
COMMENT

THE NATURE OF CITIES

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INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to comment on Katrina Wyman and Danielle Spiegel-Feld's new book, *Local Greens: Cities and Twenty-first Century Environmental Problems*—mostly because I am a big proponent of city power. Wyman and Spiegel-Feld are too . . . sort of. I say “sort of” because my impression after reading the book is that the authors, though impressed with the environmental work that cities (especially big ones, like New York) undertake, nevertheless still believe that the federal government should be the default location for most environmental policymaking, with cities providing a second-best solution when the central government is absent or unable to act. By contrast, I came to the opposite conclusion from Wyman and Spiegel-Feld's excellent case studies of New York City environmentalism: namely that the federal government is distinctly ill-equipped to address our serious environmental problems, even global ones, and that cities are more likely to do so for a number of important reasons.

This conclusion places me squarely in the “enthusiastic optimism” camp, as the authors describe it, which they contrast with much of legal literature's “skepticism about the potential for cities

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to address climate change and other environmental issues.”¹ Their book, as they write, “charts a middle path” between these two poles—certainly a judicious place for two law professors to land.² To be sure, there are good reasons to assign responsibility for tackling different kinds of environmental problems to different scales of government. Conventionally, it has been thought that large-scale, cross-border problems require large-scale, cross-border solutions, and that those solutions are best pursued by large-scale jurisdictions. This is the common local-national-global distinction, underpinning standard theoretical approaches to federalism and related concepts, such as devolution and subsidiarity.³ The usual claim is that local governments can and should do local things, but that problems involving inter-jurisdictional spillovers require regulation at a different scale—the regional, the national, or the global.⁴

This approach to the appropriate distribution of authority in a federal system tends to turn places into units on a map. When we talk about scale, the specific nature of a place—its characteristics, its economy, its density—becomes flattened; cities are treated like any other jurisdiction that exists at the local scale. But two points at the outset are important. First, cities are not just any local jurisdiction. Cities (especially large ones like New York) are also themselves a cause of and solution to many environmental problems, like global warming.⁵ And second, skepticism of cities’ relative efficacy in this policy area is mostly a function of them being constrained, not by their own foibles or pathologies, but by an institutional structure that privileges state and federal power over local power and thus ensures that cities remain legally weak.⁶ On these two scores, I am an “optimist”: first, that the city is itself a solution to environmental problems (including global ones); and second, that the city

¹ KATRINA WYMAN & DANIELLE SPIEGEL-FELD, *LOCAL GREENS: CITIES AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS* 8 (2025).

² *Id.*

³ See, e.g., Gordon Tullock, *Federalism: Problems of Scale*, 6 *PUB. CHOICE* 19, 19 (1969) (outlining the conventional idea that larger jurisdiction solutions to larger-scale problems are best because they can more likely contain externalities).

⁴ See Robert Dahl, *The City in the Future of Democracy*, 61 *AM. POL. SCI. REV.* 953, 958–59 (1967).

⁵ See DAVID OWEN, *GREEN METROPOLIS* 1–7 (2009).

⁶ See RICHARD SCHRAGGER, *CITY POWER: URBAN GOVERNANCE IN A GLOBAL AGE* 78–103 (2016).

possesses the appropriate incentives and capacity to address those problems. At the same time, I remain skeptical that cities in the U.S. will be allowed to do so by either the states or the federal government. This is a political problem, not a conceptual one, though one that *Local Greens* does not address directly. But I will do so briefly below.

I. CITY INTERESTS

My initial takeaways from *Local Greens* are that cities have historically stood at the forefront of environmental efforts and, to the extent we can talk about the city's "interests," those generally align fairly well with an environmentalist agenda. Wyman and Spiegel-Feld observe that cities were the first to adopt basic pollution and waste controls such as water treatment, sanitary sewers, street cleaning, and solid waste removal.⁷ Cities were also first to adopt land use controls to manage environmental spillovers; they were also the original park builders and tree planters.⁸

All this makes sense. To function as a viable long-term location for a dense settlement, a city needs clean water for its citizens to drink and use; sewer and solid waste systems to remove resident waste; reliable supplies of safe food for its residents to eat; uncontaminated land for residents to build on; and clean air for its residents to breathe. The failure to provide these basic environmental goods does not necessarily mean the end of the city—Victorian and industrial-era cities were notoriously polluted and many cities around the world remain so, especially for the poor. But as cities grow and prosper, the demand for—and provision of—environmental goods appear to be part of what it means to be a viable city.

That cities do all these things is consistent with Wyman and Spiegel-Feld's public choice approach to local environmental policy. *Local Greens* takes the position that those who govern cities generally prioritize economic growth above all. To the extent there is such a thing as a city's "goals," the authors assert (relying on scholars like Paul Peterson) that maximizing land use-based development (and therefore local tax revenue) seems to be the central one.⁹ This approach assumes that cities are in competitive races with

⁷ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 17–24.

⁸ *See id.*

⁹ See PAUL PETERSON, CITY LIMITS 3031 (1981).

each other for mobile capital and residents, which means that cities must provide goods that will encourage beneficial in-migration and reduce out-migration, especially of relatively well-off residents and businesses. Clean water and clean air are something both the rich and poor want (as are parks and other environmental amenities), and so cities are going to be inclined to provide them. On this theory, however, cities are unlikely to provide environmental goods that impose direct costs on well-off residents or firms while only providing diffuse or intangible benefits. And, similarly, cities are unlikely to adopt environmental policies that redistribute from the rich to the poor.¹⁰

In practice, Wyman and Spiegel-Feld observe that this dynamic means that cities are unlikely to address the problem of global warming, since city actions would impose direct costs on local firms and residents but the benefits would be diffuse; this is the distinction they draw between “local” and “global” public goods,¹¹ tracking the standard federalism literature. But notably, they also tell us that New York City has adopted greenhouse gas emissions targets¹² (as have hundreds of cities throughout the world),¹³ extensive carbon reduction plans, and specific building code requirements that require landowners to build “green.”¹⁴

That the city has done these things requires some explanation. One possibility is that the residents and businesses that cities want to attract have preferences for living in a location that is addressing climate change. In other words, these residents may have a “taste” for environmental sustainability and therefore demand that the city adopt carbon reduction regulations, even if those regulations impose local costs that are not fully offset by their global benefits.

Another possibility is that cities are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of global climate change, which voters and policymakers understand. Global warming contributes to sea level rise, heat waves, and other extreme weather events. Extreme heat waves and drought have led to catastrophic fires that have burned whole city

¹⁰ See *id.* at 17–29, 45–74.

¹¹ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 32–33.

¹² See *id.* at 57–59.

¹³ See GLOBAL COVENANT OF MAYORS, ENERGIZING CITY CLIMATE ACTION: THE 2022 GLOBAL COVENANT OF MAYORS IMPACT REPORT 4–5 (2022).

¹⁴ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 55–71.

neighborhoods to the ground (Los Angeles). Flooding from sea level rise has devastated cities (New Orleans and New York). Climate-change-induced natural disasters and everyday weather extremism are by definition more destructive in built-up areas than in remote or non-urban ones.¹⁵ And this means that cities, especially those people in cities who benefit from land-based development, should rationally pursue decarbonization and other green city efforts that might make those events less likely.

My own view, developed at length elsewhere,¹⁶ is that cities are not constrained in the way that Peterson and others claim—they can engage in much more redistributive policymaking than those accounts assume, and their choices in the environmental space are not limited to those policies that benefit mobile capital. That being said, businesses, banks, real estate firms, and developers are major political players in many cities, and those interests will often resist the imposition of costs that do not provide them direct benefits.¹⁷ But as Wyman and Spiegel-Feld also describe, other interest groups are at work in the city as well, including national environmental groups and local environmental justice organizations. The answer to “who governs”¹⁸ in the city is complicated and depends on specific issues. My general conclusion from reading *Local Greens*, however, is that it is understandable both as a matter of local politics and as a matter of urban survival that cities pursue an environmental agenda, even one that is multi-jurisdictional like global warming.

II. PREEMPTING CITIES

Whether cities have the resources and legal power to pursue the environmental agenda is another question. On Wyman and Spiegel-Feld’s public choice account, the most influential urban interest groups should pursue environmental policy for selfish reasons—to

¹⁵ See DAVID DODMAN ET AL., CLIMATE CHANGE 2022: IMPACTS, ADAPTATION AND VULNERABILITY 921–37 (2022) (identifying urban vulnerability to climate-change impacts including heat waves, flooding, and sea-level rise).

¹⁶ See SCHRAGGER, CITY POWER, *supra* note 6.

¹⁷ See Harvey Molotch, *The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place*, 82 AM. J. SOC. 309, 312 (1976).

¹⁸ See ROBERT DAHL, WHO GOVERNS? DEMOCRACY AND POWER IN AN AMERICAN CITY (1961).

protect their investments in the built environment.¹⁹ But, for some reason, these political forces are not as influential in state legislatures and the U.S. Congress, which have become increasingly hostile to environmental efforts of any kind, at whatever scale. The federal government is affirmatively rolling back environmental laws,²⁰ as are many conservative-leaning states.²¹ Indeed, climate change denialism appears to be the position of one of the two major U.S. political parties at this point.²² Meanwhile, states are aggressively preempting municipal environmental policies, from local plastic bag and Styrofoam bans, to fracking restrictions, to green building codes.²³

We have entered a period of national and state hostility to environmental policy. The 1970s explosion of federal environmental laws assumed that states and local governments would “race to the bottom” in environmental regulation.²⁴ Wyman and Spiegel-Feld tell the story of how New Jersey cities welcomed polluting industries for jobs and tax base, even as their smokestack emissions crossed the river into New York City.²⁵ This story fits the standard justification for national environmental laws; the cross-border scope

¹⁹ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 25–35.

²⁰ See Jody Freeman & Sharon Jacobs, *Structural Deregulation*, 135 HARV. L. REV. 585, 593 (2021); see also FRANK J. THOMPSON, KENNETH K. WONG & BARRY G. RABE, *TRUMP, THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRESIDENCY, AND FEDERALISM* (2020).

²¹ See Ramón Cruz, *Preempting Capitalism—An Alarming Trend Harming Climate Action*, Local Solutions Support Center (Jan. 30, 2023), <https://www.supportdemocracy.org/the-latest/ramon-cruz-blog> [<https://perma.cc/5CRC-XU58>].

²² See REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE, *2024 GOP PLATFORM: MAKE AMERICAN GREAT AGAIN! 7* (July 8, 2024) (“We will . . . terminat[e] the Socialist Green New Deal. Republicans will unleash Energy Production from all sources . . . to immediately slash Inflation and power American homes, cars, and factories with reliable, abundant, and affordable Energy.”).

²³ See RICHARD SCHRAGGER, *STATE PREEMPTION OF LOCAL LAWS: PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF SUBSTANTIVE AREAS: SNAPSHOT AS OF MARCH 2017* 7 (2017), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/State-Preemption-of-Local-Laws.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/7CL9-VHP6>].

²⁴ Richard L. Revesz, *Federalism and Environmental Regulation: A Public Choice Analysis*, 115 HARV. L. REV. 553, 555–63 (2001).

²⁵ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 20–21.

of the problem and inter-jurisdictional competition for tax base made local regulation unlikely and infeasible.²⁶

The reverse seems to be happening now, however. Cities are racing to the top in environmental regulation while the national government races to the bottom. Perhaps this is just a cyclical pattern: as national interest wanes, local interest is ignited. But I am not so sure. Over thirty years ago, Professor Ricky Revesz famously questioned the race to the bottom justification for national environmental law.²⁷ Economist William Fischel has argued that local governments are likely to be good environmental stewards because they do not want to foul their own nests.²⁸ It is possible that the national government's commitment to environmental protection and the resulting landmark statutes of the 1970s were an aberration—a moment when even political conservatives could be environmentalists. Since then, however, the right has slowly and now more quickly abandoned the environmental movement.²⁹ Climate change denialism is the logical endpoint of that realignment.

National and state hostility to environmentalism seems predictable. Industry exercises outsized power in Congress and in state legislatures.³⁰ Consider the automotive, oil and gas, coal, plastics,

²⁶ See Kirsten H. Engel, *State Environmental Standard-Setting: Is There a "Race" and Is It "To the Bottom"?*, 48 HASTINGS L.J. 271 (1997).

²⁷ See Richard L. Revesz, *Rehabilitating Interstate Competition: Rethinking the "Race-to-the-Bottom" Rationale for Federal Environmental Regulation*, 67 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1210 (1992).

²⁸ See WILLIAM A. FISCHEL, *THE HOMEVOTER HYPOTHESIS: HOW HOME VALUES INFLUENCE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TAXATION, SCHOOL FINANCE, AND LAND-USE POLICIES* 4–7, 71–75 (2001).

²⁹ See Riley E. Dunlap & Aaron M. McCright, *Challenging Climate Change: The Denial Countermovement*, in RILEY E. DUNLAP & ROBERT J. BRULLE (EDS.), *CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOCIETY* 300–332 (2015).

³⁰ See LEE DRUTMAN, *THE BUSINESS OF AMERICA IS LOBBYING: HOW CORPORATIONS BECAME POLITICIZED AND POLITICS BECAME MORE CORPORATE* 1 (2015) ("large corporations have achieved a pervasive position that is unprecedented in American political history. The most active companies now have upwards of 100 lobbyists representing them who are active on a similar number of different bills in a given session of Congress"); ALEX HERTEL-FERNANDEZ, *STATE CAPTURE: HOW CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISTS, BIG BUSINESS, AND WEALTH DONORS RESHAPED THE AMERICAN STATES—AND THE NATION* 23–31, 55 (2019) (describing how a trio of conservative, business-supported lobbying groups were able to very quickly get state legislatures to pass stand-your-ground, right-to-work, and voter ID laws).

clothing, and tech industries, just to name a few. The list itself suggests the challenge. Environmental laws impose heavy burdens on specific regulated entities, but the benefits of regulation are often diffuse. Clean air and water and a cooling planet are public goods, but they are hard to provide because any given smokestack regulation protects a diffuse and relatively unorganized mass of people. The surprise is that environmental policy gained any traction at the national level at all.

The relationship between the city and the environment is more immediate. As already noted, cities are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, as they are often near water, are always threatened by fire, and have capital-intensive investments that are worth a lot to their owners. Cities are the primary beneficiaries of clean water, which is why they are so careful to protect their supplies.³¹ Choking smog and particulate matter are a problem for the people who have to breathe them—in cities, generally. But many state governments (and now the federal government) seem uninterested in addressing these concerns and seemingly do not want cities to address them either.

III. ANTI-URBANISM

It is interesting to observe that Trumpism is both hostile to environmentalism as well as virulently anti-city. Trump himself has ratcheted up the attacks on both. As to the former, Trump has basically gutted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or plans to do so.³² As to the latter, he regularly denigrates cities as “cesspools.”³³ He has shared images of himself dumping feces from

³¹ See *N.Y.C. Water Supply*, N.Y. DEP’T OF ENV’T CONSERVATION, <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/watersheds/management/new-york-city-water-supply> [<https://perma.cc/XMK3-AD4J>] (last visited Apr. 1, 2026).

³² See CHRIS SELLERS ET AL., BURNING DOWN THE EPA: DOCUMENTING THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S HISTORIC ASSAULT 3 (2025), <https://envirodatagov.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Burning-Down-the-EPA.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/CCA3-EQ5Q>].

³³ William B. Davis et al., ‘Cesspools,’ ‘Hellholes’ and ‘Beautiful Places’: *How Trump Describes the U.S.*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 1, 2024), <https://www.ny-times.com/interactive/2024/11/02/us/politics/trump-places-quotes.html> [<https://perma.cc/TK5X-A76V>]. <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115398251623299921>

planes onto city residents and deployed troops to a number of U.S. cities³⁴ in the guise of fighting a non-existent crime wave.³⁵

That our politics is currently dominated by anti-environmentalists and anti-urbanists is not a coincidence. These trends seem to go together. Structurally, we know that the U.S. Congress is biased against urban states—the Constitution requires that Montana and New York have the same representation in the United States Senate. American cities skew Democratic, and red states have effectively isolated them politically through gerrymandering.³⁶ City dwellers are underrepresented both in the states and in the federal government.³⁷

One might think that rural states would be environmentally sensitive, and in some cases they have been. But rural states tend to favor their extractive industries and agriculture,³⁸ and are inclined

³⁴ See Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TRUTH SOCIAL (Oct. 18, 2025, 9:32 PM),

<https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115398251623299921> (featuring a video in which Trump drops excrement from a fighter jet onto a large city).

³⁵ Moira Donegan, *Trump's domestic troop deployments aren't about crime—they're about intimidation*, THE GUARDIAN (Sept. 4, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/sep/04/trump-troop-deployment-intimidation-crime>

³⁶ See Paul A. Diller, *Toward Fairer Representation in State Legislatures*, 33 STAN. L. & POL'Y REV. 135, 144–52 (2022) (discussing how gerrymandering has helped Republicans maintain legislative control “despite losing statewide vote totals”); JONATHAN RODDEN, *WHY CITIES LOSE: THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE URBAN-RURAL POLITICAL DIVIDE* 186–87 (2019).

³⁷ See JONATHAN RODDEN, *WHY CITIES LOSE: THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE URBAN-RURAL POLITICAL DIVIDE* (2019) (exploring how Democrats win in cities but still fail to gain legislative majorities).

³⁸ See Ann M. Eisenberg, *Rural Disaffection and the Regulatory State*, 126 PENN ST. L. REV.

739, 744, 774 (2022) (describing “the seemingly tense relationships between rural communities and federal agencies” resulting from “rural communities’ close proximity to vast expanses of public land, greater dependence on natural resource-based work, and heavier involvement with agriculture”). In 2015, Texas and Oklahoma each amended their oil and gas statutes to preempt local bans on fracking, after the City of Denton, Texas, had banned the industry by referendum. David B. Spence, *Regulation and the New Politics of (Energy) Market Entry*, 95 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 327, 359 (2019). See also Alexander A. Reinert, *The Right to Farm: Hog-Tied and Nuisance-Bound*, 73 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1694, 1723 (1998) (noting that “[i]f RTFs [Right to Farm] in rural areas protect industrial operations, they will stymie efforts to prevent the degradation of the environment that industrial facilities cause”).

to resist environmental mandates from Washington. Rural states are also eager for industrial investment.³⁹ In an era when cities dominate the economic landscape, states with smaller urbanized areas may be more inclined to adopt a generally deregulatory approach. That seems to be the story of the flight of capital to the South and Southwest starting in the latter third of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

That urban dwellers favor environmental regulation is not merely a function of ideological sorting. Yes, city dwellers tend to be younger, more educated, more diverse, and more liberal.⁴¹ But, as I have already noted, city dwellers also have immediate concerns about how climate change and other environmental harms directly affect their health and well-being. Extreme weather events affect rural people too, quite regularly—but the costs to cities inundated by fire or flood are enormous.⁴² Urban land is also more valuable than

³⁹ See Marty Romitti et al., *State Approaches to Developing Rural Economies*, PENN. CTR. FOR REG’L ECON. COMPETITIVENESS (May 2019), https://creconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SEDE-Network-Report_Rural-ED-Strategies_05_2019-.pdf [<https://perma.cc/K84Y-448P>] (“Rural development issues frequently surface as a key concern to state leaders, and several states have recently acted by implementing programs specifically targeted to building local capacity and enhancing the infrastructure of rural communities.”).

⁴⁰ See Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Boosterism: Industrial Recruitment, Economic Development, and Growth Politics in the Developing Sunbelt*, in *SUNBELT RISING: THE POLITICS OF PLACE, SPACE, AND REGION* 31, 33, 57 (Michelle Nickerson & Darren Dochuk eds., 2011) (describing how business leaders in the Sunbelt sought to turn their cities into “oases from the powerful, intrusive liberal regulatory state through local and state policies to create and sustain a ‘business climate’” and how this “transformed the South and Southwest” in cities like “San Jose, Atlanta, Charlotte and Houston”).

⁴¹ See Kim Parker et al., *Demographic and Economic Trends in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (May 28, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities> [<https://perma.cc/3F48-Y72F>].

⁴² See Media Release, Munich RE, *Wildfires Around Los Angeles, Severe Thunderstorms: US Natural Catastrophes Dominate Global Losses in First Half of 2025* (July 29, 2025), https://www.munichre.com/content/dam/munichre/mrwebsitespressreleases/MunichRe-Media-Release-2025-07-29.pdf/_jcr_content/renditions/original./MunichRe-Media-Release-2025-07-29.pdf [<https://perma.cc/6HP9-XHX3>] (describing the historically high costs of the wildfires in the urban and suburban areas of Los Angeles in 2025); Nat’l Oceanic & Atmospheric Admin., *Fact Sheet: Flooding—Our Nation’s Most Frequent and Costly Natural Disaster* (2010), <https://www.fbiic.gov/public/2010/mar/FloodingHistoryandCausesFS.PDF> [<https://perma.cc/GK4N-UJ3T>]

rural land; those who own it should also be attentive to the risks of climate change.

Nevertheless, even well-meaning reformers are skeptical of city power. Consider the movement to override cities' land use and zoning authority. The "Yes in My Backyard" (YIMBY) movement in California and elsewhere has targeted local land use and state and local environmental laws, arguing that those laws block or raise the costs of construction, thus contributing to a nationwide housing shortage.⁴³ Wyman and Spiegel-Feld mention this only briefly, noting that encouraging more density close to public transportation—one goal of the YIMBY movement—may be an environmentally sensible way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁴ They also note, however, that much building in cities occurs in vulnerable floodplains, thereby exposing a tension between YIMBYism's "build, build, build" mantra and sensible resilience-oriented land use planning. Even with one foot in progressive policy circles, YIMBYism's libertarian, market-favoring valence can be antagonistic to environmental regulation. Overriding city land use authority is just as preemptive as overriding cities' green building codes.

Why don't we have more faith in cities? As noted at the outset, I am a proponent of city power in all realms, and environmental policy is no exception. As *Local Greens* shows, the development of basic municipal services was itself a key moment in environmental history.⁴⁵ And while city economies can drive environmental harm, they can also ameliorate those harms. In the last decades, cities have shifted from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based one, a change that has arguably advanced the cause of clean air and water even more than regulation. Deindustrialization has been a difficult process for many cities in the U.S. But it has also made for cleaner urban spaces, accessible city waterfronts, and improved air quality,

(describing how floods have historically been the most costly natural disaster in the U.S., and that "coastal cities are particularly vulnerable" to flooding from hurricanes); Paul Reynolds, *The 5 Most At-Risk Places for Natural Disasters in the U.S. Are All Major Metropolitan Areas*, Money (Jan. 13, 2021), <https://money.com/worst-places-for-disasters/> [<https://perma.cc/LP4A-3DWY>] (Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Miami-Dade, the Bronx, and Riverside, California are the most at risk because of the high value of property in those areas).

⁴³ See Richard C. Schragger, *The Perils of Land Use Deregulation*, 170 U. PA. L. REV. 125, 125 (2022).

⁴⁴ See WYMAN & SPIEGEL-FELD, *supra* note 1, at 100–103.

⁴⁵ See *id.* at 19.

all of which have made urban downtowns more popular and likely drivers of a global urban resurgence.⁴⁶

Sadly, city skepticism has sometimes seemed baked into the environmental movement, which often treats cities as a problem to be fixed. Cities are themselves part of nature, however; the built environment is a feature of the natural world. Sociability and co-location in settlements seems to be a trait of humankind—maybe the most important part of being human. It is a mistake then to think of cities as being somehow opposed to or in conflict with the “environment”—a view that sometimes undergirds the suggestion that rural or wild places are more consonant with “nature” than are urban ones.

Environmentalism is often confused with an aesthetic: forests, green spaces, vistas unadulterated with urban things; or it is identified with preserving wild lands as untouched; or it emphasizes dispersing or deconcentrating populations on the grounds that densely populated places are more environmentally suspect. But this distinction between nature and cities, and thus between environmentalism and urbanism, is artificial. It mistakes pastoralism for environmentalism, when those are not the same. That conflation tends to assume that cities are a problem that must be solved by environmental policy. But cities should be treated instead as part of the environmental fabric and an appropriate location and solution to environmental problems.

CONCLUSION

Local Greens takes this “city-as-solution” approach mainly through a study of New York City’s various environmental efforts, which turn out to be fairly extensive. As federal and state governments have been undermining environmental regulation, cities like New York have been moving forward. Urbanism and environmentalism are in alignment—not all the time, but still often, and in many important ways. Furthermore, the hostility towards both environmentalism and urbanism stem from a similar set of beliefs. Living in a city requires an environmental infrastructure that must be maintained and paid for; it requires thousands and even millions of strangers to cooperate in making daily life possible; and it requires high levels of redistribution to maintain an environment that

⁴⁶ See SCHRAGGER, CITY POWER, *supra* note 6, at 191–217.

promotes public health and safety. All of these interactions are alien to a political culture that aggressively embraces automobiles, outright rejects renewable energy because it is un-American, and accepts no limits on consumption. Hostility to big government, taxation, and regulation is hostility to the notion of linked fate that is a necessary precondition for urban living. It also seriously undercuts our capacity to address an environmental crisis that has become existential. Cities know how to act collectively in the face of such threats. We just have to give them the power to do so.

