

EDITORIAL

At the beginning of March, Christine Whitman, the new Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had described President Bush's campaign promise to reduce carbon emissions as if it were already policy. Indeed, during the G8 Environment Ministers' Summit held at Trieste from 2-4 March, the US agreed to the Communiqué (see page 121) in which, with regard to the Kyoto Protocol, they committed themselves at the resumed COP6 "to strive to reach agreement on outstanding political issues." So US environmentalists were optimistic that President Bush would adopt the more environmentally friendly policies intimated by him on the campaign trail. The representatives of the National Environmental Trust came away from their visit to the White House on 13 March hopeful that the new Administration had listened to their message on global warming.

However, like a bolt from the blue, late on the same afternoon, a call came from the White House to inform them that the President was reversing his campaign pledge to regulate plant emissions of carbon dioxide. (See the letter from President Bush on climate issues on page 122.) Shock and disbelief has accompanied a string of anti-environment decisions since then.

On 20 March, when Christine Whitman delayed implementing a rule that would have cut the amount of arsenic allowed in drinking water to one-fifth of its current level, it was clear in which direction US policy was going. Then two days later, the Interior Department suspended a regulation requiring mining companies to post bonds to ensure they would carry out environmental cleanups and which allowed regulators to veto environmentally damaging mines on public lands. On 28 March, a spokesman for the President stated that President Bush was "unequivocal" in his opposition to the Kyoto Protocol and would not sign it. Finally, on the following day, the US announced it would withdraw its signature to the Kyoto Protocol.

Administration officials would not say whether the EPA Administrator had supported the change in position, but they suggested she had not. The sudden shift in policy is said to result from the huge amounts of money poured into the Republican campaign by the energy and chemical industries and their pressure for a change of direction.

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The Elizabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Diplomacy was awarded on 13 March in New York to Veit Koester (Denmark) and Ambassador Neroni Slade (Samoa). A report is planned for the next issue. Also scheduled, is a report on the 9th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Immediately following that session, the meeting for CSD-10 will last for a week, and serve as the first "Prepcom" for the Rio+10 conference next year in Johannesburg.

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