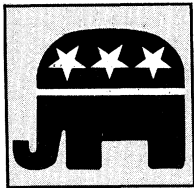


## Campaigning on the Environment

*George Bush makes a splash in Boston Harbor by pledging to curb acid rain; skeptics want to see the fine print of his program*



"I AM AN ENVIRONMENTALIST: always have been," said Vice President George Bush over the Labor Day weekend.

This announcement and a flurry of documents promising action on acid rain, toxic waste, and other environmental problems took many people by surprise, not least of them Bush's rival in the presidential race, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts.

The message carried a special wallop in New England because Bush delivered the main blast in a five-state environmental tour from an island in Boston Harbor, hitting at Dukakis' record.

Up to this point, Bush's environmental views were not well known, although activists associate him with the work of the Presidential Task Force on Regulatory Relief, a pro-business panel which he heads. In controversial actions aiding industry, the task force sought to delay or rescind rules for removing lead from gasoline (it later reversed itself), to roll back U.S. auto fuel economy standards, and to relax federal regulation of toxic wastes. In most of these, it failed.

Although the League of Conservation Voters judged Bush to have "a good environmental record" early in his career as a Texas congressman, his recent service to the Reagan Administration made a negative impression. The League gave him a grade of "D+." Dukakis received a "B."

Bush now wants to break with the past and has made the following promises:

■ **Acid rain.** "The time of study alone has passed," Bush says. "We know enough now to begin taking steps to limit future damage." He says he will aim to cut "millions of tons of sulfur dioxide emissions by the year 2000 and to significantly reduce nitrogen oxide emissions as well."

■ **Toxic waste.** Bush wants to have a "zero tolerance" policy not only for drug dealers but also for "those who poison our water with toxic chemicals." A position paper says Bush will "speed cleanups under the federal Superfund programs, . . . strengthen enforcement of our toxic waste laws, . . .

streamline the now cumbersome regulations that hamper toxic waste cleanups," and work to reduce the production of hazardous waste at the source.

■ **Wetlands.** Bush sets a national goal of "no net loss of wetlands." The government needs a coordinated wetlands policy, according to the position paper, to see to encourage "non-regulatory programs" that will help preserve threatened areas.

■ **Oceans.** "I'm for a complete ban on the ocean dumping of sewage sludge after 1991," Bush told an audience in New Jersey, a state whose beaches and recreation business were devastated by ocean-borne garbage this summer. Bush also said the federal government should create a system for tracking the disposal of medical waste.

■ **Greenhouse effect.** Bush would convene a global conference at the White House within a year of his election. On the agenda would be problems of acid rain, the carbon dioxide buildup in the atmosphere, control of chlorofluorocarbons, and deforestation. Delegates would be invited from the Third World, the Soviet Union, and China.

While in Boston, Bush also went on the attack, citing a local case in which the Reagan Administration took Massachusetts to court to compel the state to treat raw sewage flowing into Boston Harbor. In an unusual situation, the Administration found itself allied with environmental groups, thanks to an active regional director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Michael Deland. In 1983, Deland reversed the EPA's passivity under Anne Gorsuch and joined with the town of Quincy and the Conservation Law Foundation in suing for remedial action on the sewer system. The federal Clean Water Act says that local authorities must clean sewage to swimmable quality before dumping it into public waters. This can be expensive, especially for port towns like Boston that have discharged waste into the ocean for years. Boston had delayed complying with the law.

Bush's statement in Boston Harbor was "a brilliant stroke," says Douglas Foy, director of the Conservation Law Foundation in Boston, a leader in the battle to clean up the harbor. Neither he nor other local environmentalists rushed to Dukakis' defense. It

would have been awkward, since they have been battling for years with the governor to get the harbor cleaned up. Foy concedes that Dukakis' role in reality was small, "a punctuation mark at the end of a long sentence." Foy says, "The system's been collapsing for 40 years."

To bolster his image as a moderate, the Vice President's campaign staff has put out a paper linking Bush to earlier Republican conservationists. It cites Theodore Roosevelt's creation of national forests and wildlife refuges and Richard Nixon's creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

One of Bush's environmental advisers, Nathaniel Reed, a member the National Audubon Society and board member of the Natural Resources Defense Council, has described the Republican Party under Ronald Reagan as suffering a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" split in behavior when it comes to the environment. This is a reference to the division between pro-exploitation forces in the West, where "sagebrush rebels" chafe under federal land restrictions, and the traditional conservationists in the East. Now, it seems, Bush wants to uphold the Dr. Jekyll (eastern) tradition.

Leaders of "Conservationists for Bush" identified by the campaign staff come from the moderate ranks of the party. The steering committee heads include: William Ruckelshaus, twice the chief of EPA, now chairman of the board of Browning-Ferris Industries, Inc., a waste management firm; Russell Train, former chief of EPA and the first chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, now chairman of the World Wildlife Fund; Mrs. W. L. Lyons Brown, a leader in the National Parks and Conservation Association and the National Audubon Society; Mrs. Thomas Waller, former member of the Nature Conservancy board of governors and former president of the Garden Clubs of America; and Reed.

Reed is an outspoken defender of the parks and forests. In a letter to Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel dated 17 June, he excoriated Hodel for falling in with those who show "a determined disregard for the needs of the land." Reed had testified earlier about the sorry condition of the national parks and had received a critical letter from

Hodel. Responding to the secretary, Reed criticized Hodel for "single-minded grandstanding to the arch-conservative right wing of the Republican party."

In a telephone interview, Train said that Bush, whom he counts a friend, "suffered through some of the Reagan years in silence." One reason Bush never spoke up on the environment was that "he never had any responsibility that involved him getting into these issues at any depth."

Train coached Bush on his first speech of the Labor Day series, urging him to promise action on acid rain without getting into a "numbers game" on sulfur dioxide. Train says the sagebrush rebels who came into office with the Reagan Administration are on the way out because the politics of the Rocky Mountain states has changed. "It's no longer Republican big ranchers and mining interests against the smaller people out West. . . . You have the same urban interests as in the East, where people look upon the outdoors and wildlife as valuable assets" to be preserved.

But there is at least one issue, according to several environmental groups, on which Dukakis has been more direct than Bush—offshore oil drilling. Dukakis came out against drilling on the Georges Bank in the late 1970s, despite intense pressure to open up the continental shelf during an oil scare, and he has held his stand since then. Bush, on the other hand, has led both drillers of Texas and environmentalists of northern California to see good news in his statements. Before the California primary last spring, Bush recommended a delay in plans to permit drilling off the California coast; the Department of the Interior decided to postpone an auction of leases. More recently, he criticized Dukakis for opposing offshore drilling. Bush's position paper says that he will "prevent offshore drilling on certain tracts that are particularly environmentally sensitive." Skeptics point out that there is nothing new in making "certain tracts" off limits; that has always been done.

Many environmental leaders welcome the Vice President's rhetoric, but feel, as Michael McCloskey, chairman of the Sierra Club, says, that "Bush needs to be specific to be a player in the game." For example, McCloskey says, everyone agrees that sulfur dioxide emissions must be reduced by "millions of tons" a year, but there's a world of difference between 3 million tons, a goal once suggested by the Reagan Administration, and 12 million tons, a goal put forward by a National Academy of Sciences report. On this and many other strategic points, McCloskey finds the Vice President's statement "purposefully vague."

■ ELIOT MARSHALL

## DOE Challenged on WIPP Site

After spending \$700 million and taking 7 years to build the nation's first permanent repository for radioactive wastes, the Department of Energy (DOE) is seeking permission from Congress to begin limited waste storage operations. DOE could begin to load up to 125,000 barrels of wastes produced in the nation's nuclear weapons factories into the Carlsbad, New Mexico, facility early next year. But the department is coming under fire for trying to proceed before important scientific and engineering issues are resolved.

Scientists, members of Congress, and environmentalists contend that questions about the soundness of waste storage experiments, compliance with federal environmental protection rules, and the design of the facility should be settled before large quantities of wastes are shipped to the complex. Indeed, critics argue that until the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is qualified as a permanent disposal site—a process that will take 5 years—minimal waste material should be stored there.

Jill Lytle, deputy assistant secretary for nuclear materials at DOE, told *Science* that between 25,000 and 125,000 55-gallon barrels may be placed in the facility during the first 5 years of operation. Lytle said a large amount of material will be needed at WIPP in the first 5 years of operation to demonstrate that the facility can be managed effectively over its 25-year life.

Located 25 miles southeast of Carlsbad, WIPP is meant to be a permanent disposal facility for about 800,000 barrels of transuranic wastes—materials contaminated with alpha-ray-emitting isotopes with half-lives of 20 years or greater. These materials include clothing, plutonium fabrication hardware, and waste-water treatment sludge. Because the wastes often contain solvents and other chemicals, they are subject to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules governing hazardous wastes.

The WIPP site was selected because the area is geologically stable. The complex is built 2150 feet beneath the surface of a 16-acre tract and is carved out of a massive formation of bedded salt. This formation is supposed to eventually encase the facility and prevent radioactive wastes from migrating to water sources.

There is, however, concern that water contained in the salt structure may eventually seep into the storage facility and create a slurry of brine and radioactive particles. The generation of gas from decaying waste materials could be sufficient to breach plugs in the complex's access shafts, under some worst-case scenarios.

DOE plans to resolve questions about the gas generation and water seepage with experiments that will involve loading as many as 25,000 barrels of wastes in the facility during the first year or so after it is opened. The National Academy of Sciences, the General Accounting Office, and New Mexico's Scientists Review Panel have been critical of DOE's proposed tests, stating that they would not provide sound data.

Wendell D. Weart, manager of the scientific program for WIPP, says the department will submit a new plan to the National Academy of Sciences in mid-November. Weart says he is looking at ways to minimize the amount of waste necessary to carry out experiments successfully.

Representative Mike Synar (D-OK), chairman of the House Government Operations subcommittee on the environment, energy, and natural resources, charged in a 13 September hearing that DOE has yet to justify putting even 25,000 barrels into WIPP for experimental purposes. Synar criticized the department for pressing for permission to load wastes into WIPP while key issues remain unsettled.

He advised Lytle to "Go home and do your homework." DOE had sought to begin loading waste at WIPP in October. But the required legislation is still pending before several House committees and has yet to be approved by the Senate. It is unclear whether Congress will act before its scheduled adjournment in early October.

The Environmental Evaluation Group, which is funded by DOE to provide New Mexico with technical analyses on WIPP, contends that much of the data required by the department can be obtained in aboveground experiments. Unnecessary handling of wastes should be avoided, adds Lokesh Chaturvedi, EEG's deputy director, because wastes placed in WIPP may have to be retrieved.

Chaturvedi is confident, however, that DOE can eventually prove that WIPP is a suitable disposal site. But he says this may require some processing to solidify wastes before they are sent to WIPP. This would reduce water seepage problems, but add to the department's disposal costs.

■ MARK CRAWFORD