RAN Protests Automakers’ Hypocrisy at Los Angeles and Detroit Auto Shows

In November, the Freedom From Oil Campaign infiltrated the Los Angeles Auto Show and put on a series of creative actions highlighting the automakers’ efforts to block landmark clean car legislation by California and 11 other states that would regulate global warming pollution from tailpipe emissions.

While Ford CEO Allan Mulally delivered the auto show’s keynote address, the press corps received a satirical front page wrap of USA Today announcing Ford’s intention to pull out of the California Clean Car lawsuit and decision to mass-produce plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEVs). Then, just after unveiling Toyota’s new gas-guzzling Sequoia SUV, Toyota’s general manager for U.S. sales, Bob Carter, was confronted by a RAN activist asking why Toyota is blocking California’s Clean Car Law. The incident was broadcast live on the internet and later posted on YouTube, where it was viewed thousands of times throughout the week.

While the automakers were busy using the show’s green theme to roll out a series of eco-concept cars, RAN was across the street performing a high-speed conversion of a traditional hybrid Prius to a plug-in electric hybrid with partners CalCars, Plug in America and Global Exchange. The conversion, completed in under six hours, demonstrated to automakers that they could make significant and immediate gains in fuel efficiency by using existing technologies to improve conventional gasoline vehicles. A press conference following the conversion was held with rock star Ryan Cabrera, Elvis Presley's granddaughter Riley Keough, actress Alexandra Paul from Plug in America, and other allies calling on automakers to stop fighting progress and start producing cars that will reduce our dependence on oil and curb greenhouse gas emissions.

In January, at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, more than 60 students took to the streets for a spirited rally decrying the automakers’ lack of progress. Despite incentives to mass produce green cars, the auto industry’s only response has been to roll out eco-concept cars that rarely reach the assembly line. By prolonging America’s addiction to oil, the auto industry is threatening our national security, economy and the environment. The action followed a three-day Transportation Challenge Weekend Getaway sponsored by the Freedom From Oil Campaign that brought together activists and students from campuses across Michigan for strategizing, skill-building, and networking.

To learn more about how RAN’s work to break the auto industry’s oil addiction and create green jobs for American workers, visit RAN.org/ffo.

You can help support this campaign! Make a donation today at RAN.org/give.
Day of action against coal finance targets Citi and Bank of America

RAN’s Global Finance Campaign has successfully reframed the debate over coal to include the finance sector by targeting the world’s two leading coal financiers, Bank of America and Citi. Our campaign is galvanizing the climate change movement in the U.S. while elevating the struggles of communities throughout Appalachia and other regions fighting to stop mountaintop removal coal mining.

RAN’s participation in Power Shift, the week-long national youth climate change conference, inspired a mass direct action involving more than 100 participants that ultimately shut down a major Citi branch in downtown Washington, D.C.

On November 16, our first National Day of Action resulted in more than 100 actions in 40 cities, with help from our allies at Coal River Mountain Watch, Appalachian Voices, Rising Tide North America, Mountain Justice Summer, Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), Energy Justice Network and others. Activists demonstrated outside bank branches, shut down ATM machines, and educated customers about their bank’s lending practices. In the weeks that followed, we generated more than 15,000 emails to Bank of America CEO Ken Lewis and new Citi CEO Vikram Pandit, asking them to stop funding the coal rush.

Coal is the country’s largest, dirtiest source of climate-changing greenhouse gases. U.S. coal plants are a leading cause of asthma and lung cancer. Despite what the coal industry would have us believe, there’s no such thing as “clean coal.”

RAN is calling for a complete halt to new coal development and demanding that banks divert funding away from coal and into renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power and energy efficiency initiatives.

One year and more than 100 demonstrations later, Citi has stepped forward. This week, Citi, along with JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley, announced a set of “Carbon Principles” that will ostensibly make it more difficult for utilities to secure funding for new – and often unneeded – coal-fired power plants. These lending guidelines require developers to show that their proposed coal plants are needed, that they offer the cheapest source of power, and that they could provide carbon capture and storage (CCS) if the government demanded it. The principles will force coal plant backers to prove that dirty energy – rather than efficiency initiatives or renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power – is needed in their markets before funding is approved. The banks will use this information in determining whether coal is a good investment. This increased due diligence is genuine validation of RAN’s efforts.

Yet, our Global Finance Campaign’s motto is “No New Coal.” We believe coal is never a good investment, and we do not accept the industry’s “clean coal” propaganda. Carbon capture and storage will not be a commercially viable option for years, if ever. And even if it were, it would still fail to address environmentally devastating coal mining practices like mountaintop removal.

If banks stopped funding coal altogether and instead devoted their resources to renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives, we could meet America’s energy demands with far less damage to the climate. We’d also like to see real climate policies that extend beyond coal plant finance into other carbon-intensive sectors such as oil and transportation. Coal may be the biggest climate criminal, but it’s not the only one.

In short, we still have our work cut out for us. But freeing our energy grid from dirty coal begins with depriving coal projects of easy access to Wall Street capital. The Carbon Principles don’t take us to our final destination, but they are a step in the right direction.

For the latest on RAN’s work to stop coal-fired power plants from being built, visit DirtyMoney.org.

Dear friends,

Being a campaigner at RAN means occasionally having to make unpopular demands. We certainly didn’t make any new friends on Wall Street when we suggested to banking executives that the threats of climate change were so severe that a complete moratorium on the construction of new coal-fired power plants was the only responsible course of action. Though many banks had adopted environmental policies, none had ever considered limiting their investments in coal.

On a snowy Valentine’s Day in 2007, I found myself in the offices of Chuck Prince, then-CEO of Citi, the world’s largest bank. I argued that Citi had an opportunity to take the lead on climate change, maintaining the trailblazing status it had gained in 2004 when it developed a set of policies to prohibit destructive investments in endangered ecosystems.

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For a better world,

Michael Brune

Executive Director
For 25 years, James Balog has consistently broken new ground in the art of photographing nature. His images have received international acclaim and have been featured in National Geographic, The New Yorker, Vanity Fair, The New York Times Magazine, Outside and many other esteemed publications.

What motivates your work?
I want to use photography to help the environment gain a stronger position on the agenda of politics and culture. Imagemakers are the eyes of civilization—discovering, framing, and interpreting reality—and we can play a major role in shaping how humanity perceives and responds to the world around us. People need to be provoked, stimulated, and challenged, so there is room for tremendous experimentation and creativity by photographers in the pursuit of meaning and impact.

What is the biggest challenge in communicating a global phenomenon like global warming with imagery, and have you noticed any shift in public sentiment as a result of your imagery?
Our civilization doesn’t have nearly as much of an economic and technological barrier to turning this problem around as it thinks it has. I believe that the immediacy of the photographic evidence can break down barriers of mental resistance in a way that nothing else can—but it is too early to tell just how much impact we are having.

What role do you see photography or photographers playing in the movement to stop global warming and how can that role be expanded?
No modern-day conservation crusade is complete without elegant photographs to advertise the natural world to a distracted public. The conservationist impulse has long been embedded in American photography and photography was an important part of many land preservation battles. Ansel Adams’ images helped save Kings Canyon in California. David Brower’s spectacular images bore witness to the wilds of Alaska and were pivotal in ensuring public support for preservation of vast stretches of the 50th state. A lot more sitka spruce would have been scalped from Alaska’s Tongass National Forest had it not been for Robert Glen Ketchum’s landscape work and energetic lobbying.

How do you feel your photographs can help organizations like RAN find solutions to global warming?
Organizations like RAN play a vital role in helping us disseminate our words and images into the hands of those people who are passionately connected to the natural world, who are ready to take responsibility and action. It is by harnessing the collective energy of those concerned citizens that solutions to the immense threat facing our future as a result of global warming will be found.

What kind of projects can we look forward to from you in the near future?
I will be thinking about glaciers and melting ice morning, noon, and night for as far into the future as I can project myself right now. To learn more about James’ work, visit extremeicesurvey.org.

RAN is working to curb the global warming crisis. With your continued support, we can reduce emissions by more than 85 percent by mid-century and prevent climate catastrophe before it’s too late.
In November, RAN hosted several leaders from communities on the front lines of industrial agriculture’s expansion into tropical ecosystems for a speaking tour across the United States. Our speakers included Hiparidi Toptiro, president of Mobilization of Indigenous People in the Cerrado; Francisco Avalos, a Guarani campesino leader from Paraguay; Lynette Hambuga, an Indigenous farmers’ and women’s rights activist from Oro Province, Papua New Guinea; and George Laume, a campaigner for the Center for Environmental Law and Community Rights in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. They spoke out against the environmental destruction and human rights abuses they have witnessed on and around soy and palm oil plantations owned or supported by U.S. agribusinesses ADM, Bunge and Cargill.

With speaking events in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and the Power Shift student energy conference in Washington, D.C., the delegation’s tour culminated in a visit to Decatur, Ill., where they joined with local students and activists to protest ADM’s Annual General Shareholder’s Meeting.

The meeting presented the chance to shed light on ADM’s role in destroying rainforests; displacing Indigenous and traditional communities from their lands; marginalizing small farmers; and intensifying climate change by cutting down rainforests to establish soy and palm oil plantations. ADM’s unfortunate response was to heighten security and forego its own corporate governance standards and written by-laws by blocking proxy-holders from entering the meeting room.

Eventually, ADM allowed Toptiro and Leila Salazar-Lopez, director of RAN’s Rainforest Agribusiness Campaign, to enter the meeting hall, where they were finally able to address ADM CEO Patricia Woertz directly about her company’s destructive practices. Those who were denied access joined a spirited rally outside.

We hope you’ll join RAN at ADM’s 2008 shareholders meeting, where we’ll continue to confront them about their irresponsible business practices.

Contact Leila Salazar-Lopez at leila@ran.org for more information.

RAN pressures OfficeMax to support moratorium in Grassy Narrows

Tensions continue to mount in the conflict over clear-cut logging in Grassy Narrows, one of more than 600 Indigenous communities located within Canada’s vast Boreal forest. Earlier this month, four Grassy Narrows clan mothers built a wigwam on an isolated logging road and issued eviction notices to the loggers who continue to operate within the community’s traditional territory despite longstanding objections. Days later, former Canadian Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci, acting as a negotiator between Grassy Narrows and the province of Ontario, called an emergency meeting to help settle the growing tensions in the area.

These developments show that RAN’s work with the Grassy Narrows First Nation is having a significant impact. But even as formal negotiations between the province of Ontario and Grassy Narrows continue, so too do intrusions into Grassy Narrows’ traditional territory by logging companies like Weyerhaeuser and Abitibi.

RAN saw an opportunity to step up the pressure on companies that buy wood pulp that comes from Grassy Narrows. On January 30, we targeted OfficeMax and its Canadian subsidiary, Grand & Toy, with more than 40 protests at outlets throughout North America, demanding that the paper retailers publicly support a logging moratorium in Grassy Narrows.
Honoring a true environmental hero

Jeremy Paster, an inspiring activist and longtime friend of RAN, passed away on Friday, November 23, after a long struggle with prostate cancer.

Jeremy dedicated his life to defending human rights and the environment all over the world. At last year’s Revel, Jeremy was honored with The People and Planet Award for his extraordinary work as an activist for nearly 15 years. Jeremy was an inspiration to all of us in Seattle in 1999, where he coordinated RAN’s role in the global justice movement’s shutdown of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which included the now-iconic banner hang showing the WTO and Democracy as opposing one-way signs.

Jeremy Paster was a true hero and he will always be remembered.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING RAN!

RAN has grown significantly over the last two years in order to meet the intense demands of the world’s environmental and social justice crises. Our No New Coal and Rainforest Agribusiness campaigns would not have been possible without your continued and increased support. But RAN is more than just campaigns. Our communications, operations, grassroots and development teams are crucial to our efforts to keep RAN effective and moving forward. Your support makes this possible. You put RAN in the position to be successful in this new year, and from every one of RAN’s 43 staff, we say thank you.

You help us fight for the mountains and communities of Appalachia. You’ve helped lower the number of proposed coal-fired power plants in the United States. Your pressure on Weyerhaeuser is finally resulting in real progress to protect the Boreal forest and the rights of the Grassy Narrows First Nation. You are forcing automakers to focus on increasing fuel efficiency and reducing emissions. You’ve put Big Agribusiness on notice for destroying the world’s remaining rainforests.

You are amazing. Thank you for your actions. Thank you for supporting RAN. Thank you for making this good, important work possible.

Branden Barber
Development Director