Millions of us citizens, for years, have been taking action to bring about positive environmental change in our country and for our world. Individually we have been recycling paper and cardboard and using our own cloth bags at grocery stores to “Save the Trees”. We have been dutifully recycling number one and number two plastic bottles and containers in the desire to save our nonrenewable resources. For Forty years we have been turning out the lights when we leave the room. We have searched for and found energy efficient appliances and vehicles. We turn the water off in the sink while brushing our teeth. We have been composting our kitchen scraps and keeping the pressure up in our car tires. We have been taking the hard path by paying extra for the trash pickup service that offered recycling. We have been using public transit when we can find it. We bought the curly fluorescent light bulbs to replace our old incandescents. We have spent decades separating our recyclables and putting them out on the street in their own special bins. We want to help. We have sincerely been trying to tread lightly.

What positive environmental gains have we made in this country and why.

Well it has been more than 40 years since a river burned. A law was passed, the Clean Water Act.

The Mountains on three sides of Los Angeles can now be seen on most days of the year. Again a law, the Clean Air Act.

The hole in our protective ozone layer is now leveling off and starting to get thicker and more protective. Why? An international treaty called the Montreal Protocol.

Although they may get a warm fuzzy feeling for doing it; positive changes have not been made by Mr. and Mrs. Treehugger ritualistically separating their trash before taking it to the curb.

It is the Federal Government that has the best chance of making any kind of difference for our children and their children. Governments collect taxes, build infrastructure, fund important research, they provide an education for the people; they protect its citizens from harm. Oh wait what was that last one? Harm? Harm from aggressive foreign Nations, Harm from unfair trade agreements, Harm from consequences of Global Climate Change. Yes!

I want to tell a short story: There was a town with a nice big grass covered square. Everyone knew that this was a space for all the towns’ citizens. Well one of the citizens raised cattle and his land was getting a little thin. So he put one of his cows out on the town square. That cow got fat and did quite well, so soon his friends and neighbors had their cows out there too. You know where this is heading. Soon the grass was gone and erosion set in and the land started washing away. Finally the Mayor stepped up to his responsibilities and made a rule that no one
could put their cattle on the town square. That it was for Frisbees and picnics. The grass grew back, the fire in the river went out, the mountains were visible again, and the earth's protective shield was restored.

Environmental Protection Agency you are the Mayor. This calls for a topside down solution. Even millions of Mr. and Mrs. Treehuggers could not change a thing. You must do what we cannot do; you must get laws passed and enforce existing ones to protect our environment. We have tried for many years thinking and hoping our individual efforts would make our world safe for our children, but they will not. We face the biggest challenge we have ever faced with Climate Change. We are only beginning to see what we have caused. The Monarch butterfly is rapidly declining. Maple Syrup harvesting is becoming a thing of the past, animal migrations are skewed and species are going extinct. We are experiencing droughts and fires and hurricanes and seem to set new temperature records every year. This and much more have been predicted by the International Panel on Climate Change; the world’s climate experts. We are in real trouble.

Will protecting our climate cost more than “business as usual”? If so, I am willing to pay. Just imagine the energy saving technologies that will be created when a “True Cost” is applied to energy. It is not just “How fast we can get it out of the ground”. It is our future, our safety, our health, and the other species we share this great planet with.

Let us do everything we can now so our grandchildren might respect us. We must take this small step on a long path towards sustainability. It will not be cheap and it will not be easy, but we must try. Please put your foot forward.

Chuck Niemeyer

Citizen of the United States and the Earth