

# Iowa PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA

A Report To Members Of The Iowa Public Interest Research Group

## Defending Our Air

# Is The EPA Listening On Clean Air?

At EPA-sponsored “listening sessions” held around the country this spring, senior citizens and public health advocates sharply criticized Bush administration proposals to allow more air pollution.

An overwhelming majority of the speakers at each of the six sessions testified in favor of strictly enforcing the Clean Air Act and tougher rules to curb smog, soot, mercury and carbon dioxide. More than 225,000 people told officials to uphold New Source Review.

“Unfortunately, overall the White House has been far more responsive to the powerful utilities and coal and oil industries that are pressing for these gaping loopholes in the Clean Air Act,” said Rebecca Stanfield, a staff attorney in Iowa PIRG’s Washington, D.C., office.

On Aug. 27, the Bush administration dismantled the Clean Air Act’s New Source Review program, which required the oldest and dirtiest power plants to clean up.

The administration has also been trying to build support for its “Clear Skies” bill, which would delay reductions in mercury pollution, and allow emissions three times higher than current law permits. And, the plan does nothing about power plants’ emissions of carbon dioxide, the main cause of global warming. “No matter how the Bush administration spins it, more power plants mean more pol-

lution, leading to more asthma attacks and more heart and lung disease for Iowans,” said Stanfield.

Stanfield is urging lawmakers to reject the “Clear Skies” bill and instead support the Clean Power Act, which would reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxides, mercury and carbon dioxide. ■

## Smart Energy Choices

# Congress Okays Dirty, Dangerous Energy Bills

On July 31, the Senate approved certain provisions of the energy bill that had passed the House on April 29. These bills would make the nation’s energy problems worse, according to a staff attorney in Iowa PIRG’s Washington, D.C., office, Katherine Morrison.

“Much like last year’s harmful proposal, these bills fall short of the clean energy policy that Iowans deserve,” said Morrison.

The bills would repeal one of the few laws that protect electricity consumers from price gouging and market manipulation; give away \$7



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**CLEAR SKIES OR A CLEAR SHAM?**—When touting the “Clear Skies” bill’s supposed benefits, President Bush and his advisors don’t compare it to current law—they compare it to no law at all. The bill would allow emissions of smog-forming nitrogen oxides to be 68 percent higher than current law through 2018, and would allow emissions of soot-forming sulfur dioxide to double.

billion in subsidies to the oil, coal, gas and nuclear industries; and exempt pickup trucks from any future increases in fuel economy standards. However, the Senate version of the bill spares the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from drilling.

The bills are now headed to conference committee. Iowa PIRG is urging Congress to send the bills back to the drawing board.

Instead, Iowa PIRG supports policies that would increase the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency, clean up old, dirty power plants, and protect wild places. ■

## Member Resource

✓ ENERGY  
Visit [www.newenergyfuture.com](http://www.newenergyfuture.com) to keep up-to-date on Iowa PIRG’s federal energy work, and find out how you can help.

## America's Environment At Risk

# Anti-Environment Efforts Intensified After 2002 Elections

On April 22, Iowa PIRG joined other state PIRGs in releasing a report detailing how the Bush administration has continued to help powerful corporate polluters—electric utilities, oil companies, big timber companies and others—to undermine or completely undo cornerstone environmental and public health protections.



Ken Mueller

**BEHIND CLOSED DOORS**—On Earth Day, April 22, Gene Karpinski, lobbying director of Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, released a new report detailing the Bush administration's anti-environmental policies.

The report, "Behind Closed Doors," found that, since the November 2002 elections, the White House has discreetly accelerated its campaign to undermine nearly every program that protects our air, water, forests, wetlands, wild places and public health.

"As if that isn't bad enough, White House spin-doctors have taken to making announcements about changes or proposals to weaken environmental protections late on Friday afternoons or before holidays," noted Gene Karpinski, lobbying director of Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office. "This is probably in recognition of the unpopularity of the Bush administration's agenda."

In August, the White House unveiled its so-called "Healthy For-

ests" initiative, which would allow timber companies to increase logging under the guise of fighting forest fires. Previously, in the fall of 2002, the Bush administration proposed policy changes—affecting millions of acres of publicly owned forests—that would end a requirement that the Forest Service survey for rare species before approving logging.

The administration also plans to allow governors to seek exemptions from federal law for forests in their states, giving governors decision-making power over natural treasures owned by all Americans.

### Polluters Running Rampant

In one of its most far-reaching proposals, the White House announced Jan. 15 that it wanted to exempt so-called "isolated waters" from Clean Water Act protections.

Richard Caplan, an environmental advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, points out that no waterways are isolated—all water cycles through the environment. But officials could stop enforcing Clean Water Act rules for streams, ponds or wetlands. Depending on how the White House defines "isolated," as much as 60 percent of

stream miles and 20 percent of wetlands could be left unprotected.

On another front, the Bush administration has also undercut the letter and spirit of the Superfund law by failing to reinstate the program's "polluter pays" fees and shifting the burden of paying for toxic waste cleanups to taxpayers, Caplan noted. Next year, taxpayers will pay a whopping 79 percent or more of Superfund costs. By 2005, taxpayers will fund virtually the entire program. At the same time, EPA has kept the public in the dark about which Superfund cleanups will be funded and at what level.

### It's Time For Public Scrutiny

"When it comes to the environment, poll after poll confirms that the overwhelming majority of Americans favors stronger rather than weaker environmental safeguards," Karpinski said.

Iowa PIRG's advocates have joined other environmental groups to defend our environmental laws. They are working to protect national forests from attempts to open them to logging, ensure that the Clean Water Act is fully enforced, and urge lawmakers to reinstate Superfund's "polluter pays" fees. ■

## Planned Giving: Preserve And Protect Iowa For Future Generations

When you include Iowa PIRG in your will, you leave a legacy of activism that will preserve our environment, protect public health, and defend the rights of consumers for decades to come. Please consider including Iowa PIRG in your estate and major giving plans.

For more information, call 1-800-841-7299 or e-mail [PlannedGiving@IowaPIRG.org](mailto:PlannedGiving@IowaPIRG.org).

## News Briefs

### Uninsured Pay The Most For Rx Drugs

On average, uninsured consumers across the U.S. have to pay 72 percent more than the federal government for 10 common drugs, according to a recent Iowa PIRG study.

"HMOs and the federal government use their buying power to negotiate fairer prices for the drugs they purchase," said Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "Uninsured consumers have no one doing the same on their behalf, so drug companies are profiting the most from Americans who can least afford high prices."

In June, the U.S. House and Senate passed versions of a Bush administration bill that would establish a prescription drug benefit. Hard criticized the plans because they do nothing for uninsured Americans.

Iowa PIRG is urging the Legislature to form prescription drug buying pools to lower costs for government agencies, the uninsured and other consumers and businesses. ■

### Secrecy Undermining Food Safety Tests

Nearly 70 percent of all field tests of genetically engineered crops conducted in the last year contained secret, classified genes, pre-

venting the public from accessing information about experiments being conducted in their communities. This finding was documented in "Raising Risk," a report released on June 18 by Iowa PIRG.

"Our environment is being used as a laboratory for widespread experimentation on genetically engineered crops with profound risks," said Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C.-based Environmental Advocate Richard Caplan. "Until proper safeguards are in place, this experimentation should stop." For more, visit [www.pirg.org/ge](http://www.pirg.org/ge). ■

### Few Donors Funding Presidential Hopefuls

An analysis by Adam Lioz, a democracy advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, shows that 76 percent of 2004 presidential candidates' individual fundraising came in contributions of at least \$1,000.

"Candidates are raising more money from wealthy contributors and a smaller percentage of their funds from average Americans," Lioz said.

"The new contribution limit of \$2,000 is out of reach for all but a few Americans," he said. "It gives one wealthy donor the same influence as 40 middle-class families each contributing \$50." ■



Photo: iStock.com

**DRUG PRICES CLIMBING**—A survey conducted by Iowa PIRG advocates found that, nationwide, uninsured consumers are paying up to 72 percent more than the federal government for 10 common prescription drugs.

### Rising Cable Prices Hurting Consumers

Since the 1996 deregulation of the cable industry, prices for cable subscribers have risen by more than 50 percent—three times the rate of inflation.

"Congress promised that deregulation would bring competition and lower prices. Instead, the industry has raised prices, blocked competition and consumer choice, and allowed service quality to erode," said Ed Mierzwinski, director of Iowa PIRG's federal consumer program work.

Mierzwinski helped author the report "The Failure Of Cable Deregulation," which compared the promises of deregulation proponents to the realities faced by cable consumers in 2003. Since deregulation in 1996 cable companies have consolidated, eliminating competition.

Just three companies serve 56 percent of cable consumers in America, up from 48 percent in 1996. The report also found that the more these larger companies dominate a given region, the higher prices are for consumers in the area.

Iowa PIRG, the Consumer Federation of America and other media access advocates are calling on Congress to allow state and local decision-makers to promote real competition in the marketplace and ensure fair prices for consumers where large cable companies control the market. ■

### 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](mailto:info@iowapirg.org). Information about Iowa PIRG is also available on the Web at [www.iowapirg.org](http://www.iowapirg.org).



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# IOWA PIRG



## ■ The Last Word

# Challenges Keep Coming From D.C.



Jan Nelson

Since the November 2002 elections, polluters and their allies in the White House have gotten even bolder in their efforts to weaken America's core environmental and public health protections.

They may try to disguise their policies with benign-sounding names like the "Clear Skies Initiative" or the "Healthy Forests Initiative," but these irresponsible proposals would fundamentally weaken the Clean Air Act, our forest protections, and other federal policies.

Some research quickly brings to light the Orwellian doublespeak the public has been subjected to.

On Earth Day, Iowa PIRG released "Behind Closed Doors," a report that documented the aggressive pace with which the Bush administration has pursued its anti-environmental agenda.

But Iowa PIRG and our allies have helped secure a few bright spots in this otherwise tarnished environmental record.

On April 15, the U.S. EPA announced promising new rules to clean up diesel-powered farm and construction equipment, similar to rules we helped win three years ago for trucks and buses. The EPA estimates that the new rules will prevent an estimated 9,600 premature deaths each year.

In May, former EPA Administrator Christie Whitman announced that the agency would stop discounting the lives of senior citizens when evaluating environmental regulations. The agency had been discounting the lives of seniors by 37 percent, which helped them to downplay the health impacts of proposed regulations.

Unfortunately, these victories are crumbs compared to the feast the Bush administration has been serving up to polluters in recent months.

But with your support, and that of other members of Iowa PIRG, we'll have the resources to continue advocating smart policies that put the public's well-being above that of the special interests.

*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

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