**The Truth About Representative Vern Buchanan’s Environmental Record**

*By Jane Sellick, Vice President, Manatee Democratic Environmental Caucus*

Introduction

Representative Buchanan’s recent media blitz in the Bradenton Herald and on his own website in opposition to President Trump’s current assault on the Endangered Species Act sports an action shot of our county mascot, the manatee, one of the species about to be booted off the endangered list. Representative Buchanan expresses his grave concern at the potential loss of this and other invaluable species. As this drew a cynical ‘ huh’ from me and several of my fellow Manatee Democratic Environmental Caucus members, we decided to research and write an article on the Senator’s actual environmental record. We reviewed all of the bills classified as environmental that he has voted on since 2015 and some key bills in several categories back to 2010.

As a result of our research, I have developed a theory of Buchanan’s environmental voting record and stated positions that I call ‘Fluff’ vs ‘the Real Stuff’. ‘Fluff’ entails his support for popular pro-environmental issues of concern to many of his coastal constituents in high visibility, low risk ways. Support for bills that have no chance of passing or require no funding or contain no regulatory action but seem to at least partially address serious environmental issues fall under this category. They are largely distractions from what actually needs to be done for the environment. ‘The Real Stuff’ is his consistently conservative, anti-environmental voting record. I will compare these two approaches to several crucial environmental issues.

 Drilling for Oil and Gas off Florida’s Shores

This is Buchanan’s most favorable environmental issue as he has consistently supported at least a moratorium on new drilling leases since shortly after the Deepwater Horizon spill and explosion in 2010. Representative Buchanan was quick to sponsor a bill (HR 5436, 2010) that, considering the disastrous circumstances of the spill, was a Fluff. It called for a moratorium on new leases until the spill was stopped and the cause of the explosion was determined, a minimum response in the face of such a huge disaster. His bill established the practice of stopping new leases on a temporary basis, prompting many attempts to extend or make it permanent, none of which has passed Congress. Vern actually co-sponsored the 2015 moratorium version, a bipartisan affair sponsored by David Jolly-R FL. The newest version (HR 1091, sponsored by Joe Cunningham -D, SC) is a permanent ban on new leases for much of the Atlantic coast. It has passed the newly Democratic House with the help of Buchanan’s yea vote and moved on to the solidly Republican Senate, another safe vote for Vern, whether it passes or not.

Demonstrating that banning new oil leases off FL coasts is a fluff issue for Buchanan rather than a true pro environmental stance, he recently voted against HR 1146 which prohibits exploration and drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. The opening of this wilderness preserve to drilling has been fought by environmentalists for decades.

Red Tide

On this issue, Buchanan has a widely touted Fluff co-sponsorship to his credit, HR 3650, the

Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2017. He lists it on his website as one of his major environmental accomplishments, but what it actually did was relegate Red Tide and related hypoxia (oxygen deficiency) from monitoring and regulation under the Clean Water Act where the Obama administration had labored to place it, to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) purview. Under the Clean Water Act the EPA could have established acceptable levels of red tide toxin in coastal waters and moved toward regulating human accelerants of outbreaks such as nutrient runoff from farms and lawns, wastewater and septic tank leaks and phosphate mining discharges. Under NOAA it’s back to research on mitigation techniques, none of which have been found to be possible and/or cost effective on a sufficient scale to stop red tide from periodically wreaking havoc on FL beaches, wildlife and businesses. He has also voted against every attempt to control water pollution and warming Gulf waters, see sections on Water and Climate Change.

Water

In the general category of water pollution Representative Buchanan doesn’t even have a Fluff action in support of clean water. Buchanan has not issued a statement against Trump’s current effort to rollback Obama era expansions of the Clean Water Act. In fact, Buchanan co-sponsored a bill (HR 5078, 2014) to prevent Obama’s expansion of the definition of “waters of the United States” to include more feeder streams and rivers to be covered under the Clean Water Act and voted for the Congressional resolution (SJRes 22, 2016) opposing this expansion. Florida’s consistent failure to enforce the Clean Water Act is frequently cited by environmental scientists as a major cause of increasing levels of red tide and decreasing fish and marine mammal populations in Florida waters.\*

 He has also voted to remove the need for an EPA permit to spray pesticides on navigable waters (HR 953, 2015) and again in 2016 to loosen regulations on applying pesticides to water. The second bill, the ‘Zika Vector Control Act’, was obviously in response to the 2016 Zika outbreak in Southern Florida, but a wholesale deregulation of pesticide application to water is asking for unintended negative consequences.

\* In regard to industrial pollution, for instance: h[ttps://environmentflorida.org/reports/fle/troubled-waters-2018](https://environmentflorida.org/reports/fle/troubled-waters-2018).

Climate Change

Representative Buchanan’s Fluff issue for climate change is opposition to President Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord. He made it official by voting for HR9, 2019 which compels the President to take action on Accord provisions previously committed to by the US.This bill is going nowhere in the Republican dominated Senate but makes for a good environmental cred for Vern.

By contrast, Buchanan has voted for all of the recent Republican backed bills attempting to control the debate about climate change. HR 348, 2015 which prohibits federal agencies from considering the ‘social cost’ of carbon in environmental reviews got his yea vote. He also voted for H Con Res 119, 2018 which declares that a carbon tax would be detrimental to the US economy. Many economists believe that carbon pricing, a market based method, is the best way to reduce fossil fuel usage and finance the transition to a sustainable energy economy. Of course, it is not popular with the oil and gas industry, their lobbyists and their Republican supporters.

Buchanan has voted for every legislative attempt to prevent the EPA from regulating greenhouse gas emissions from power plants (e.g.HR 910, 2011) and for the repeal of Obama’s increased standards (SJ Res 23, 2015) with most of his Republican colleagues.

Endangered Species, Vern’s new Fluff

Representative Buchanan’s opposition to Trump’s threatened decimation of the Endangered Species List is a Fluff issue with a manatee photo op. He has no control over whether Trump accomplishes this or not except to sponsor legislation prohibiting it, Buchanan has no Endangered Species legislation to his credit and has voted against land management bills (such as HR146 2009) that would expand protected habitats. More recently he voted for expanding unlicensed hunting on federal lands ( HR 2406, 2016). Although he consistently supports maintaining funds for the Endangered Species Act (HR amdt 735, 2012) and opposes bills preventing the listing of specific species (H Amdt 230, 2015) he has done nothing to address the main causes of extinction-habitat loss and climate change. Protecting endangered species is a perfect Fluff for Buchanan, it is a complex and therefore easily misrepresented issue of great concern to many Floridians.