

# Iowa PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA

A Report To Members Of The Iowa Public Interest Research Group

## Smart Energy Choices

# Vilsack Supports More Clean Energy

Less than a month before the gubernatorial elections, Gov. Vilsack announced his support for increasing Iowa's use of clean energy sources at a forum hosted by the Iowa Sustainable Energy for Economic Development Coalition (Iowa SEED).

Gov. Vilsack said he supports renewable energy and energy efficiency, and said he would support legislation that would increase Iowa's production of renewable energy to 10 percent by 2010. At press time, the governor had yet to deliver the State of the State Address, where he would announce his legislative agenda for the year—including energy proposals.

"Iowa currently imports 95 percent of its energy from out of state at a cost of more than \$300 million a year," noted Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "However, the state has the potential, through wind and biomass, to produce more than 20 times its current energy needs."

During the forum, Gov. Vilsack and challengers Doug Gross, Jay Robinson and Clyde Cleveland each spoke to more than 200 Iowa voters. The forum was the only one attended by all four candidates, and was the last before election day.

David Osterberg, a professor at the University of Iowa and international energy policy expert, says increasing renewable energy production in Iowa would bring sig-

nificant economic and environmental benefits to the state. Those benefits include a net gain of 8,300 jobs created in Iowa from implementing renewable energy and energy efficiency measures.

Iowa PIRG, Iowa SEED and other groups are advocating that the state Legislature pass a bill requiring utilities to generate 10 percent of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2010, and 20 percent by 2020. ■

## Youth Vote

# Iowa PIRG Helps Register 1,500 Students To Vote

More than 1,500 youth were registered to vote in Iowa thanks to the efforts of Iowa PIRG Education Fund and members of the Youth Vote Coalition of Central Iowa.

Coalition members worked with student interns at Iowa State University, Drake, Simpson and Des Moines Area Community College to contact over 23,000 students on Iowa college campuses to talk about the importance of voting in the recent elections.

"Voter turnout in American elections has plunged in recent years,



Staff photo

**INCREASING CLEAN ENERGY**—Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard spoke at a forum held for the gubernatorial candidates to talk about clean energy possibilities. Wind power alone could provide Iowa with almost five times the amount of energy that the state currently uses.

## Member Resource

✓ VOTING  
To learn more about Youth Vote's work, visit [www.youthvote.org](http://www.youthvote.org).

## Campaign Finance Reform

# Why We Still Need Campaign Finance Reform

In a trio of reports published this fall and winter, Adam Lioz, a democracy advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, analyzed the degree to which big money influences who runs for office and who wins.

"Even after the new McCain-Feingold campaign finance law goes into effect this year, potential candidates will still need to spend far too much time raising money if they hope to win," said Lioz. The McCain-Feingold law bans "soft money" contributions, but doubles the amount a donor can give to a candidate to \$2,000.

### The Biggest Fundraisers Win

Released on Oct. 15, Lioz's "The Wealth Primary" found that the candidates who raised the most money won 90 percent of the 2002 major party primaries. It also found that primary campaigns were, for the most part, funded by large contributions from less than one tenth of one percent of the electorate.

"Most candidates are raising money from a very small circle of wealthy contributors," commented Lioz. "By increasing contribution limits, McCain-Feingold will do nothing to reduce those contribu-

tors' influence on who wins, or who runs in the first place."

His next report, "The Best Elections Money Can Buy," predicted that the biggest fundraisers would emerge victorious in the general election.

In fact, 96 percent of the biggest fundraisers won. But Lioz noted that fundraising is not the only factor that influences elections. In some races, spending by political parties and outside interest groups can have a significant impact.

The regulations set by McCain-Feingold reduce the amount of money that political parties and outside groups can spend. "But that's outweighed by the fact that it doubles the amount of hard money candidates can raise," Lioz said.

Lioz' third report, "Look Who's Not Coming To Washington," profiled House and Senate candidates who lost, dropped out or decided not to run—all because they couldn't compete with opponents backed by big-money interests.

### Real Reform Is Needed

"We pride ourselves on the idea that anyone can grow up to be president," concluded Lioz. "But



C-SPAN

**WEALTHY CONTRIBUTORS' INFLUENCE**— Even after the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform goes into effect this year, noted Iowa PIRG's Adam Lioz, potential candidates will need to cater to a small group of wealthy contributors to win.

our research suggests that's only true if you appeal to special interests and wealthy donors. And it seems like McCain-Feingold will only amplify that problem."

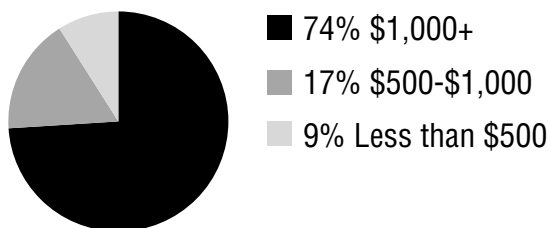
To curb the influence of wealthy donors, Lioz and other advocates urged leaders to provide candidates with free radio and TV time, limit campaign spending, lower contribution limits, create tax credits to encourage small contributions from citizens, and require in-district fundraising. ■

### Member Resource

✓ DEMOCRACY  
For further information or to download any of these reports, visit [www.iowapirg.org](http://www.iowapirg.org).

### Big Money In Primaries

Percentage of Individual Contributions To Primary Candidates By Contribution Size



### Donors Don't Represent The Public

Donors In The 1996 Congressional Elections Versus The General Population In 1996

Category	Donors	Public
Annual income over \$100,000:	81 percent	4.6 percent
Over 60 years old:	50 percent	12.8 percent
White:	95 percent	83 percent
Male:	80 percent	49 percent

## News Briefs

### Livestock Community Impact Rules To Be Set

In December, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) closed the public comment period for rules that would help communities calculate the local impact of proposed livestock production operations.

"The program was created as part of an Iowa PIRG-backed livestock bill that was passed in April," noted Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "It will rate proposals for livestock production operations on air quality, water quality, and local community quality of life impacts."

As this was written, Iowa PIRG was asking the DNR to require facilities not only to achieve a minimum local impact score, but also to score points in all categories in order for construction to begin.

"Requiring facilities to receive a minimum score in each category will ensure that livestock operations that would have severe local impacts in one category are not built," Hard explained.

In April, Gov. Vilsack signed a law that protects Iowa's water by limiting polluted runoff from factory farms, among other measures. The bill was supported by Iowa PIRG and more than a dozen environmental and community groups. ■

### Iowa PIRG Finds Unsafe Toys Still On Shelves

On Nov. 26, Iowa PIRG released a new brochure, "Tips for Toy Safety," aimed at helping parents and caregivers reduce toy-related hazards. Iowa PIRG also released its 17th annual survey of unsafe toys, "Trouble In Toyland."

"The 1994 Child Safety Protection Act is helping, but parents still need to look out for hazardous toys on store shelves," noted Iowa PIRG's Nick Rugen.

Past reports prompted federal toy safety labeling legislation in 1994, and have resulted in more than 100 recalls and other enforcement actions in the last 17 years.

Iowa PIRG cautioned consumers about toy hazards in five categories: choking hazards, toxic chemicals, hearing loss hazards, scooter dangers, and purchasing toys on the Internet. To download the brochure and the report, visit [www.toysafety.net](http://www.toysafety.net). ■

### 9 in 10 Iowa Facilities Breaking Water Laws

A study released Oct. 17 found that more than 95 percent of industrial and municipal facilities across Iowa exceeded their Clean Water Act pollution limits over a recent three-year period. The study, "In Gross Violation," found that more than nine in 10 facilities in Iowa violated their permits, on average, by at least 10 times the legal limit.

Iowa PIRG and the Iowa Environmental Council are urging lawmakers to fully fund the EPA's enforcement program, set mandatory minimum penalties, tighten permitted pollution limits, revoke permits from repeat violators, and give the public full access to information about Clean Water Act enforcement. ■

### Chemical Industry Fights Security Bill

Despite bipartisan Senate support for an Iowa PIRG-backed bill to tighten security at chemical plants, lobbyists for the chemical industry stalled action on the bill before the Senate adjourned this fall.

The Chemical Security Act, introduced by Sen. Jon Corzine (N.J.), would require high-priority facilities to conduct vulnerability and hazard assessments, and develop plans for improving site security and reducing chemical hazards.



**TOY SAFETY**—Iowa PIRG's Nick Rugen, along with Dr. Michael Metts, a pediatrician at Mercy Hospital, explained why some toys are unsafe for young children. Iowa PIRG released a safe toys guide on Nov. 26.

Jeremiah Baumann, a toxics expert in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, urged lawmakers to put public safety first and take action on the proposal when Congress reconvenes. ■

### EPA Plan Would Increase Smog, Soot

Despite research showing that air pollution from coal-fired power plants is a significant health risk, the EPA announced final rule changes on Nov. 22 and proposed additional changes that, together, will allow millions more tons of soot, smog and other toxic pollution to be released each year.

"Almost 300 Iowa residents already suffer from asthma," said Iowa PIRG's Amber Hard. "The rollback could increase smog-forming nitrogen dioxide pollution by more than 12,000 tons in Iowa alone, increasing health problems."

The EPA's rule changes will effectively gut a Clean Air Act program that requires power plants, refineries and other industries to install modern pollution controls when they modify their operations.

Iowa PIRG is working with the American Lung Association, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and others to halt the plan, and win approval for strong, new clean air protections, included in the Clean Power Act. ■

#### Member Action

✓ **CLEAN AIR**  
To send an e-mail urging Congress to support the Clean Power Act, which would clean up old, dirty power plants, visit [cleanairnow.org](http://cleanairnow.org).

# IOWA PIRG



## ■ The Last Word

# Energizing Economic Development



Jan Nelson

Amber Hard

As 2003 kicks off, politicians are searching for ways to help the economy recover from a continuing economic downturn. During the 2003 legislative session, Iowa PIRG is advocating stimulating Iowa's economy by increasing our use of renewable energy.

Renewable energy enjoys broad, bipartisan support. Gov. Vilsack (D) and his challenger, Doug Gross (R), agreed on support for renewable energy. Sens. Grassley (R) and Harkin (D) voted to support renewable energy during the last Congress.

Politicians support renewable energy for many reasons, including cleaner air and water, economic development, and homeland security. Furthermore, Iowa has enough renewable energy potential to supply our own needs and export to other states. So, why spend over \$300 million to import dirty power from other states?

Renewable energy means jobs, thousands of dollars to farmers who produce energy, and thousands of dollars that you spend on your utility bills staying in the state. When the Legislature passed a renewable energy

standard in the 1980s, companies like Florida Power and Light rushed into Iowa. Now, the Legislature should ramp up the requirement from two percent to 10 percent by 2010, and 20 percent by 2020.

But MidAmerican Energy is proposing a coal-fired plant that would supply about 10 percent of the energy Iowa currently uses. MidAmerican already derives about 76 percent of its energy from coal. The Utilities Board needs to stop them from putting all our eggs in one dirty energy basket.

Congress should resist the efforts of the energy industry to write federal energy policies that are only in their interest. These policies include the Bush administration's Clear Skies Initiative, which weakens clean air standards for power plants, and a Congressional energy bill that would give billions of dollars in subsidies to coal, oil, gas and nuclear companies.

A staffer for an Iowa congressman once told me a vote for renewable energy is a no-brainer for an Iowa politician. As we head into the next congressional and legislative sessions, let's hope he's right.

Amber Hard is Iowa PIRG's Public Interest Advocate.

## ■ 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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