Thank you. I’m honored be here with all of you. The kind of coalition you’ve brought together is an inspiration and it’s what I hope to see happen with a campaign I call And Beauty for All.

Now I’m going to be a bit provocative. I hope that’s OK.

You want to build thriving and resilient communities, ensure the health of natural resources for future generations of humans and wildlife, and connect people across the political divides that so polarize us today.

That’s what I want too.

So I’m excited to share a vision with you.

But first, I’ve got bad news and good news.

I’ll start with the bad—you may already know it.

I think most of us have personal heroes and mine was the late, great environmentalist David Brower, who built the Sierra Club and was the leading American voice for conservation in the second half of the 20th Century. Some of you may have known him. Dave advocated what he called “CPR for the Earth”—conservation, preservation and restoration. Exactly what you all do.

I knew Dave for the last 28 years of his life and visited him at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley, where he lived, only a few days before he died in 2000. It was clear that the end was near, but when I left, I told him, “The next time I see you I hope you’ll be back out there healthy again and fighting the good fight.”

He looked me right in the eye and said, “John, I don’t think that’s in the cards, but it’s been a great 88 years.”
I think that’s what we all want to be able to say when our time is up, however much or little time we have. We want to know that our lives have counted for something, that we made a difference, not just a killing.

I think David Brower died a happy man, but he was certainly a worried one.

In many of his speeches, he used a powerful metaphor to point out the absurdity of our current faith in \textit{limitless} growth. He compressed the age of the earth, estimated by scientists at some 4.6 \textit{billion} years, into one week.

When you do this, a day represents about 650 million years, an hour, 27 million, a minute, about 450,000, and a second, 7,500. Think about that.

On Sunday morning, the earth congeals from cosmic gases, and by late Monday, the first tiny life forms emerge. In the next few days, they become larger, more complex and more wondrous. Before dawn on the last day—Saturday—strangely-shaped creatures fill the Cambrian seas.

In the afternoon of that \textit{very last} day of the week, giant reptiles thunder across the land and fill the sky. The dinosaurs enjoy a long run, commanding Earth’s stage for about six hours, before an asteroid or a series of volcanic eruptions makes earth too cold for them.

Late that evening, mammals, able to withstand a cooler world, flourish and evolve, until, \textit{less than a minute before midnight}, on that final night of the week, we show up.

Only about 10,000 years ago in real time, \textit{less than two seconds before midnight} in our metaphor, humans develop agriculture and start building cities. At a third of a second before midnight, Buddha is born; at a quarter of a second, Christ; at a fifth of a second, Mohammed.

Only a thirtieth of a second before midnight, we launch the Industrial Revolution, and, after World War II, perhaps \textit{one hundredth of a second before midnight} in our week of creation—again, on the \textit{final} night—the age of consumerism—or what I’ve called “the age of Affluenza,” begins.

In that hundredth of a second, Brower and others have pointed out, we have managed to consume more resources than did all human beings all together in all of previous history.
We have diminished our soils, wildlife, fisheries, fossil fuels and forests by half. We have caused the extinction of countless other species, and, most scientists agree, we have dramatically changed the climate.

Think of what it means that we have done all of this in this blink of the geological eye.

There are people, Brower said, who believe that what we have been doing for that last one-hundredth of a second can go on indefinitely. They are considered normal, reasonable, intelligent people; but, really, they are stark, raving mad.

We can’t grow on like this.

I think you know that, and you know we don’t have much time to change our ways, especially if you’ve looked out the window in large parts of California.

But we know too, from the research, that gloom and doom like I just offered you, is more likely to inspire passivity than action.

We will have to convince our fellow citizens that learning to live responsibly and in balance with nature really can mean a better, happier life.

And we need to convey that message with language and examples that touch the heart and soul as well as the head—good news, if you will.

That’s what Bob Sampayan is doing.

Bob is the mayor of Vallejo, that gritty, very diverse, industrial port city on the north end of San Francisco Bay.

Bob grew up in a family of former farmworkers in Salinas and was using a short-handled hoe in the lettuce fields by the age of 12. He worked his way through college and became a police officer—a job he held for nearly 30 years.

He calls himself “America’s first Steampunk mayor.” You can look that up. He’s not the first person I’d expect to be a committed environmentalist.

But what Bob is trying to do is to bring more beauty, and more nature, more “wild,” if you will, back into Vallejo. It’s exactly what I hope every city and town in America will begin to do—and sooner rather than later.
Each September, Vallejo hosts a festival called *Visions of the Wild* to introduce young people to nature and to use art and design to create the kind of beauty that can build community. *Visions* gets people out on local trails and Solano County land trusts, gets them in kayaks on the Bay and boats on the Napa River.

At the same time, the city is working to re-forest blighted neighborhoods, restore wetlands, create new city trails and parks, and preserve open space for wildlife and for exploration.

This work builds on fruitful long-term efforts by the Solano Resource Conservation District, which has provided outdoor education to thousands of students. Those students have participated in watershed restoration activities, assessed water quality, planted trees, shrubs and grasses, and learned about human impact on these wild spaces within urban communities.

Solano RCD and Visions of the Wild are engaging citizens in dialogue about the kind of future they’d like to see. The work also unites the city with organizations like the Forest Service and many others. Mayor Sampayan is excited by its promise.

When I interviewed him several months ago, I found we had something special in common—a childhood love of nature, and especially of Yosemite National Park. We had both gone there as children with our families, and those experiences were formative.

Along with Bob’s trips to Fremont Peak State Park, near his home in Salinas, they awakened a deep appreciation for the natural world, and the necessity of restoring it to cities like Vallejo, so that it can work its marvelous magic on all of us and our children.

We know—and I know you know—from *so many* studies, that nature and open space improve our health and our happiness in dozens of ways.

What we may *not* know is that living, working and playing amidst beauty brings us together, making us kinder, more tolerant and more generous. It could be exactly the cure we need for our current polarization.

Mayor Sampayan knows this from first-hand experience.
He told me that when he was barely out of high school, he and his brother would often drive up to Yosemite and camp for the weekend. Still teenagers, they loved to play their music loud in the campground.

“We were stupid kids,” Bob explained. But one day a man came over and asked them to turn down the volume.

He didn’t shout at them. He just calmly asked them why they came to Yosemite and they told him of their love for the beauty of the place. He agreed and asked them to understand that, for his family, part of the beauty was the quiet and the birdsongs and other sounds of nature.

They turned the music off. That conversation brought them together and Bob and his brother became good friends with that family.

That’s what nature can do. That’s what beauty can do.

But we can’t all get to Yosemite, and even if we can, we don’t get to wild places like that very often. We need to re-wild our cities and even our rural communities, and encourage children, especially, to experience trees and flowers and animals and open space on a regular basis.

When I was growing up in South San Francisco in the late 1950s, I only got to Yosemite in the summer. But in those days, we had lots of open space right on the edge of the suburb where I lived.

We were as free to hike through the grassy hills as the cattle were to graze there. We found rocks to climb, and ponds full of frogs and salamanders.

We could hike all the way to the ocean to wade in the tide pools, excited by all the marine life they contained.

But by the time I graduated from high school in 1964, all that open space was completely covered with suburban homes—the “Little Boxes on the Hillsides” that Malvina Reynolds sang about.

As California’s population grows, all the open space that remains will be coveted for development. What we save now is all we will ever save—for all time--so that our children and theirs may discover some of the joys of nature that I took for granted.
You know, we’re rather obsessed with the “economy” these days—with growth and money and all it will buy. But undifferentiated economic growth is not only ultimately unsustainable, it also isn’t delivering happiness.

In fact, the latest United Nations World Happiness Report shows that American satisfaction with life has actually fallen since 2010, when we were still in the Great Recession.

John Muir understood that a rising material standard of living wasn’t enough.

“Everyone needs beauty as well as bread,” he proclaimed.

The need for beauty may atrophy without access to it, but it never dies.

In the late 1800s, Muir marveled that San Francisco’s street urchins, living in squalor, asked him for flowers on his return from hikes on Mt. Tamalpais or the Berkeley hills.

“As soon as they caught sight of my wild bouquet, they quit their pitiful attempts at amusement in the miserable dirty streets and ran after me begging a flower. ‘Please Mister, give me a flower, Mister,’ in a humble, begging tone as if expecting to be refused.

“And when I stopped and distributed the treasures...the dirty faces fairly glowed with enthusiasm while they gazed at them and fondled them reverently as if looking into the faces of angels from heaven.”

Or as the words to that powerful song written for the striking immigrant textile workers of New York and Lawrence, Massachusetts, put it:

Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but roses too.

And you know what Aldo Leopold said: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

Beauty as well as bread.

I’d like to interest you in a campaign I’m working on called And Beauty for All-- in hopes that in seeking to restore and protect natural beauty, create lovely urban designs, support local sustainable agriculture, and bring art into our communities, we can also build community and reduce polarization.
When I was in high school, I spent several weeks each summer backpacking throughout the Sierra with my friends.

My dad had taught us how, and our parents trusted us to backpack on our own from the age of 14. We walked from trailhead to trailhead, then hitchhiked to small Owens Valley towns to resupply our food.

I learned most of the lessons that have shaped who I am from those experiences.

I call what I learned THE BACKPACKING THEORY OF LIFE.

When you backpack, you learn what’s essential to carry, and what isn’t—to find a balance between the pain caused by too little food or water or protection from the elements, and the extra weight on your back that will make you miserable.

You find you don’t need a lot to be happy: friendship, healthy exercise, fresh air, leisure time, freedom of movement, and above all, beautiful surroundings.

My friends and I walked in beauty as the Navajo say.

Beauty above us in the wide crystal sky, beauty below in the fields of colorful wildflowers.

Beauty before us in mountains, lakes, and waterfalls, in the grand thunderheads and cleansing rain.

Beauty in the deer that wandered by at dawn and dusk, in the flash of the trout on still water, in the dew on the morning meadows, and in the ever-present song of the white-crowned sparrow.

Over the years, I’ve come to think of America as a backpacker who didn’t learn its lessons.

Our national backpack lacks some essential things, especially for the poor.

As one student put it to me, we’ve got a defective first aid kit, for example.

Some Americans truly need more.

But as a country, we are as weighted down with stuff, like a backpacker with too big a load who has fallen over backwards and struggles, like an upside-down beetle or turtle, to get right-side up.
Have you seen the movie, WILD? Do you remember when Reese Witherspoon puts on her pack for the first time and falls over backwards? She had to get rid of things so she could even stand up.

Our lives are as overloaded with stuff, with expectations, with tight schedules, with hurry and worry and stress. The straps are cutting into our shoulders and we are angry, dammit.

And we are blaming everything—women, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, gays, minorities, regulations, taxes—instead of the misguided values and priorities that have left us where we are.

We will not find what we need by worshipping economic growth and material progress. In fact, we just might drive ourselves to extinction.

We will need to live more lightly on the earth, more slowly, appreciating simpler things, natural things. We will only do this if our children live with nature around them and come to appreciate the wonder of all living things.

Perhaps we cannot imagine that now because we have lost much of the beauty of the world.

We have to get it back.

That’s where And Beauty for All comes in. Beauty. For all. I see those words as another way of saying Environmental Justice. As we work toward resilience and protection of the biosphere, we may need different language to widen our appeal.

Words like environmentalist, and green, and even sustainability, often stop our conversations before they start. Yet an old word, beauty, a term we rarely use these days, rarely hear in political speeches, can get the conversation going again.

I got the idea for And Beauty for All from two experiences.

While making my latest film, REDEFINING PROSPERITY, I learned how the fight for beauty, the fight to save their beautiful Yuba River, brought so-called “hippies” and “rednecks” together in Nevada City, California.
And I was struck by the wager of Doug Tompkins, the adventurer who founded the North Face and Esprit clothing companies. “If anything can save the world, I’d put my money on beauty,” he said.

The beauty of environmental restoration.

The beauty of cities designed with nature and favoring human locomotion over automobiles.

The beauty of farms bursting with diversity.

As I’ve worked on this campaign, I’ve found that beauty matters to both liberals and conservatives. Dostoevsky, in THE IDIOT, said that beauty would save the world. So did Solzhenitsyn.

So have all three of the most recent Popes.

So have numerous articles in popular conservative publications.

New studies by both Gallup and the University of South Carolina have found that access to beauty is one of the three most likely predictors both of people’s love for the communities they live in and the likelihood that they are happy with their lives.

We used to understand this better than we do now.

This past October 2nd marked the 50th anniversary of the day when President Lyndon Johnson signed four of the most important beauty bills in our history—the Redwoods and North Cascades National Park Acts, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Trails Acts.

They were part of Johnson’s national beautification campaign, led by his wife Lady Bird and his Interior Secretary Stuart Udall. That was 50 years ago.

About 100 years ago, the City Beautiful Movement was bringing great parks and magnificent public spaces into American cities. The Nature Study Movement and Arts and Crafts Movement and Country Life Movement and Conservation Movement flourished, all strongly connected to beauty.

At the same time, the poet Vachel Lindsay walked across America preaching what he called “the Gospel of Beauty” and suggesting that rural America needed a new
birth in beauty and a new localism that would fill our villages with hope and reverse the great shift to the cities.

And 150 years ago, the Olmsteds were creating great urban parks and our first national parks were established.

So, you see, it happens just about every 50 years. That means time has come for a restored commitment to beauty and the protection of nature, and all of you and the work you do are leading the way.

I look forward to our collaboration. I can’t think of anything more important than what you do.

Thank you.