

SPAN

State PIRG Alumni Network

State PIRG Alumni Newsletter • Spring 2009

Moving Forward On Public Transportation

Most Americans live miles from our daily trips for work, school, or other responsibilities. Unfortunately, our current transportation system has many stuck waiting in traffic, all the while creating air pollution and consuming billions of barrels of overseas oil. Some drivers are even paying private toll companies for the privilege to use the roads.

Instead, transportation networks should be built and operated in the public interest. That means helping Americans get around by reducing traffic congestion and increasing alternatives to car travel.

U.S. PIRG reports that without big changes, America's transportation problems will severely worsen as over 60 million people join the population by 2030.

Light rail, clean bus systems, high-speed intercity rail, and other forms of public transit should play a greater part in America's transportation future.

Efficient public transportation systems reduce the number of cars on the road and increase our options for getting around. As we work to maintain and expand transportation networks, we must also ensure that roadways continue to be operated for the public interest rather than for private profit.

U.S. PIRG is working for more and better transit by encouraging public support for new projects and improved service. The group is also working to ensure that toll road privatization deals don't sell out the public by relinquishing public control or selling valuable assets at a discount.

This year has so far seen some big victories for public transportation:

- Last winter, House and Senate negotiators added \$8 billion to the final economic recovery bill for high-speed rail, a move backed by U.S. PIRG. Another \$8 billion in the bill is designated for other public transportation uses. *The New York Times* quoted U.S. PIRG's **John Krieger**: "After decades of looking on with envy at efficient bullet trains overseas, American high-speed rail is finally leaving the station."

- After thousands of CALPIRG members urged House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to stand up for public transit, she did, helping to push through an amendment to the House version of the bill and hanging tough in negotiations with the Senate.

- CALPIRG was victorious last fall in passing statewide ballot initiative 1A to approve building high-speed rail between L.A. and the San Francisco Bay Area. ■



ADVOCATING IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSIT—CoPIRG
State Director Danny Katz speaks to the press about Transportation Freedom Day on March 10 in Denver.

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Alumna Pam Wilmot of Common Cause Massachusetts, Sen. Jamie Eldridge, Rep. Jay Kaufman, MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz, and Rep. Gloria Fox at an April 29 Election Day Registration lobby day in Boston.

Students Converge for 2009 Power Shift Conference

In late February and early March, more than 10,000 students converged on Washington, D.C., for the 2009 Power Shift conference, an effort to hold our leaders accountable for bold action on climate change and energy.

The event was organized by the Energy Action Coalition members, including the Student PIRGs. Energy Action Coalition staff include New Voters Project alumni **Eliza Simon** (Managing Director), **Jessy Tolkan** (Executive Director), and **Josh Tulkin** (Field Director).

The 400 or so PIRG students in attendance at Power Shift sported T-shirts that read, "Congress: Make It Greener, Better, Faster, Stronger."

Conference attendees were able to participate in panels; an impressive series of inspirational

speeches from Nancy Pelosi, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Van Jones, and others; workshops; training; a huge lobby day; rally; and more. ■

Funding For Clean Energy In Stimulus Package

The economic recovery plan signed into law by President Obama on Feb. 17 in Denver included \$80 billion in new funding for clean energy.

Environment Colorado's **Pam Kiely** and Public Interest Network Chair **Doug Phelps** were on hand as the president spoke and signed the historic measure.

As the stimulus bill had been working its way through Congress, Environment America advocates and organizers around the country turned out members and coalition partners to town hall meetings, downtown rallies, and other events, all designed to

Campaign Highlights

build support for a truly green economic recovery plan. Over 20,000 online activists spoke up, as well. The clean energy provisions in the resulting law should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 68 million tons, reduce oil consumption by 15 million barrels, and create more than 1.5 million green jobs.

While, as *The New York Times* put it, the bill should not be confused with a global warming bill, as "dealing with climate change will require a much broader strategy, even larger federal investments in clean-energy technologies and an effort to put a price on greenhouse gas emissions to unlock private investment on an enormous scale," the package still represents a great step toward a clean energy economy. ■

Recovery Bill Also Comes Through For Students

The final recovery bill also included a \$17 billion increase in the Pell grant program for college students. The increase means more grant money, as well as more work-study aid and bigger tax credits for low-income students and their families. Rep. George Miller, the key House leader on education, sought input on the plan from U.S. PIRG's **Rich Williams**. ■

Florida Liquefied Natural Gas Project Halted

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist joined

President Obama at a Fort Myers, Fla. town hall event on Feb. 10, and Environment Florida's **Adam Rivera** took the opportunity to turn out activists opposed to plans for a deep-water liquefied natural gas facility slated for Fort Lauderdale.

The governor announced his opposition to the plan on the spot—good news for local residents, since a leak at the facility could have created a vapor cloud that, if ignited, would have incinerated everything within a four-mile radius. ■

New Jersey Passes Solar Homes Law

On March 31, New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine signed the Residential Development Solar Energy Systems Act into law. The act requires developers in the state to offer solar power as a standard option on new homes, and to explain the economic and environmental benefits of solar to potential buyers.

"Solar is a proven technology that can put New Jerseyans back to work and reduce our dependence upon dirty and dangerous power plants," said Environment New Jersey Global Warming and Clean Energy Advocate **Matt Elliot**.

New Jersey is already a national leader in solar power, and the new legislation should further grow the market and help to position the state as a true innovator in the field. ■

Alumni Profile

Will Coyne: Chief of Staff

Will Coyne grew up in the nation’s capital, so it seems appropriate that he has pursued a career in politics.

From his first position as a summer canvasser, Will soon moved up to become a Field Manager on the canvass, and then joined the Fellowship program with the Frontier Group, directed by **Susan Rakov**, in Santa Barbara.

Moving to Denver in 2003, Will became an advocate at Environment Colorado. Will eventually served as Program Director for Environment Colorado, working closely with **Matt Baker** and others.

Some of his best memories from his time on staff include directing the Santa Barbara canvass office with **Jennette Gayer**; really learning how to write by working with **Susan Rakov**—one of the smartest people he has had the pleasure to know; and watching **Matt Baker** turn what seemed like a fringe renewable energy idea into a new political reality in Colorado.

Over the last couple of years, Will has served as Chief of Staff to two Speakers of the Colorado House of Representatives, Andrew Romanoff and Terrance Carroll.

His favorite part of this work is helping progressive legislators win big victories for the middle class against powerful special interests.

In the time that Will has served as Chief of Staff to the Speakers, the state has made significant strides for renewable energy against the coal companies and utilities, won big battles against the insurance companies to provide cheaper and better quality health coverage, and fought the tobacco industry to get a smoke-free Colorado.

Working at the Capitol, Will sees Public Interest Network staff



Will Coyne

and alumni **Pam Kiely, Ben Prochazka, Chuck Malick, Pete Maysmith, Jon Goldin-Dubois, Kelly Nordini, and Rex Wilmouth** on a regular basis.

Will lives in northwest Denver with his wife, Lauren, and their big, hairy dog, Mia. He can be reached at willcoyne@gmail.com. ■

In Memoriam: Jonathan Souweine



Jonathan Souweine (front left), along with other MASSPIRG pioneers Suzanne Wilson, Stephen Rider, Karen Meenan, and Peter Bogle outside the Amherst office in 1974.

Alumnus **Jonathan Souweine** passed away on April 7 in Boston after a hard-fought five-year battle with leukemia. He was 61 years old.

Born in Brooklyn, Jonathan was raised on Long Island and later attended Columbia and Harvard Law School.

He went on to become a staff attorney and the executive director of MASSPIRG. Working alongside early MASSPIRG leaders **Mindy Lubber, Steve Morgan, and Norman Stein**, he led the first Bottle Bill campaign in Massachusetts that ultimately resulted

in a statewide deposit on beverage containers.

Jonathan was also instrumental in MASSPIRG’s opposition to the Seabrook Nuclear Plant, advocacy to end NE Telephone company consumer abuses, and passing a lemon law on used automobiles. He was respected and greatly admired for his passion, intelligence, sense of humor, and devotion to PIRG staff and students.

Jonathan later worked as a private practice attorney and partner at Lesser, Newman, Souweine and Nasser for more than 25 years, while remaining an active par-

ticipant in countless community groups and causes.

He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Judith; his children Jesse, Isaac, and Daniel; grandchildren; sisters; and many, many loving relatives and friends.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Kestrel Trust in Amherst or to the Pan-Mass Challenge, which supports cancer research, at www.pmc.org or at PMC, 77 4th Ave.; Needham, MA 02494. Please specify donation for JS0476 or write “tribute to Jonathan Souweine.” ■

Alumni Updates

Weddings and Babies:

Environment America staff **Paul Burns** and **Alyssa Schuren** were married on Sept. 6 in Richmond, Vt. Alumni in attendance included **Will Everitt**, **Drew Hudson**, **James & Mia (Scampini) Moore**, **Harris Parnell**, **Sandy Pooler**, **Jay Rasku & Iris Vicencio-Rasku**, **Ben Walsh**, **Richard Watts**, and **Matt Wilson**.

Former canvass director **Kate (Mancina) Collum** and her husband, Brian, announced the birth of Charles Aidan Collum on July 24, 2008. Kate works as a health coach and nursing program coordinator at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo.

Alumnus **Paul Copleman** and Andrea Hall welcomed their first child, Benjamin Douglas Copleman, to the world on Dec. 18 in Bryn Mawr, Pa.

CoPIRG alumna **Barb Ferrill Van Hoy** gave birth to Olivia Ella Mariah Van Hoy on Oct. 5 in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Campus team alumnus **Alex Kaplan** and his wife, Lisa, celebrated the birth of Nora Rose Kaplan on Feb. 3 in Boston. Alex currently teaches English at Newton South High School.

Former California staff **Greg Lewis** and **Christine Houseworth** welcomed twins Henry and Imogene Lewis Houseworth to the world on Dec. 31 in New York City.

Alumna **Amy Marrinan Davidson** and her husband, Dean, celebrated the birth of Megan Marin Davidson on Aug. 14, 2008. She joins big sister Riley, age two.

Public Interest GRFX alumna **Jenna Perry Leschuk** gave birth to Aidan Robert Leschuk on Dec. 20 in Boston.

Alumnus **Merc Pittinos** and his wife, Mary Clare, welcomed Catherine Clare Pittinos to the world during a blizzard on March 27 in Denver, Colo.

Alumna **Jill Rubin** married

Andrew Lehto on June 22, 2008, in Huntington, Vt. The couple now resides in Beacon, N.Y. where Jill works on sustainable food and agriculture issues.

Alumna **Alex Russell** and her husband, Brant Jones, announced the birth of Winnie Calvin Jones-Russell on Oct. 23.

Former internet organizer **Toby Russell** and his wife, Kelly, celebrated the birth of Calvin Taylor Russell on Jan. 25 near Boulder, Colo.

Alumni **Jodi Segal** and **Jim Taylor** welcomed Violet Taylor to the world on March 4 in Columbus, Ohio.

Fund alumna **Cathy Svehla** married Phillip Rosenberg on March 8 in Nevada. They live in Joshua Tree, Calif., and encourage anyone anxious to get away from cold, gray weather to look them up.

Alumnus **John Valley** and his wife, Amanda, announced the birth of Bridget Katherine

Valley on March 9 in Portland, Ore. Bridget joins older brother, Parker, age three.

Public Interest GRFX alumna **Amy Wolf** married Bennett Baumer on Oct. 4 in New York City. Amy works as a communications officer at The New York Community Trust and produces video with The New York Independent Media Center (www.independent.org).

Movers and Shakers:

Campus team alumna **Kat Barr** recently left her position at Rock the Vote to begin work as a campaign director at MoveOn.org.

Former campus organizer **Brenda Barron** recently began a new job as Regional Field Director with USAction, where alumna **Cassandra McKee** also works.

NJPIRG alumna **Kristen Brengel** left her position at The Wilderness Society and started as the Director of Legislative and Government Affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association in late April. On a personal



Benjamin Douglas Copleman



Megan Marin Davidson



Calvin Taylor Russell



Bridget Katherine Valley



Winnie Jones-Russell



Nora Rose Kaplan



Catherine Clare Pittinos



Olivia Ella Mariah Van Hoy

note, Kristen married Jemal Hajibrahim on March 14 in Toledo, Ohio.

Alumna **Jolinda Buchanan** has been busy working with Farm Aid and HOME (Hoosier Organic Marketing Education) to facilitate post-flood disaster relief in her part of Indiana after last year's devastating Midwestern floods. She has also kept up with publishing examples of her writing and photography—much of it award-winning—at www.jpgmag.com/people/adniloj.

Alumnus **Michael Caudell-Feagan** was recently promoted to Deputy Director of the Pew Center on the States. In the new role, he oversees the Pew Government Performance unit, which builds on the work of their Public Safety Performance Project, Make Voting Work, and Government Performance Project.

Alumna **Jennifer Coken** announced her candidacy for the Colorado State House of Representatives, District 4, in March. More at coken4colorado@gmail.com.

U.S. PIRG alumnus **Grant Cope** recently left his position on the Senate Environment & Public

Works Committee to head the Office of Solid Waste & Emergency Response at the EPA.

Former canvasser and canvass director **Penny (Needs) Crump** reports that she is hard at work managing web communications for the humanitarian aid organization AmeriCares, which delivers medicines, medical supplies, and disaster relief aid throughout the world as well as supports U.S. health clinics that serve the uninsured and underinsured. You can follow them on Twitter @AmeriCares.

Former canvass director **Michelle Denney** is working as a community organizer for Planned Parenthood in New Orleans.

NYPIRG alumnus **Ken Deutsch** and his team at Morningside Analytics have developed a "Political Video Barometer" that lets anyone see which YouTube videos are moving through the conservative and liberal blogs, and which ones are breaking through to a mainstream audience. Check it out at <http://tinyurl.com/5vmuvm>. You can reach Ken at ken@morningside-analytics.com.

ConnPIRG co-founder **De Fischer Herman**, a long-time environmental activist in the Jewish com-

munity of greater Washington, D.C., was recently ordained as a Rabbinic Pastor and is currently serving as a chaplain with Capital Hospice.

Alumnus and Progressive Voter Network Director **Clayt Freed** recently received the University of Wisconsin-Madison Alumni Association's "Forward Under 40" award. More at <http://www.forwardunder40.com/freed.html>.

Green Corps alumna **Edie Gilliss** and former canvass director **Aaron Toso** recently began work together at the office of the Washington State Commissioner of Public Lands: Edie was appointed Senior Advisor, and Aaron the new Director of Communications.

CALPIRG alumnus **Jon Golinger** was recently elected Editor-in-Chief of the Golden Gate University Law Review. In addition to law school, Jon continues his work on San Francisco political and environmental campaigns. Last fall, he managed the successful campaign to elect new San Francisco Board of Supervisors President David Chiu.



Aidan Robert Leschuk



Henry and Imogene Lewis Houseworth



Bennett Baumer and Amy Wolf

—Continued on page 6



Alyssa Schuren and Paul Burns with alumni and staff guests.

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Fund alumna **Stephanie Haynes** was recently hired as the Community Coordinator for Philadelphia Family Pride, a social networking group for LGBT families that also does some advocacy and education around gay parenting issues.

Fund alumnus **Sean Koenig** recently wrapped up a stint of volunteer hurricane clean

up and mudslide removal in Haiti and moved to Seoul to begin a position teaching middle school science.

Former canvasser and campus organizer **Cassandra McKee** is the 2009 recipient of the Heather Award from the Midwest Academy to recognize her organizing work as field director of USAction and the values and vision she embraces as an organizer. The award was established

Alumni Updates (continued)

in 2005 in honor of veteran activist Heather Booth.

MASSPIRG alumnus **Colin Peppard** recently began a new position as Climate and Infrastructure Campaign Director at the Environmental Defense Fund.

Alumna **Kathryn Poindexter** recently began a new position as Senior Analyst at Lake Research Partners, a public opinion and political strategy research firm headed by alumni **Celinda Lake** and **David Mermin**.

NJPIRG alumnus **Bill Potter** has been keeping busy with the law firm of Potter & Dickson, where he is partner. They have recently successfully argued the following cases for the public interest: Gallenthin v. Borough of Paulsboro; Pond Run Watershed Association v. Hamilton;

and Harrison Redevelopment Agency v. DeRosel; to name a few.

Alumnus **William (Bill) Powers** recently moved back to New York City from Bolivia and is working as a Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute on the rainforest-global warming connection. His recently completed book, *The Soft World: A Memoir with a Small Footprint*, is set to appear early next year.

Alumnae **Samantha Rodgers**, **Jessy Tolkan**, and **Anth Williams**, along with Environment America's **Anna Aurilio** and Green Corps Executive Director **Cindy Kang**, were featured in the "Glamour's Green Heroes" photo spread in the April issue of *Glamour* magazine. The piece honors 70 female "Eco Heroes" in honor of Earth Day 2009 and *Glamour*'s 70th anniversary.

Some Current Career Opportunities With The Public Interest Network

For more information, please visit www.uspirg.org/jobs and www.environment-america.org/jobs, or call Hiring Director **Surf del Mar** at 303-573-5885 x325.

• Advocate, PIRGIM—Ann Arbor, MI

Develop programs and campaigns to implement common-sense protections for Michigan, particularly in the areas of transportation and health care. Work on campaigns to make sure our transportation systems are affordable, dependable, safe, and environmentally friendly, and hold pharmaceutical companies accountable for driving up drug prices.

• Executive Assistant, MASSPIRG & Environment Massachusetts—Boston, MA

Help to coordinate most aspects of two fast-paced public interest organizations. Oversee day-to-day functioning, implement organizational plans and strategies, and manage the staff. Responsibilities range from clerical duties such as filing to strategic planning such as budget creation.

• Director, Environment Oregon—Portland, OR

Lead the effort to protect Oregon's air, water, and open spaces. Direct statewide energy campaigns, including efforts to clean up dirty sources of electricity; promote clean and renewable power; and advance progressive transportation policy.

• Advocate, NCPIRG—Raleigh, NC

Focus on transportation policy and energy efficiency in North Carolina. Work to close corporate tax loopholes, call for an end to special interest handouts, protect consumers' financial privacy, and push for sensible health care reform.

• Program Director, Environment Washington—Seattle, WA

Oversee the organization's work on energy and preservation policy in Washington. Create a plan to win campaigns and develop strategies to gain political support for our agenda through coalition-building, grassroots organizing, media publicity, endorsements, and message development.

Alumni Updates (continued)

Alumnus **Justin Ruben** recently stepped up from his position as MoveOn.org's Organizing Director to become the organization's Executive Director.

Alumnus **Sam Sager** recently left his position at the Western Conservation Foundation in Denver to help Sudan's efforts to run its first democratic presidential election.

Former canvasser **Brian Selander** recently began a new position as Chief Strategy Officer for the state of Delaware and Gov. Jack Markell.

CALPIRG alumnus **Bob Shireman** has been named the Deputy Undersecretary of Education, where he will be responsible for the Obama administration's agenda on college financial aid

and other higher education and training initiatives. His wife, alumna **Lucinda Sikes**, and their children will be making the move to join him in the nation's capital this summer.

MASSPIRG alumna **Stephanie Sorge Wing** and her husband, Andy, recently moved to Harrodsburg, Ky., to serve the United Presbyterian Church as Co-Pastors.

Fund alumnus **Dan Stafford** is founder and co-owner of Kilgore Used Books and Comics in Denver's Capitol Hill neighborhood. The store was recently honored in the *Westword* newspaper's 2009 "Best of Denver" list.

Public Interest GREX alumnus **Drew Stephan** is living in New Orleans and working for C4 Tech



Jill Rubin and Andrew Lehto



Kristen Bregel and Jemal Hajibrahim

& Design, a computer repair, web development, and graphic design collective.

U.S. PIRG alumnus and former Georgia state representative **Doug Teper** recently joined the U.S. State Department's Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team and is spending time in Iraq working

on rebuilding efforts.

In addition to being part of the aforementioned spread in *Glamour*, Energy Action Coalition Executive Director and alumna **Jessy Tolkan** was also named one of Rolling Stone magazine's "100 Agents of Change." Read all about it at <http://tinyurl.com/dj7cta>. ■

Investing For Environmental Change

Green Century Capital Management (Green Century) was founded and is wholly owned by Public Interest Network organizations to promote corporate environmental responsibility and green investing.

Green Century manages the Green Century Balanced Fund and Equity Fund, two of the first environmentally responsible mutual funds.

Each of the Green Century Funds seeks competitive financial returns while providing people who care about a clean,

healthy planet the opportunity to use the clout of their investment dollars to encourage sustainable corporate behavior.

Continuing a tradition begun by its founding President, alumna **Mindy Lubber**, Green Century advocates that companies improve their environmental practices.

Green Century's Advocacy team, advised by Public Interest Network Political Director and Green Century President **Wendy Wendlandt** and comprised of **Larisa Ruoff** and Green Corps

alumna **Emily Stone**, pressures companies to adopt greener practices.

Green Century is collaborating with Environment Florida to halt Lowe's attempts to build a store in the Everglades and worked with U.S. PIRG and state PIRGs to release Green Century's report on the controversial chemical bisphenol-A.

For more information, contact Larisa or Emily at lruff@greencentury.com or estone@greencentury.com. For information about how to invest in the Green

Century mutual funds, please go to www.greencentury.com.

You should carefully consider the Funds' investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses before investing. To obtain a prospectus that contains this and other information about the Funds, visit www.greencentury.com, email info@greencentury.com or call 1-800-93-GREEN. Please read the prospectus carefully before investing.

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Save The Date: Upcoming Alumni Events

Alumni and staff gather regularly in cities across the country to catch up with old friends and meet some new faces from the Public Interest Network family. We are in the midst of planning events for 2009, so stay tuned to www.pirg.org/alumni/calendar.html for more details on upcoming events and for photos from past events. If you'd like to help organize an alumni get-together near you, contact Kirsten Schatz at alumni@publicinterestnetwork.org or 303-573-5885 x331.

Philadelphia, PA Wednesday, June 3, 2009
Contact Jenne Turner: jturner@fundstaff.org

Portland, ME Thursday, June 4, 2009
Contact Katie Kokkinos: kkokkinos@environmentmaine.org

Austin, TX Saturday, July 18, 2009
Contact Luke Metzger: luke@environmenttexas.org

Portland, OR Thursday, September 17, 2009
Contact Dave Rosenfeld: daver@ospirg.org

Denver, CO Saturday, September 26, 2009
Contact Pam Kiely: pkiely@environmentcolorado.org

Concord, NH Saturday, October 17, 2009
Contact Katie Fox: kfox@environmentnewhampshire.org

Aspen, CO Dec. 11-19, 2009
Eligible career alumni should save these dates for the next Alumni Aspen vacation! Contact Kirsten Schatz at alumni@publicinterestnetwork.org for more info.



Andre Delattre, Rachel Heller, Megan DeSmedt, and Erin Casey catch up at last year's event in Boston.