

Iowa PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA

A Report To Members Of The Iowa Public Interest Research Group

Smart Energy Choices

Advocates Bring Energy To The Table

With the Iowa caucuses just months away, Iowa PIRG advocates are calling on President Bush and the candidates vying to replace him to make energy policy a top priority.

The energy issue is especially relevant for Iowa, given the rising costs of traditional energy sources and high potential for clean energy. That's why Iowa PIRG's Nick Rugen, Kate Mosehauer and Amber Hard are spending the summer building support for policies that promote clean, renewable and surprisingly affordable energy sources like wind and solar power.

"Our hope is that bringing clean energy to the attention of the presidential candidates at this early stage will make this issue a priority in 2004," Hard said.

In 2000 less than three percent of the state's electricity was generated by renewable sources. The rest came from plants fueled by oil, coal and nuclear fission—with serious consequences for public health and the environment, including 125,000 tons of soot pollution and 75,000 tons of smog pollution.

Soot particles, less than one-hundredth of the width of a human hair, evade the natural defenses of even the healthiest citizens, and cause irritation that could lead to bronchitis and reduced heart and lung function. Smog burns through lung tissue, and is a leading cause of asthma attacks in the summer.

Clean, renewable sources of energy like wind, solar and biomass, will reduce this pollution. According to a Tellus Institute study, investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency would also result in a net gain of 8,300 jobs by 2010 in Iowa.

"It's time to make smarter power choices," Hard said. "Moving toward clean energy—on the state and national level—will benefit our environment and our economy." ■

Smart Energy Choices

MidAmerican Will Build Coal Plant And Wind Farm

MidAmerican Energy has announced plans to build the world's largest wind farm in Iowa, but will also move forward with a coal-fired power plant in Council Bluffs.

On April 2, the Legislature passed a MidAmerican-sponsored bill to make it easier for investor-owned utilities to build, own and operate wind farms. Under the bill, MidAmerican could decide to drop leases on existing wind farms once it builds its own wind farm, leaving local wind farms high and dry.

"We didn't support this bill because profits from wind energy develop-



Rick Trisch

CLEAN ENERGY—Rep. James Leach spoke with Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard in February. Rep. Leach introduced clean energy legislation into the U.S. House in March. Unfortunately, the House Rules Committee did not allow a floor vote on the legislation, which was offered as an amendment to the House energy bill.

Member Resource

✓ ENERGY
To learn more about Iowa PIRG's work to promote a clean energy future for Iowa, visit www.iowapirg.org.

ment would be sapped from local communities and go straight into MidAmerican's coffers," noted Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard.

"Senate Majority Leader Stewart Iverson and Minority Leader Michael Gronstal rushed the legislation through the statehouse," Hard said. Sen. Mary Lundby (R-Marion) offered an amendment to the bill that would have made it easier for a portion of wind energy production to come from local facilities. That amendment was narrowly defeated.

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Iowa PIRG's Summer Membership Drive

On May 1, Iowa PIRG Canvass Directors Nick Rugen and Katherine Mosehauer kicked off the organization's annual summer canvass from their Des Moines office.

Rugen and Mosehauer are training a team of canvassers to go door-to-door across central Iowa, signing up new Iowa PIRG members, renewing memberships, and building citizen support for Iowa PIRG's summer priority: energy policy and cleaning up our air (see story on page 1).

Canvassers also are helping to arrange and participate in media events to draw more attention to the issues, focusing particularly on the presidential hopefuls as they travel through the state during the summer caucuses.

"Our canvassers, most of them in or just out of college, work incredibly hard and do incredibly important work for Iowa PIRG," said Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "They help raise the funds and enlist the support that make Iowa PIRG so effective." ■

Toxics And Environmental Health Program

Report: Toxic Releases Dropped Since 1987

From 1987 to 2000, toxic releases in the EPA region that includes Iowa dropped from 6.2 percent of the national total to 3.8 percent.

The findings were published in an Iowa PIRG Education Fund report released in January. The report, "Toxic Releases And Health," is a first-ever analysis of toxic releases into the air and water organized by health effect.

"Toxic releases in our region were low to begin with," noted Julie Wolk, a toxics policy advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office. "But we're glad to see that they've declined further."

EPA Region 7 includes Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska. On Iowa's eastern border, Illinois is included in EPA Region 5, which also saw a decline in toxic releases, from

25 percent of the national total in 1987 to 21.1 percent in 2000.

The report ranked states for releases of dioxin and carcinogens, as well as toxics that cause developmental and reproductive disorders, and those suspected to cause neurological and respiratory disorders.

Iowa was ranked 20th for dioxin releases—the highest amount of toxics released in the state—and 38th for toxics suspected to cause reproductive disorders. Within the region, Nebraska was ranked the lowest across the board. The report also showed that, overall, the public lacks information on how these releases affect health. Iowa is one of just three states, including Massachusetts and California, that systematically track asthma and have high-level cancer and birth defect registries. ■

Energy

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In the past, MidAmerican fought a 1983 law requiring it to purchase locally produced renewable energy, and opposed a law that requires utilities to buy power from customers with renewable energy systems who wish to sell the excess energy they produce. In both cases, MidAmerican was forced to comply with the regulations.

Iowa PIRG supported another bill in the Senate that would have increased the state's existing renewable energy standard to 10 percent by 2010, and would have required that 20 percent of that energy come from locally owned, small-scale renewable energy projects.

"Our renewable energy standard

has helped create a market," Hard said. "Other developers jumped in and did the heavy lifting, building the industry. Now that they know it works, MidAmerican wants to come in and corner the market."

"According to their own proposal, MidAmerican could easily comply with this standard, without increasing rates, yet they have opposed this bill," Hard continued. Iowa PIRG's coalition will work toward passage of the bill next session.

In addition, despite the efforts of Iowa PIRG and other groups, MidAmerican's proposal to build a coal-fired power plant in Council Bluffs was approved by the Utilities Board in January. The plant will supply about 10 percent of the state's total energy demand. ■



PacificCorp Power Marketing

WIND POWER—By fully tapping the state's wind power potential, Iowa could generate five times the amount of energy currently generated by dirty power sources.

News Briefs

Senate Votes To Protect Arctic From Drilling

On March 19, for the second time in the past year, the U.S. Senate rejected drilling in the untouched coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Sens. Tom Harkin and Chuck Grassley both voted to support an Iowa PIRG-backed amendment that stripped language from a budget bill that would have allowed oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Refuge. ■

House Passes Dirty, Dangerous Energy Bill

On April 11, the U.S. House passed a dirty, dangerous energy bill that "delivers more to the energy industry than it ever will to consumers," said Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard.

"Iowans deserve a cleaner energy future," she said. "Unfortunately, the House is offering us more drilling, more oil spills, more asthma attacks and more air pollution."

Hard and others commended Reps. Boswell and Leach for voting against the bill, and urged Sens. Grassley and Harkin to follow suit in the Senate. ■

Federal Lawmakers Graded On Votes

Iowa's congressional delegation scored an average of 41 percent on this year's Iowa PIRG Congressional Scorecard.

"Overall, we're disappointed with this year's results," said Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "We hope that our lawmakers will follow the lead of Sen. Harkin and Rep. Boswell, this year's high-scorers."

Sen. Harkin scored 86 percent, while Rep. Boswell scored 81 percent. For a breakdown of the scores and descriptions of the votes, visit www.iowapirg.org. ■

Report Highlights Anti-Environmental Policies

On Earth Day, April 22, Iowa PIRG released "Behind Closed Doors," a report highlighting more than two dozen policies proposed or enacted by the Bush administration that will degrade the environment and compromise public health in Iowa and across the U.S.

"Behind closed doors, the Bush administration has worked with polluters to craft one proposal after another to weaken environmental and public health protections," said



CLEAN ENERGY—Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard spoke with Sen. Tom Harkin on energy policy in February.

Emily Figdor, an advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office.

The report found that changes proposed by the Bush administration this January could eliminate Clean Water Act protections for streams and wetlands across Iowa, and would allow more pollution into state waterways. It also detailed regulations that will do little to stem the tide of animal waste from factory farms polluting waterways and drinking water in the state. ■

Harkin Named Public Interest Champion

At a reception in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 11, Iowa PIRG honored Sen. Tom Harkin as a Public Interest Champion.

At the event, the state PIRGs honored a bipartisan group of 30 members of Congress for their work on behalf of consumers and the environment.

"Because of his consistent record of leadership in the fight to move the country toward a smarter energy future, and to protect consumers, Iowa PIRG is proud to honor Sen. Tom Harkin," said Iowa PIRG Advocate Amber Hard.

Sen. Harkin has been a supporter of measures to protect consumers' privacy, reduce tobacco use among children, Hard noted. He is also a proponent of renewable energy. ■

Iowa PIRG Citizen Agenda

is published three times a year in June, September, and January by the Iowa Public Interest Research Group. Members contributing \$25 or more receive Iowa PIRG Citizen Agenda. \$1.25 of your contribution pays for the newsletter; the rest goes to public interest research, advocacy and other expenses. For information on membership, contact Iowa PIRG, 1723 Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50309 or e-mail info@iowapirg.org. Information about Iowa PIRG is also available on the web at www.iowapirg.org.



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■ The Last Word

It's That Season Again . . .



Amber Hard

Jan Nelson
. . . election season. Every four years, Iowans host one of the most famous political events on our national calendar: the presidential caucuses. Already, candidates are showing up in community centers, living rooms, and neighborhood

restaurants trying to meet as many of us as they can.

In less than a year, we will meet with our neighbors to debate the fate of our country. Republicans and Democrats alike will have the opportunity not only to decide which candidate should be their party's nominee, but also which issues and positions need to be part of the party's platform.

Sometimes I think Iowans take this process for granted. Growing up in Illinois, I assumed that all states worked the same: most of your interaction with candidates was via political ads on TV and radio, and no one really knew how the parties decided what positions to take on the issues. Since moving here, I've developed a deep appreciation for Iowa's process. It has its flaws, but provides some truly unique opportunities.

Obviously, it's exciting to be in the national political spotlight for a year or so. But bigger than that, we have a responsibility to use our access to decision-makers to promote the public interest. Our friends and families in Illinois, California or New York may never be invited to a neighbor's for coffee with a candidate, bump into a candidate at the state fair, or have a candidate clear their table at the local diner—but many of us will. And during the 30 seconds or 30 minutes we have with that candidate, we can ask whatever we want.

So, I urge you to ask them serious questions. This summer, we will be asking them about their plans for energy independence—plans that could have significant consequences for Iowa's economy, environment and quality of life. On our Web site, www.iowapirg.org, you can find out more about our activities on this front, and view some sample questions you can ask of the candidates.

I'd like to thank you again for your support—both financial and political. Without our members, we wouldn't be able to ask the serious questions, and push for the serious solutions.

Amber Hard is the Public Interest Advocate for Iowa PIRG.

■ Iowa PIRG

Iowa PIRG is an advocate for the public interest. When consumers are cheated, or our natural environment is threatened, or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, Iowa PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. Iowa PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects our environment, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

IOWA PIRG CITIZEN AGENDA

Iowa PIRG CITIZEN AGENDA is the report of the Iowa Public Interest Research Group (Iowa PIRG), sent to Iowa PIRG members three times a year. Printed on recycled paper. **Editor** Alison Cody **Contributors** Margie Alt, Matthew Curtis, Wendy DePuy, Dana Dorman, Rebecca Farabaugh, Amber Hard, Stephanie Haynes, Brian Henry, Ryan Moeckly, Ginne Pera, Amy Wolf, Jane Wong **Publications Director** Richard J. Hannigan

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