



The Climate Movement We Have Been Waiting For

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When environmentalist author Bill McKibben spoke to a community of progressive philanthropists this past summer, he advised his audience, "We do not have time to wait for change light bulb by light bulb, person by person, or even community by community. We need a movement, and we need it right now." I then raised my hand, and asked him where he saw the most promising seeds of such a movement to lie, if at all. His first response, "The youth movement." Looking directly at me, perhaps one of the youngest people in the room, he said, "You probably know them. Energy Action Coalition."

He was right. I do know the Energy Action Coalition, and as a young person in North America, it is becoming increasingly difficult to not cross paths with Energy Action. A coalition of more than forty youth led social justice and environmental organizations, Energy Action is pulling young people together from across the U.S. and Canada to fight for and win clean energy and climate policies. In May 2005, Energy Action launched the Campus Climate Challenge to unite students in gaining 100 percent clean energy policies on their campuses. In the first year of the Challenge, more than 550 universities, tribal colleges, high schools, and community colleges signed on. These young activists and organizers are now well on their way to reaching a 3-year goal of 1000 campuses moving towards 100 percent carbon neutrality.

McKibben continued that day, back in July, saying that, "When it comes to talking versus doing, young people are getting the most done." Shortly thereafter, and almost as if to not disappoint McKibben, who has been a leader and inspirational visionary within the environmental movement for decades, Energy Action announced that it was once again upping the ante. This time in the form of Powershift, the first national youth led-climate summit, which will take place Nov. 2-5th in Washington D.C.

This historic gathering will bring youth of all backgrounds, from all 50 states, and every single Congressional district, together for four days of training, action, and inspiration. We will use our experience from local and state level climate change movements to create a fresh, positive, and hopeful vision of the future; one focused on our potential to overcome the challenges of the 21st century, build a clean energy economy, achieve energy independence, create millions of green jobs, increase global equity, and revitalize the American economy. Indeed these are ambitious goals, but as young people who will be left to deal with the consequences of global warming, we can ask no less.

As a young person myself, I have heard my elders say over and over, "Where are the young people? ... Why aren't they voting? ... Back in the 1960's, young people led

the way ... Do young people today just not care?" We as a country have been waiting for our youth to get organized, inspire us, and lead the way toward positive social change. Well, the young people we have been waiting for are here; they are mobilized and they are showing up.

Nearly 5,000 young people will attend Powershift. Leaders of our generation will share ideas, learn new skills, make new connections, establish a national voice for our generation, and send a united message to our national leaders: we are moving beyond the same old special interests, empty promises, and inadequate results to embrace a new paradigm that leverages our strengths and achieves what is possible for our future. Together with the thousands of local actions that are taking place in communities across the country as part of Step It Up: National Day of Climate Action (which was actually founded by McKibben and his students at Middlebury College), the weekend of November 2nd, 2007 is shaping up to be the largest grassroots mobilization for climate change in U.S. History.

Powershift will culminate on November 5th, with "Confront Congress," where thousands of youth, along with our allies such as the newly created 1 Sky Campaign, will lobby House and Senate members from every state on a coordinated national platform: 5 million green jobs, resulting in a 20 percent conservation of energy by 2015; the freezing of climate pollution levels now and cutting them 30 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050; and the reprogramming of fossil fuel and highway investments for clean energy and transportation choices, starting with a moratorium on new coal plants.

The House Special Committee on Climate Change has also scheduled a hearing where young people directly affected by climate change will speak out on the issue. Youth witnesses, representing the Arctic north, Appalachia, the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, and other locations will testify on the urgency of the crisis and the importance of bold action.

Having witnessed the power and potential of the youth leaders within Energy Action, I agree with McKibben, that when it comes to climate, youth are leading the way. We as young people, are getting our act together, and working collectively in unprecedented ways, because we must. The climate crisis, and its innumerable byproducts, are urgent and they affect us all. We are no longer the absentee voters, nor can we be called the quiet generation. We are learning from the lessons of those before us, and we are creating new ways of organizing to accomplish our goal of a just future based in clean-energy economies.

The momentum is growing. Please join us.

For information about Power Shift, or local Step It Up Actions in your neighborhood, please visit [Power Shift](#).

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