



Trailblazer

Niagara Group of the SIERRA CLUB

Vol. XXXII, No. 4, October 2000

Meeting with Lazio, Endorsement of Clinton

On August 5, Niagara Group Chair, Larry Beahan trekked to New York City to take part in the Atlantic Chapter's Board of Governors meeting. Larry offers this account of the day's events:

"The chief business of the day was to interview Senate candidate Rick Lazio. Even though he had not made it easy to set up this meeting, once we met him in person, he certainly seemed eager for our support. He also talked the right talk. He also sent us several pages of information establishing that he had been in many ways a defender of the environment. I was particularly impressed that he had stuck his neck out on more than occasion as one of the few Republicans to vote down last-minute anti-environment riders.

Hillary Clinton stole his thunder, though. Later that same day, the Atlantic chapter BOG voted overwhelmingly to endorse Clinton for the U.S. Senate. The vote was 21 to 2 in favor of the Clinton endorsement. Two weeks later, the Sierra Club's National Political Committee made it official and decided to accept the chapter's endorsement of Clinton."

According to Atlantic Chapter Conservation Chair Rhea Jezer, who was instrumental in arranging the Chapter's interviews with both Clinton and Lazio, "Clinton proved she knows New York's environmental problems inside and out. She showed deep passion and dedication to fight to protect our air, water and land. Rick Lazio, while he has been praised as an environmentalist, has dropped the ball on many key environmental issues."

The Chapter cited a number of specific issues in support of Clinton's candidacy:

This year, at her urging, the Administration proposed substantially boosting research into the environmental causes of breast cancer and other cancers. In addition, she committed herself to: Cleaning up New York's waterways, such as Long Island Sound and the Hudson River; Reducing emissions of NOx and mercury from coal-burning power plants; Curbing out-of-control suburban sprawl; and Conserving lands that provide New York's drinking water to avoid the need for costly filtration plants.

On the other hand, although Lazio has at times voted the pro-environmental side, there were also many, many occasions when he took the other side. Perhaps his most egregious vote of all was cast on March 3, 1995, in favor of

the so-called "Regulatory Reform and Takings" legislation, a part of the Contract with America. This bill would have established myriad legal, financial and bureaucratic hurdles making it difficult, if not impossible, to protect the environment. For instance, the bill would have blocked federal rules to reduce mercury, acid rain, and other power plant emissions that plague New York. It would have also made it nearly impossible for the EPA to strengthen clean air standards.

Quoting Rhea Jezer once again, "Although he has a few environmental achievements, Lazio's overall environmental batting average puts him in the bottom third of our state's delegation...He's not a worthy successor to Senator Pat Moynihan and his long conservation legacy. It is Hillary Clinton who can follow in Moynihan's footsteps and fight to protect New York's environment as U.S. Senator."

--Larry Beahan and Mike Kukla

Niagara Group Annual Dinner and Meeting

Date: Tuesday, October 24, 2000

Time: Schmooze at 6:30 PM; Dinner at 7:30 PM

Place: Eagle House Restaurant,
5578 Main St.
Williamsville, New York

Cost: \$16.00 (tip and taxes are included)

Reservations: Contact Art Klein (693-1082)

Reviving a tradition of old, the Niagara Group will be hosting a Fall Dinner on Tuesday, October 24. The evening will offer a delicious buffet-style dinner--with vegetarian fare also available--a guest speaker with an interesting subject, good company and good conversation.

Don't miss this it! The cost is a mere \$16.00, tax and gratuity included. Even if you can't come, buy a ticket and support your local chapter. Call **Art Klein** at 693-1082 for information and reservations.

--Art Klein

Progress on Power Plant Emissions

The efforts of the OntAIRio Clean Air Campaign and its U.S. allies, including the Niagara Group, have met with significant preliminary success. On August 25, Canadian Environment Minister David Anderson and Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy announced that Canada is

prepared to put pollution controls in place for domestic power plants to reduce domestic and trans-boundary air pollution. These controls would apply to power generating facilities in Ontario, including the now notorious Nanticoke facility, North America's largest coal-fired power plant, located just 63 miles from Buffalo.

It is believed that emissions of oxides of nitrogen (NOx) from this facility contribute directly to the increase in high smog days observed here in Western New York in the past few years.

Some background for this important announcement is necessary here: Canada and the U.S. are currently negotiating a so-called "Ozone Annex" under the 1991 Canada-United States Air Quality Agreement. The third round of Ozone Annex negotiations took place August 24 and 25 in Ottawa. The new Canadian commitments announced during the August session would require fossil fuel electricity generating plants--especially those in Ontario and Quebec--to meet or exceed the U.S. NOx requirements. The U.S. is expected to tighten its own NOx standards in turn.

The fourth and final session of the Ozone Annex negotiations will take place in Washington, D.C. in early October and a final agreement is expected before the end of this year.

Regional and local activism played a significant role in bringing about this international environmental progress. For example, the list of local signatories of an August 22, 2000 letter sent to Secretary of State **Madeline Albright** and calling for strong bilateral commitments to NOx reduction comprised a virtual who's who of local environmental activism. The American Lung Association, Environmental Advocates, NYPIRG, Citizens' Environmental Coalition, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Great Lakes United, and last but not least, our very own Niagara Group all signed onto the letter.

And for the moment, it does appear that our voices were heard. For Western New Yorkers, this is breath of fresh air indeed. Our eyes should now be turned towards the final agreement to be reached in Washington this coming October.

--Mike Kukla

WNY Environmental Roundtable: Global Warming and the Great Lakes

On September 5, 2000, Jay Burney, Executive Director of the Buffalo Institute of Urban Ecology, Inc. announced the first season of The Western New York Environmental Roundtable. The purpose of the Roundtable is to provide a periodic forum for environmentalists, public officials, educators and other members of the community to educate ourselves about environmental subjects that have a bearing

on our lives and our futures, and to devise strategies for environmental betterment.

The first roundtable will be held on Thursday October 26, 2,000 beginning at 8:30 am in the Georgian Room of the Statler Building in downtown Buffalo. The keynote speaker will be **Dr. Peter J. Sousounis**, Associate Professor of Atmospheric Sciences, University of Michigan. Dr. Sousounis is also the Great Lakes Principal Program Director for the soon to be released EPA national assessment *Climate Change Impacts on the United States: The Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change*.

The October roundtable session will focus on the potential and projected impacts of global warming on Western New York, and the Great Lakes. It is also expected that additional speakers and presenters will join Dr. Sousounis as a part of this event.

Additional sessions of the Roundtable will follow in the coming months. For further information about the Western New York Environmental Roundtable, contact

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Notice Any Similarity?

In the emptiest extent of the Pacific Ocean, there lies a small dot of land called Easter Island. Only 35 miles long and 20 miles wide it is devoid of trees, shrubs, lakes, flowers, animal and bird life. It is exposed to terrible heat from the sun and pummeled unceasingly from the waves of the Humboldt current.

The 500 monoliths, each standing 30 feet high and weighing in excess of 1000 pounds, are testimony that at one time there lived a great civilization on this island. What manner of humanity was able to carve and erect these granite stone statues, each facing away from the sea, many hundreds of years ago; and why are these stones all that remains of this people?

There is abundant evidence that in its original state Easter Island was heavily forested. Cores taken away from volcanic craters reveal the presence of pollen from as many as twenty species of trees including large deciduous trees, conifers and palms. And recent excavations have found charred remains of human life, of people that lived there as recently as the 16th century. A French mariner, Jean Francois De La Perouse stopped on the island a few years later and was quick to analyze and identify the reason the utter desolation of the land and the downfall of the island's people:

Overpopulation had exhausted soil, food and timber resources. Shortages bred discontent, violence and warfare. Eventually, exposure, starvation and suicide claimed the last of the islanders.

The story shows what can happen to a promising viable culture when population growth puts great stress on limited natural resources and fighting breaks out over the remaining supplies of food and water.

Where are we going with all this, you ask? Does anyone out there see a similarity between Easter Island and what is going on from an environmental standpoint in our contemporary world?

I'm sorry to say that I feel little or no optimism for the future of our country and the world. I am angry and very discouraged by the attitudes of legislators and big corporations. It seems to me that we are pursuing a self-destructive course as we increasingly threaten, disrupt and destroy nature's precarious ecological balance. That's something to think about, isn't it?

--Gen Robins

Y6B

This October 12, according to the United Nations, the population of Planet Earth reached 6 billion people, a truly startling milestone when placed in historical context. It took all of human history for the world's population to reach 1 billion in 1804, but little more than 150 years to reach 3 billion in 1960. Now, not quite 40 years later, we are twice that number.

The experts universally agree that, no matter what programs or policies are put into place today, it is virtually assured that world population will reach anywhere from 8-12 billion early in the next century.

A "Youthquake" is taking place in these countries, in which 1 billion teenagers are about to enter their reproductive years. Their sheer numbers guarantee an enormous momentum of population growth through 2050 and an urgent global need for reproductive health information and services. As Mark Hertsgaard put it in his recent book, *Earth Odyssey*, "Global, regional and local ecosystems are already crumbling beneath the weight of today's six billion people, yet many of these six billion are living in indescribable squalor, with billions more on the way."

Even with a recent slowing of the growth rate, world population keeps rising by about 78 million a year. Improved provision of reproductive health care has resulted in roughly half of the world's married women now having access to birth control or family planning techniques, compared with only 10 percent 30 years ago. However, because of population momentum, the absolute number of people who lack access to contraceptives is roughly the same

today as it was in the mid-1960's when population was increasing exponentially.

Nor is this population increase limited to the developing world.. The United States is expected to double its population of 270 million in the next 60 years under existing trends. And although the U.S. accounts for only 5% of global population, our outsized consumption of resources makes us an environmental Goliath. All by itself, the U.S. accounts for 22% of the world's fossil fuel consumption, 24% of carbon dioxide emissions, and 33% of paper and plastic use.

Education and access to birth control ought to be included in any proposals that deal realistically with the looming population explosion in both the developed and developing worlds. In this vein, for the first time in years, the US Congress recently voted to contribute funds to UN population programs--but, unfortunately, in little more than nominal amounts. The advent of Y6B demands serious planning and education among government and volunteer agencies. We need to make a commitment, as the American Century draws to a close, to extend our leadership well into the next, and prevent the looming global catastrophe that threatens us and our children.

--James Hufnagel

Green Building Design Is Topic Of Upcoming Workshop And Talk

Erie County, in conjunction with other co-sponsors, will be holding two green building design workshops on Wednesday, November 15. Three hour morning and afternoon sessions are planned. There may also be an evening event for the general public on November 14 or 15 featuring the primary workshop trainer, **Bill Bobenhausen**, AIA, Director of Sustainable Design for the Steven Winter Associates firm (Norwalk, CT, and Washington, DC). For more information, contact Sierra Club member and workshop organizer Walter Simpson, 829-2515, wsimpson@facilities.buffalo.edu.

--Walter Simpson

Niagara Group Web Site Update

Please note that our web site address has changed as a result of moving our site to the national Sierra Club's own web server. The new address is

<http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/ny/niagara/index.html>

--Mike Kukla

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