Democracy Defeated Discursively: Andrew Wheeler and the Deregulation of the Fossil Fuel Industry

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The problem: How could Andrew Wheeler effectively deregulate the fossil fuel industry?

- Public support is overwhelming in supporting climate-change action

- 70% of U.S. citizens believe aggressive action should be taken, 75% believe that it is a serious problem that merits immediate confrontation (Volcovici 2019; McCarthy 2019)

- EPA furthered over 50 deregulatory actions from 2018-2020…how?

Previous explanations

- Regulatory capture theory (Dillion et al. 2018, Laffont and Tirole 1991)

- Failure of class consciousness (Gare 2006)

- My focus is discursive

- Content analysis of Wheeler's 2-hour confirmation hearing and TV interviews

- "illegal alien" vs "individual without documentation", profound impact (Thomas 2020, Dick 2011)

Wheeler uses terms that index a neoliberal ideology to erase the dangers and highlight the purported benefits of deregulation

1. Indexicality

To index is to "point to" something in a context that it can occur.

2. Erasure

"the process in which ideology, in simplifying the field of linguistic practices, renders some persons or activities or sociolinguistic phenomena invisible" (Gal and Irvine 1995: 974).

Highlighting is the "converse of erasure" Bucholtz and Hall (2004b: 495)

Aaron Stibbe's erasure forms

Void, Mask and trace

1. Void occurs when something is "completely excluded from a text"
Ex: spurious factors, sound-biting.

1. Mask "something is erased but replaced by a distorted version of itself"

2. Trace "something partially erased but still present"

(Stibbe, 2015).

Free Market and the Money Fetish

John A Barrasso: We have discussed that we can use carbon dioxide to get oil out of the ground, to construct building materials, and to make fuels. What role does the EPA play in supporting innovations that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Andrew Wheeler: We have a lot of opportunities. We do that through our air program as well as all of our programs. We are looking to do innovation and encourage new innovation. I think it is important on the regulatory side that we do not try to tip the scale one way or the other on, for example, energy sources. We want to encourage innovation in the marketplace and encourage new ideas to come forward.

From 1970 to 2017 U.S. criteria air pollution fell by 73 percent while the economy grew over 260 percent. In addition, we are ranked No. 1 in the world for access to safe drinking water. In addition, in 2018 we finalized 13 major deregulatory actions, saving Americans roughly $1.8 billion in regulatory costs.

2. Certainty

Opening statement:

"Since becoming the acting administrator I have focused our efforts on providing greater **certainty** to the American public: **certainty** in our EPA programs; **certainty** to the States, tribes, and local governments; and **certainty** on how we communicate risk. Personally, I have also worked to provide more **certainty** to Congress.

In place of discussing deregulatory dangers, he uses the term certainty (3x more than environment and environmental combined)

This is the void-form

3. Climate Change

Only uses them when others do so first

Bernie Sanders: I found it interesting, Mr. Wheeler, that you, as the nominee to be the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, in your opening statement, you did not mention the words climate change." How does it happen that the nominee to be the head of the Environmental Protection Agency does not mention the words climate change" at a time when the scientific community thinks climate change is the great environmental crisis facing this planet?

Discussion

- Void-form most prevalent

- Marketplace only 3 times

See what speech-acts are effective in countering this effort and paying attention to what discourse is used

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