Gas mileage standards too low, too slow

As prices at the pump hit previously unimaginable highs this summer, Environment Minnesota championed policies that would reduce America’s dependence on oil and chart a course for a cleaner, smarter energy future. But President Bush dragged his feet on new mileage standards and pushed for offshore drilling as the Senate Republicans blocked efforts to renew programs that encourage investment in clean, renewable energy.

Investing in clean energy

In 2005, Congress passed energy production and solar investment tax credits that provide tax incentives for large-scale renewable energy producers. These tax credits have proven to be one of the most significant and effective investments the federal government has made in clean energy. Unfortunately, the programs will expire at the end of this year, and Senate Republicans have already blocked two attempts to renew the credits.

This summer, we worked to make sure that Congress heard from Americans who support critical incentives for renewable energy and efficiency. We activated our members, and went door-to-door to identify public support for the programs. As Congress nears the election-season recess, we’ll continue our work to renew support for the programs.

Gas mileage standards

In December 2007, Congress passed Environment Minnesota-backed increases in gas mileage. The law requires the Bush administration’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to set “the highest gas mileage standard technologically and economically feasible.” In June of this year, NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason proposed the slowest and lowest standard allowed under the law—35 mpg by 2020.

Environment Minnesota called on NHTSA to conduct public hearings to listen to citizens’ concern about dependence on oil, global warming, and the high price at the pump. In June, our federal energy advocate, Ben Schrieber, delivered thousands of public comments on the proposal to NHTSA.

The burgeoning wind energy industry could lose thousands of jobs if Congress allows renewable energy incentives to expire at the end of this year.
By the time you read this, the election will be just around the corner. I don’t know about you, but I’m excited. Despite the candidates’ attacks and counter-attacks, there’s real hope for change—just in time, as we’re facing enormous environmental challenges.

After our own review and careful consideration, we endorsed Sen. Barack Obama for president, due in large part to his commitment to a clean energy plan that can solve global warming. We’re working to register, persuade and turn out enough voters to make the difference on Election Day.

As Nov. 4 nears and you make your own final decisions, we hope you consider our endorsement. We believe that an Obama administration offers all of us our best opportunity to build upon the progress we’ve made together for our environment.

Thanks again for your support.

Sincerely,

Monique Sullivan
MoniqueS@EnvironmentMinnesota.org

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**Recent action**

**Environment Minnesota endorses Barack Obama**


Sen. John McCain deserves credit for bucking his party in the past on such environmental issues as global warming. However, Sen. Obama’s clean energy plan is superior, offering more hope that America can meet the challenge of global warming, build a new economy based on renewable energy, and break our addiction to oil. Sen. Obama has also proven to be a more consistent champion of the environment and our health on such issues as toxic pollution, clean air and water, and the preservation of our natural treasures.

To learn more about our endorsement, our election program, and the candidates’ positions, visit www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/election2008.

**Senate Republicans block global warming bill**

On June 6, the Senate voted 48-36 to move forward on the Boxer-Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act, falling short of the necessary 60-vote threshold and ending consideration of the global warming bill before it was able to come to a vote. Environment Minnesota had been working over the past year to strengthen key provisions in the bill. In the end, what could have been a solid first step toward a comprehensive global warming bill failed to overcome opposition from powerful polluting industries.

The Senate Republican leadership, backed by special interest allies and a presidential veto threat, used time-consuming procedural maneuvers to obstruct the bill, including forcing Senate clerks to read aloud every word of the 492-page bill.

After the vote, our federal global warming program director Emily Figdor told the media, “Faced with an urgent problem that demands action, the Senate passed the buck. Next time around, the polluters and their allies in Congress won’t get off so easy.”
On June 25, in a move initiated by Rep. Raul Grijalva (Az), the House Natural Resources Committee ordered the Bush administration to halt new mining activity on 1 million acres surrounding Grand Canyon National Park, a victory for Environment Minnesota’s campaign to protect the Grand Canyon from toxic mining. From its jagged red cliffs to the winding Colorado River, the Grand Canyon stands as one of America’s most prized natural treasures. Environment Minnesota has been working to protect the Canyon as part of our work to protect the country’s national parks and forests.

The Grand Canyon is facing a growing threat from mining pollution. As the price of gold and uranium has climbed, mining companies have dramatically expanded their plans to drill near the Canyon.

Hardrock mining, the type of mining used to gather gold and uranium, uses highly toxic chemicals such as cyanide, which pollutes the land and water surrounding a mine. Mining within five miles of the national park would destroy the scenic views, water quality and priceless wildlife habitat that hundreds of thousands of park visitors enjoy every year.

Claims within five miles of Grand Canyon National Park exploded from just 10 claims in January 2003, to 1,130 in 2008, according to Bureau of Land Management records. Several companies, such as Vane Minerals, had planned to move forward with mining for uranium just three miles from the border of the park.

Eleventh hour protection
As the corporate land grab snowballed, threatening to permanently damage the Grand Canyon, Environment Minnesota and its allies looked for a way to put on the brakes. We found it in a little-know provision that allowed the House Committee on Natural Resources, in an emergency situation, to compel the Secretary of the Interior to stop new mining claims in a specific area for up to three years. Unfortunately, the emergency resolution is only a temporary fix. Comprehensive mining reform is needed to protect the Grand Canyon and all of our national parks. Currently, the Mining Law of 1872 governs all hardrock mining on public lands. The 136-year-old law requires no environmental reviews, views mining as the single best use of public lands, and gives mining companies rights to mine the land for pennies on the dollar.

Working to reform our mining laws
In December 2007, the House passed a Environment Minnesota-supported mining bill that would protect lands near national parks from mining waste. But it has proved tougher going in the Senate, where the mining industry holds enormous clout with key legislators.

To overcome mining industry influence, Environment Minnesota—along with our allies in Environment America, our national federation—ramped up our field campaign. We helped to build a coalition of more than 160 groups, generating media in 13 states, and collecting thousands of petition signatures asking Congress to permanently protect the Grand Canyon and all of our national parks.

Questions for Rep. Ed Markey

Environment America, our national partner group, sat down with Rep. Ed Markey (Mass.), a leader in the House on energy and global warming. Markey is the chairman of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming and recently introduced the Investing in Climate Action and Protection Act (iCAP Act), a bill to reduce global warming emissions by the amount scientists say is needed.

You’ve spent many years in Congress fighting for solutions to our energy problems and to reduce global warming pollution. Why are these issues so important to you?

The day I came to Congress, the Washington Star, a newspaper long since closed down, had a picture of me on their front page with a “Mr. Smith Goes To Washington” headline. That same day, on the front page, just to the right of me, was an article on climate change. That was 1976.

Thirty-two years later, the issue that once concerned a small group of scientists has transformed into the global challenge of our generation. In order to protect people and the planet, we must unleash a green revolution that will transform our energy system to depend on the truly renewable resources of the wind and the sun.

Staff in action

Environment Minnesota’s Matt LaFontaine speaks to citizens about an important ballot measure (see p. 4 for more).
To read more about the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, and to find out how you can get involved, visit our Web site: www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org.

Vote Yes for Minnesota!

Environment Minnesota is teaming up with a coalition of more than 200 organizations to protect Minnesota's most important resources before they're lost forever.

Right now, 40 percent of Minnesota's tested waterways are too polluted to boat or swim in, and companies are continuing to dump chemicals in to our lakes and rivers. One million acres of open land are set to be lost to development over the next 25 years. Meanwhile, state funding for natural resources remains at an all time low.

On Nov. 4, Minnesota voters could change all that by approving the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The law will provide dedicated funding to protect waterways, parks and wildlife habitat. Environment Minnesota has talked to tens of thousands of voters about the amendment, urging them to vote Yes. We'll talk to thousands more in the coming weeks. We can't afford to miss this opportunity.

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