

# Lonely at the top at the EPA

**I**t's awfully lonely being Christine Whitman. Love her or hate her, it's impossible not to feel a pang of sympathy for the former governor of New Jersey, now administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. She sits behind a desk in a vast, gloomy office, leader of an agency whose internal machinations — let's face it — few bother to understand, at the center of an environmental debate that has lately become ludicrously, almost hysterically, polarized. After two years in the job, she has, she says, her own way of determining whether she has taken the "right" stand in a regulatory debate: "If I'm getting equally blasted by both sides, I know I'm in the right place."

Up to a point you can see her point. There is little applause nowadays for those who describe themselves as "pro-business and pro-environment" as Ms. Whitman tries to do. With surprisingly few exceptions, both environmentalists and industry lobbies have convinced themselves that the environmental debate is a zero-sum game. Every new regulation is calculated in dollars lost by one side; every failure to regulate is calculated in dead birds by the other side. Perhaps this is no surprise: Even a minor change in the notoriously complex EPA rules can require thousands of people to alter their behavior, or else spend a great deal of money for benefits they can't necessarily see. At the same time, the failure to make these same intricate changes can have dramatic impacts on particular species or particular places. Both sides now spend vast amounts of money and lobbying time on everything from riders attached to appropriations bills to the vast, almost philosophical question of whether the globe is or is not warming.

And no wonder: It's worth it to industry to fight every issue with loud rhetoric, given the money involved. It's worth it to the en-

## Where is it written in blood that conservatism and environmentalism must be ideological enemies?

vironmentalists, because the more fuss they make, the more attention (and donations) they receive. In recent years, this bitter battle has been exacerbated further by politics: In the last election, Al Gore solidly identified himself with the environmental lobby, and George W. Bush hasn't gone out of his way to emphasize his differences from the energy industry.

But if decorum has been sacrificed, so too, for the moment, have the prospects for a moderate environmental policy, not to say a Republican one. Which is odd, if you think about it. Where is it written in blood that conservatism and environmentalism must be ideological enemies? In other places — England, for example — conservation has a distinctly conservative face: Saving trees is about future generations. I've also met Bush administration officials who mumble darkly about energy conservation policy being critical to national security policy: After all, every gallon of gas saved is another one we don't have to buy from Saudi Arabia. If we are counting pennies, there are other ways to do it too: Polluted air adds billions of dollars to health care costs, thanks to increased incidence of asthma and lung disease.

Bravely, or perhaps foolishly, Ms. Whitman has set herself up as the spokesman for this moderate position. While not calling anyone names, she firmly separates herself, in conversation, both from the environmental

lobby and from the Republican congressmen who have spent their careers fighting it. (Both sides, she sniffs, "benefit from heated rhetoric.") She also supports several policies she describes as "market-based." Last week EPA published its new rules on water quality trading, which will allow businesses and local governments to buy and sell rights to pollute. Several states have found such trading results in less money being spent on more cleanup. Ms. Whitman also offers the administration's proposed Clear Skies Act — which will allow industry to trade rights to emit certain pollutants — as an example of the moderate environmentalism she is talking about.

The question, of course, is whether the intermediate position Ms. Whitman has carved out is a real one, with real political backing in the rest of her party and the rest of the administration, or whether she merely serves as window dressing for people who have other priorities but don't want to say so out loud. EPA officials do admit Ms. Whitman faces pressure from other parts of the administration — including the vice president's office — to modify her proposals. James M. Inhofe, the new Republican chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, has also failed to mention the Clear Skies Act in his list of priorities. Maybe this is Ms. Whitman's fault, testimony to her inability to play behind-the-scenes politics. Or maybe it's because there is no serious support anywhere for a wishy-washy-sounding, common-sense, cost-benefit-analysis view of environmental protection. Either way, Ms. Whitman's fluctuating fortunes serve as an excellent weathervane: Her success, or failure, will tell us whether compromise on the environment is even possible anymore.

Anne Applebaum writes for The Washington Post.

1/24/03 Morning Star

Nation

# Environmentalists take aim at Bush record

As elections near, green groups push their concerns back into the spotlight

By Tom Kenworthy and Traci Watson  
USA TODAY

Several contentious environmental issues are returning to the national agenda as the political unity that grew out of the trauma of Sept. 11 fades.

In a flurry of assessments of President Bush's first year in office, environmentalists largely quiet since the terrorist attacks are trying to set the stage for the 2002 elections by condemning the White House as a captive of industry and unremittingly hostile to environmental protection.

"On the major issues most Americans care about, their record is 100% bad," says Phil Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust. "They are systematically gutting key protections."

At the same time, senior administration officials are issuing score cards of their own as both sides jockey for public support in anticipation of key legislative and regulatory fights. Among the issues on which major decisions are likely to be made soon are global warming and drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

## Administrations, environmental groups' positions on key issues

	Status	Bush administration view	Environmentalists' view
<b>Global warming</b>	House approved; Senate to vote in February.	Will create jobs, reduce dependence on foreign oil.	Will threaten fragile environment and wildlife, yet provide little energy independence.
<b>Aging power plants</b>	White House pulled out of international treaty to slow warming last year. It's now devising its own plan. Clinton administration barred roads and other development on 58.5 million acres.	Wants to address problem without costing jobs or damaging economy.	Nation needs a plan to quickly cut emissions tied to warming.
<b>Clean water</b>	Administration last year blocked Clinton rules to clean up the 40% of rivers and lakes nationwide that don't meet pollution standards.	Wants rules that don't threaten energy supplies.	Administration undermining protections by failing to defend them in court and letting agencies bypass them.
<b>Snowmobiling in Yellowstone National Park</b>	Administration last year blocked Clinton rules to clean up the 40% of rivers and lakes nationwide that don't meet pollution standards.	Wants more flexible rules that would give states more authority than they had under Clinton rules.	Favors clearer version of previous rules that led to cleanup at many plants.
<b>Waterways should be cleaned up promptly and thoroughly.</b>	Administration last year blocked Clinton rules to clean up the 40% of rivers and lakes nationwide that don't meet pollution standards.	Wants more flexible rules that would give states more authority than they had under Clinton rules.	Waterways should be cleaned up promptly and thoroughly.
<b>Phase out snowmobiles to protect wildlife and reduce air and noise pollution.</b>	Administration last year blocked Clinton rules to clean up the 40% of rivers and lakes nationwide that don't meet pollution standards.	Wants more flexible rules that would give states more authority than they had under Clinton rules.	Phase out snowmobiles to protect wildlife and reduce air and noise pollution.

Source: USA TODAY research by Tom Kenworthy, Traci Watson

testimonial to her first-year accomplishments with her sprawling department, which manages a quarter of the nation's landmass.

Norton says the hallmarks of her record are "communication, consultation and cooperation," particularly with state officials who felt "federal agencies seldom listened."

The philosophy is "to make these kinds of decisions with less of a Washington, D.C., knows best" approach," adds Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey.

With control of both the House and Senate at stake in November, the White House has been laboring to moderate its image on the environment. The administration endured a recent relations debacle

last year after initially moving to allow higher arsenic levels in drinking water, a position it subsequently reversed.

In recent weeks, President Bush has traveled to Florida to complete an agreement with Florida to protect the Everglades and to Pennsylvania to sign legislation on cleaning up contaminated industrial sites. Also, the administration recently announced that it would move ahead with the cleanup of PCBs in the Hudson River and continue pressing lawsuits against power plant owners who upgrade old generating plants without installing better pollution controls.

Bush gets credit for those moves even from some of his environmental opponents on Capitol Hill.

"There are some things that give me hope," said Sen. Jim Jeffords, the Vermont independent whose defection from the Republican Party last year cost the GOP control of the Senate.

Election-year pressures, Jeffords predicts, will likely bring more White House moderation. "I would expect, knowing this is a critical year for control of the House and Senate, that we'll see some moves for getting more votes."

Leaders of major environmental groups give Bush little credit, however. They point to a lengthy list of decisions during the first year, de-

tion regulations on mining on public lands that would have given the government veto power over projects deemed harmful to nature.

► Eased Clinton-era restrictions on the destruction of wetlands.

► Weakened a Clinton directive protecting 58.5 million acres of national forest from road-building and other development.

► Pushed an energy policy that stresses expanded oil and gas exploration on public lands over conservation and renewable sources.

► Rejected an international treaty to reduce emissions that contribute to global warming.

William Meadows, president of the Wilderness Society, says the only progress the administration

has made is showing more finesse in disguising its anti-environmental agenda. He cites recent directives undermining an earlier pledge to uphold Clinton's protections for roadless areas in national forests. Another issue: a low-key announcement promising review of a conservation plan for California's Sierra Nevada one day after high-profile endorsement of it plan. "This is their half-and-switch philosophy," he said.

With major issues surfacing the next few months and "w" worries over terrorism easing, "the environment could be the sleep issue of the 2002 election," predicts Daniel Weiss, former political director of the Sierra Club.

Today's debate: Public service ads

## Ad Council sacrifices credibility to politics

### Our view:

**'Non-partisan' ad campaign helps fund partisan attacks.**

When a revered charity dupes the public once, it can be chalked up as a mistake. But when the charity persists in the deception, there's no getting around the fact that it's intentional.

And now that the Advertising Council has decided to renew its controversial fundraising support for partisan environmental groups, the conclusion is inescapable: In spite of its reputation for high-quality public-service ad campaigns, the Ad Council's standards for political neutrality are situational, at best. Consequently, TV stations and newspapers that donate air time and ad space to the Ad Council (among them USA TODAY) have no guarantee their charitable efforts won't be used for partisan causes.

To most, the Ad Council is best known for the good works it advances. In 1972, the council encouraged Americans to give to the United Negro College Fund through ads declaring, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

In 1944, the Ad Council was behind the creation of Smokey Bear to help prevent forest fires. And almost 40 years later, it introduced McGruff the Crime Dog, to raise children's awareness of crime issues. All worthy causes that met the council's strict standards for non-partisanship.

For the past 10 years, though, the Ad Council also has been raising money for environmental and allied political groups with controversial agendas that spread beyond the environment — including support for campaign-finance reform, opposition to bankruptcy legislation and advocacy of civil disobedience to fight the deployment of a national missile defense.

In March, the Ad Council announced it would continue this fundraising through a series of new ads eliciting donations for Earth Share, an umbrella organization for 44 environmental groups. Some of that money is flowing into partisan politics.

Within weeks of the Ad Council's decision, 14 environmental groups that receive some of the money announced how they'll be spending a portion of their donations on a "multimillion-dollar" series of ads attacking the Bush administration's environmental policies.



**Pointed message:** Scene from ad attacking the Bush administration paid for by Earth Share members.

**Brought to you by Smokey Bear**  
The Advertising Council contends its public-service ads are "non-partisan." But its Earth Share campaign raises money for the following groups involved in politics, among others:

- ▶ **American Rivers:** Last month it, along with 11 other groups that are members of Earth Share, including the Center for Marine Conservation and the National Audubon Society, ran ads in nine states attacking the Bush administration.

- ▶ **Union of Concerned Scientists:** The UCS brags that its activities include "lobbying" on specific legislation before Congress. Its agenda extends beyond popular environmental issues to include such issues as restricting biotechnology and fighting plans for a national missile defense.

- ▶ **U.S. Public Interest Research Group:** The PIIRG distributes congressional scorecards similar to the Christian Coalition's voter guides.

- ▶ **Sierra Club:** The Sierra Club has played an increasingly active role in elections in recent years," says its Web site. This spring, the organization ran ads attacking senators from Oregon, New Hampshire and Arkansas for their positions on campaign-finance reform.

- ▶ **Natural Resources Defense Council:** This year, the NRDC has already spent a half-million dollars on cable TV ads in 20 markets urging people to contact Congress and the White House to oppose new oil drilling in an Alaska wildlife refuge.

- ▶ **Friends of the Earth:** During last year's primary, Friends of the Earth endorsed Bill Bradley against Al Gore, then backed Gore against Bush.

SOURCE: USA TODAY research

Their political stand is no surprise. During last fall's presidential elections, many of the same groups were heavily involved in politics, making endorsements, running phone banks and launching attack ads.

The surprise is the Ad Council's insistence that such activities don't violate its standards requiring the public-service campaigns it supports to be "non-partisan." "Political advocacy groups," the council's application criteria note, are "not eligible."

Most of the groups under Earth Share's membership umbrella are laudable, using their portion of the \$60 million the group has collected since 1991 to clean up parks and wilderness areas, fund scientific research and purchase the development rights of farms and watersheds.

But a third of the groups funded by Earth Share have clear political agendas and are more involved in Washington political battles than actually improving the environment. Several regularly run political ads or employ lobbyists, while still others endorse candidates for federal office and distribute campaign scorecards just as the National Rifle Association and the Christian Coalition do.

Asked eight months ago about the violation of its standards, the Ad Council dismissed the issue as irrelevant since Earth Share funds only the charitable branches of the political groups. That's a thin excuse: The groups' charitable affiliates are almost always on the same address by the same person and can spend much of their money supporting political activism.

If the leaders of the Ad Council learned from their mistakes, they would have quietly let the Earth Share campaign lapse. Instead, they ignored their own rules. As a result, residents of at least nine states from New Mexico to New Hampshire are being treated to a new round of attack ads targeting the Bush administration.

The Ad Council really has only one asset of value: credibility. That's the tool that encourages corporations to make huge donations of ad space, and it's the reason that millions of Americans act on the messages they hear in Ad Council ads.

Too bad the Ad Council doesn't seem to care. Credibility is a terrible thing to waste.

## Campaigns meet criteria

influence legislation. All campaigns, including Earth Share, are thoroughly vetted by our proposals committee, which is made up of industry leaders from advertising, media, business and philanthropy.

Having carefully reviewed our selection criteria, we firmly maintain our commitment to Earth Share. As a campaign sponsor, Earth Share not only meets all of our criteria, but also maintains its own strict criteria for the groups that it represents.

Contrary to USA TODAY's assertion, most of Earth Share's members do not engage in legislative politics. Still, while issues of environmental policy sometimes enter into the political arena, the environment itself is a concern all Americans share, regardless of political affiliation.

And while it may be true that some of our campaign sponsors are involved in legislative activities, Ad Council campaigns address issues only. We do not advocate nor do we condemn gun ownership; we promote safe gun storage. We do not advocate nor do we condemn lowering the legal blood-alcohol limit; we encourage friends to prevent friends from driving drunk.

As I have previously written, the Ad Council gives national voice to issues that might otherwise go unheard. To politicize those issues would be to jeopardize our effectiveness, thus undermining the Ad Council's very foundation.

Our mission is, and continues to be, a non-political one.

Peggy Conlon is president and CEO of the Advertising Council.

### Opposing view:

**Council's ads are carefully screened for political bias.**

By Peggy Conlon

For the second time, USA TODAY has taken issue with our support of a public-service advertising campaign for Earth Share. Since creating the category of public-service advertising (PSAs) in 1942, the Ad Council has consistently produced timely, compelling and politically unbiased messages — solely in the spirit of improving American life.

Ad Council PSAs are not, nor have they ever been, political in nature. For 59 years, our campaigns have raised awareness, inspired individuals to action and saved lives. Decade after decade, the Ad Council has served as a champion for various environmental issues.

Our long partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and Smokey Bear has saved millions of acres of woodland. Our work for Keep America Beautiful, featuring Iron Eyes Cody as "The Crying Indian," still remains a powerful symbol of the fight against pollution. And our alliance with Environmental Defense has in large part contributed to the rapid adoption of community curbside-recycling programs nationwide.

Every year, we receive hundreds of inquiries from those wishing to become an Ad Council campaign. The few campaigns that are accepted must fit strict, established criteria. Above all else, the issue we take on must be non-commercial, non-demonstrational, non-politically partisan and not designed to

# Revisiting arsenic policy a mistake, EPA chief says

'If I'd been smart ... I would've let the courts decide'

By Traci Watson  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Environmental Protection Agency head Christie Whitman says she made a strategic mistake in reconsidering a strict federal limit on arsenic levels in drinking water.

Her announcement in March that the EPA would take a second look at a new arsenic standard set by the Clinton administration was not bad policy, Whitman says, but it was naive politics.

"Politically, if I'd been smart, I would've never changed it. I never would've gone back. I would've let the courts decide," Whitman said in an interview. "We were going to be sued anyway by the Western states and a bunch of water companies, and I should've just left it there."

Whitman said she was unprepared for the fallout of her decision on the arsenic limit, which prompted outrage from environmental groups and jokes on late-night television.

Arsenic, which is thought to cause cancer, is found naturally in some kinds of rock and can leach into groundwater through erosion or mining. High arsenic concentrations are found mostly in the drinking water of Western cities, such as Albuquerque.

For decades, the U.S. limit of the chemical in drinking water stood at 50 parts per billion. In 1999, the National Academy of Sciences said that limit needed to be lowered as soon as possible. One of the last acts by the Clinton administration in January was to cut the arsenic limit to 10 parts per billion.

Mining groups, many water companies and some Western lawmakers immediately protested. They said the cost to lower the limit would be devastating and the science was unproved. Several months later, Whitman agreed to re-examine setting the limit.

Her decision came the same day the Bush administration said it would also suspend new limits on



By Al Grillo, AP

**Whitman:** "Governors do not like to let courts make policy. Governors like to make policy."

mining. A week earlier, the president had backed off a campaign pledge to cut global-warming emissions from power plants.

The string of events helped portray Bush as weak on public-health issues and the environment, political analysts said.

Analysts said Whitman's arsenic decision played a prime role in giving the administration an image problem.

"Some well-known poison obviously gets people's attention in a way that another chemical would not," Republican pollster Whit Ayres said.

Debbie Sease, legislative director of the Sierra Club, characterized Whitman's decision as "a terrible political mistake" that helped focus the public's attention on Bush's environmental policies. "Arsenic ... is not complicated. It's just scary and bad," Sease said.

In response to the arsenic uproar, both the House and Senate approved measures calling for tougher arsenic limits. That makes it likely Congress will send Bush an arsenic-limiting provision, probably attached to a spending bill.

If that happens, Whitman said, she's not sure she'd advise a presi-

## States, cities using boutique blends

Some of the states and metropolitan areas where "boutique blends" of gasoline are required to lower air pollution. (Story, 1A)

- ▶ California
- ▶ Minnesota
- ▶ Albuquerque
- ▶ Atlanta
- ▶ Birmingham, Ala.
- ▶ Boston
- ▶ Charlotte, N.C.
- ▶ Chicago
- ▶ Cincinnati
- ▶ Denver
- ▶ Houston
- ▶ Kansas City, Mo. and Kan.
- ▶ Las Vegas
- ▶ Miami
- ▶ Missoula, Mont.
- ▶ Nashville
- ▶ New York City
- ▶ Norfolk, Va.
- ▶ Philadelphia
- ▶ Phoenix
- ▶ Pittsburgh
- ▶ Portland, Ore.
- ▶ St. Louis
- ▶ Salt Lake City
- ▶ Seattle
- ▶ Tulsa

dential veto, because of the possible consequences of turning down a spending bill.

Whitman, who was governor of New Jersey before taking the helm at the EPA, said she's still not likely to let the courts settle future policy decisions, despite the political fallout from her move to suspend the limit on arsenic.

Being a governor, Whitman said, gave her the "bad habit" of wanting to make her own decisions.

"Governors do not like to let courts make policy," she said. "Governors like to make policy."

Asked about global warming and Bush's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, which has been accepted by 180 nations, Whitman said the administration might never offer a single substitute plan.

"At this point, I'd hesitate to even call it a plan," Whitman said. "It may be a series of initiatives and undertakings."