die for our state's environment.

If you don't want to be surprised again, pay attention to what I have to say. Stop trying to convince anyone of your point of view, especially about the environment. Talking until you're blue in the face doesn't turn anyone from red to blue. It exhausts you and only encourages your audience to dig in their heels.

## Do or Die Election

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor  
November 2018

---

Science has proved that persuasion has much less effect on behavior than anyone would hope. If we want to save the planet, we have to change behaviors, not minds.

Aside from issue-focused influence and other forms of persuasion, there are many “get out the vote” campaigns. In late September, Michelle Obama spoke at the University of Miami for a “When We All Vote” rally. She told a relatable story about how we’re busy, we get hyped and bombarded around election time, we survive an election -- then we go back to ignoring important issues.

I liked how she was using empathy to break down barriers, and really thought this was a promising strategy -- until I learned of something entirely different when it comes to environmental voters.

Too few environmentalists actually vote.

So it should be no surprise that the politicians don’t take more action on climate change, right? Where’s the pressure?

Worse, when environmentalists report that they voted, they’re often lying. I’m sure you know that your voting record is public. Not how you voted, but whether you voted. This information and more like it has been assembled and analyzed by the Environmental Voter Project (EVP), the brainchild of founder Nathaniel Stinnett.

A former a political strategist, Stinnett has been called a visionary by the *New York Times*, and his approach has been likened to that used by the NRA.

EVP’s research uncovers that most people know voting is an important responsibility and they feel ashamed if they didn’t do the homework. We don’t want to mess up. And they lie rather than admit the truth, 78.1 percent of the time, based on surveys. The liars are EVP’s targets because it believes that “the single most important thing a person can do for the environment is

## Do or Die Election

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor  
November 2018

---

to vote.”

EVP describes the flawed thinking:

“Since most environmental groups are trying to win the next big election for their endorsed candidates, they rightly focus on targeting voters who are likely to show up on a particular Election Day. The Environmental Voter Project never talks to these voters -- all we care about is turning non-voting environmentalists into super-voters, so we only focus on the environmentalists who rarely or never vote.”

This year EVP has targeted 2.4 million environmentalists in five states, including Florida. The election is a battle for control of the Senate and thus direction on climate change and other environmental matters important to Miamians, and EVP’s presence here feels like an awkward privilege. I welcome it. EVP has communicated with 961,161 environmentalists across Florida this fall -- 99,550 in Miami-Dade County alone.

At the top of EVP’s nonpartisan messaging is the request for a commitment to vote. That’s it. All the research has directed the canvasser to the right target. There’s no judgment. My friend Jess Zimbabwe intuited this power of the promise as she helped her daughters distribute “I promised a Girl Scout I would vote” stickers. In a similar vein, the EVP pledge goes like this (say it with me): “I pledge to be a consistent voter, and I will always prioritize environmental issues.”

With *Moneyball*-style big data analysis, Girl Scout pledges, and NRA-like focus, we can turn the tide.

“It’s unbelievable how much latent political power environmentalists have in South Florida,” says Kate Heffernan, EVP’s national organizing director and a Boca Raton native. “If we start showing up to vote, we could completely change environmental policy at the local, state, and federal level.”

## Do or Die Election

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor  
November 2018

---

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)