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The Sierra Club Activist Resource

PLANET

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Stronger Than Ever

BY ROBBIE COX
SIERRA CLUB PRESIDENT

Like the feel of electricity before a storm, there's tension in the air as a new Congress and administration take office. Not since President Dwight Eisenhower worked with Republican majorities in the House and Senate has the nation faced a Republican lock on all three branches of government. With wide support in the land for environmental protection, however, President-elect George W. Bush ignores the environment at his peril.

The Sierra Club arrives at this crossroads stronger and better prepared than at any time in our 108-year history, our muscles toned by six years of battle with a hostile leadership in Congress. Club activists and staff have developed powerful new tools, cultivated new allies and demonstrated we can and *will* hold our political leaders accountable.

We've been here before — in 1995-96, we stopped Newt Gingrich and company when they tried to gut the Clean Water Act, weaken protections for endangered species and reverse 25 years of environmental progress.

In response, the Sierra Club organized the largest, most sustained grassroots accountability campaign in our history. We committed new resources to local organizing in hundreds of communities, redesigned old tools and developed new ones (like *The Planet*, daily action alerts, our Web site) to better communicate with our members. We launched the Sierra Club Training Academy, empowering thousands of activists.

But the Club that stopped the 104th Congress' "war on the environment" was not as strong as it is today. Then, we were stung by budget deficits and undergoing a major restructuring of our operations. By contrast, John Muir's Sierra Club today is running on all cylinders, emboldened by recent victories, such as:

- the naming of 11 new national monuments (and still counting);
- the dramatic strengthening of the Forest Service's final wild forest protection plan, which will halt roadbuilding and commercial logging in roadless areas, in-

The Sierra Club scared of George W? No. We're prepared though.

- including Alaska's Tongass National Forest;
- stronger legal tools to protect our air and water; and
- an elevated national debate over the importance of "smart choices" to combat sprawl.

Similarly, the Club achieved its top electoral goals in races for the U.S. House and Senate in November 2000, with 75 percent of our endorsed candidates winning. Of special importance was the defeat of Washington's environmental grinch, Sen. Slade Gorton (R).

Along the way, the Sierra Club earned respect from our adversaries and the media alike as we moved from the chorus of our nation's political drama to one of its principal actors. Where we invested resources in getting out our message — particularly in states such as Michigan, Washington, Oregon, Kansas, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey and New York — the public understood the difference between candidates' positions on the environment.

As I traveled the country in the months before the 2000 election, I was struck again and again by the raw talent and the commitment of our members. The Mackinac (Michigan) Chapter publicized Sen. Spencer Abraham's (R) poor record by handing out Abraham "trading cards" at baseball games. Kansas volunteers turned out on a cold weekend to distribute voter guides.

Club activists in Illinois organized a solidarity rally with labor unions. And, in 11 states, dozens of different volunteers and staff put on the "Tommy the Toxic Waste Drum" costumes to bird-dog Bush and remind the public of his poor environmental record in Texas.

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DAVID J. ROOSEN/STOCK/SCIENCE/NOVA/GALETTE



NOVA/SHANE/SIPA

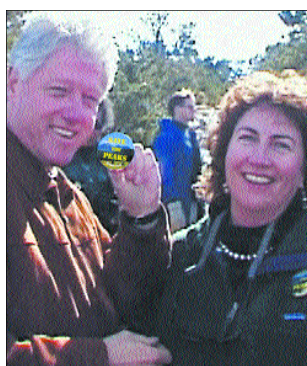
River Bottoms and Mountain Tops: Dad's shoulders were the perfect perch for Katie Ballantyne, whose message was made loud and clear at a rally held in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., in October. Katie's dad is Chris Ballantyne, director of the Sierra Club's Northeast Field Office, who wants General Electric to clean up PCB-contamination released into the river from several power plants. Meanwhile, activists in the Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter heaved a sigh of relief when a pact was signed in August to stop pumice mining in Arizona's San Francisco Peaks. Coconino County Supervisor Tom Chabin holds an umbrella as the agreement is signed, left to right, mining company lawyer Doug Martin, U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jim Lyons and settlement author Mark Squillace, who represented Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.

JANUARY

7 **Kudos to a Clean Car**
The Sierra Club gives the first product award in its 108-year history to the Honda Insight. The car, the first commercially available hybrid, uses both a battery and a gasoline-powered motor to get a fuel-efficient 68 miles per gallon on the highway.



11 **Monumental Victory**
President Clinton, shown here with Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter volunteer Sharon Galbreath, designates three national monuments (Grand Canyon-Parashant and Agua Fria in Arizona, and California Coastal on the state's coastline) and expands a fourth, Pinnacles in California.



12 **Pollution Solution**
The Sierra Club and co-plaintiffs win a U.S. Supreme Court victory, *Friends of the Earth v. Laidlaw Environmental Services*. Laidlaw, a hazardous-waste disposal outfit, had illegally and repeatedly dumped mercury into a South Carolina river. The Supreme Court ruling, overturning an appeals court decision that dismissed a lawsuit against the company, reinforces the right of citizens to sue big polluters.

16 **Keeping the Environment in Mind**
A Gallup poll of 1,000 adults nationwide indicates that 70 percent think "protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth."



16 **Mayor Meets Manatee**
A manatee costume helps Florida Chapter activists oppose Homestead Airport. Miami Mayor Alex Penelas grabs a photo op, but ignores the message.