

Memo

To: Lily Rothman, Mike Lux, Presidential Transition Team
From: The Student PIRGs
Date: 12/20/2008
Re: What are young Americans uniquely qualified to do to help meet specific national challenges, and how?

The Student Public Interest Research Groups are the nation's largest student civic engagement program. Each year, our intensive training program teaches more than 10,000 students on 100 campuses basic advocacy skills. Our thirty years of experience demonstrates with a little training, students are able to harness their biggest resources – energy and idealism – to mobilize the public to help solve key national challenges.

A Record of Success

Young people's ability to harness their energy and idealism and successfully mobilize for change on key issues of national importance was clearly illustrated by several recent successes in student advocacy.

Repowering America. CALPIRG students played a major role in the passage of Prop 1A, a ballot measure to implement the first high speed rail project in the country. Fifty students spent their spring break organizing a bike tour of the proposed train route, holding media conferences along the way with local officials to build support for the measure. Later, hundreds of CALPIRG activists blanketed the state with pro-high speed rail on-line campaign to put the measure over the top.

Making Education Affordable. In August, Congress adopted a new PIRG-crafted law requiring textbook publishers to disclose textbook prices to faculty before the time of sale. In four years of sustained advocacy, students released seven investigative reports into the abuses of the textbooks industry that generated national and local media coverage from hundreds of outlets in all 50 states and organized 2,000 faculty to speak out against high textbook prices. In 2007, Student PIRG leaders played a key role in passage of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, one of the biggest expansions in student aid in 15 years. On the ground, Student PIRGs organized students to enter their personal debt stories into an online *Student Debt Yearbook*, generated hundreds of news stories, met with their members of Congress, and testified at field hearings on student debt around the country.

Mobilizing Young Voters. Since 2004, student volunteers and a network of paid organizers trained by the Student PIRGs New Voters Project have registered more than 700,000 young voters and established more than a million get out the vote contacts to urge young people to the polls.

A Student Agenda for Change

In the coming year, thousands of Student PIRG leaders on campuses across the country will continue their push for change and launch an extensive effort to mobilize public support around an ambitious agenda to repower our economy with clean energy, reduce the cost of higher education and ensure basic voting rights. Top student priorities include:

- Ensuring at least a \$62.3 billion in renewable energy investments such as wind and solar and green job training that will play a crucial role in repowering America with clean, homegrown energy;
- Making college more affordable by lowering the interest rate on the PLUS loan, increasing protections for students who borrow from private lenders, and working with the Obama Department of Education to ensure full participation in a new law to disclose textbook prices to faculty;
- Ensuring basic voting rights by passing legislation to implement a system of automatic and permanent voter registration that ensures students and others are registered at their current address.

We look forward to working with the new administration and congress to replicate this success in the coming year and ensuring the students do harness their unique ability to tackle the key challenges facing our nation today.