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Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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Yesterday:

In marked contrast to the Cheney-Bush administration, the new Obama-Biden administration has made an unprecedented attempt to convey material to the American public concerning its new energy and environment policies. While in January 2001 Vice President Cheney chaired a group that became known as the "Cheney Energy Task Force," the proceedings of the group's meetings were never revealed to the public. Indeed, even a full list of those who participated was withheld from public scrutiny. Despite repeated requests and a court suit to obtain the list of the attendees and the agenda of the meeting, the Vice President and the President argued that these matters could be shielded by "executive privilege." Although the task force meeting had been paid for from public funds, they argued that the proceedings and all other details about the meetings were to be kept from the public. (See: "[The National Energy Policy Development Group](#)," SourceWatch, 3 March 2009).

In an entirely different approach, President Obama has been frank and forthcoming with the American people, using the Internet and its video transmission capacities to communicate directly with the people. (For a summary of some of these initiatives during the transition period, see [Program #2 of the Eco Views & News series, Transitions and Transformations](#)). Yesterday, on Saturday, 28 February 2009, for example, the White House posted both the text and a video representation of the President's weekly address: ("[Keeping](#)

[Promises](#)," TheWhiteHouse.Gov, (28 February 2009 5:43 am EST).



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The White House web site Included not only the full text of his weekly address, but a link as well to view the statement given by the President from the White House. Further, the White House web page included the "source code" enabling anyone throughout to view, capture and absorb the President's address in whatever form they wished to pace it on their own web sites. In the speech, the President addressed the kinds of struggles the President foresaw in the coming weeks and months in overcoming the "special interests" in Washington. It was not long before individuals uploaded the speech to YouTube on the Internet, so that it could receive maximum attention -- both within the United States and around the world. (See: "[President Obama Weekly Youtube/Radio Address](#)," YouTube - Cspanjunkie, 28 February 2009).

Today:

The response to the Saturday White House weekly address appeared in the newspapers today (1 March 2009) throughout the country. In the New York Times, Peter Baker commented that Obama had "cast himself as a populist crusader willing to do battle with special interests." (See "[Obama Calls His Budget Sweeping, Needed Change.](#)" The New York Times, 1 March 2009). In fact, President Obama, had indeed warned the special interests in Washington that he was willing to fight for the new budget priorities. As he put it in his initial speech, "I know these steps won't sit well with the special interests and lobbyists who are invested in the old way of doing business, and I know they're gearing up for a fight as we speak. My message to them is this: "So am I." (See: "[President Obama Weekly Youtube/Radio Address.](#)" YouTube - CSpanjunkie, 28 February 2009).

Meanwhile the Washington Post printed an Op Ed article this morning (1 March), by noted author and activist, Bill McKibben, pointing to a whole series of important events that were taking place in Washington over the last several days. McKibben drew attention to what he called the "carbon addicts on Capitol Hill," and noted that something was about to change tomorrow -- that is, 2 March 2009. As he put it:

Washington has seen its share of big protests over the years, and most of them center on the White House, the Mall or the Capitol. That will change tomorrow, when the first big protest of the Obama era -- and the first mass civil disobedience against global warming in this country -- will take place against the not-very-scenic backdrop of the Capitol Hill Power Plant, a dirty symbol of the dirtiest business on Earth, the combustion of coal. (see: "[The Carbon Addicts on Capitol Hill.](#)" The Washington Post, 1 March 2009).

Tomorrow:

What, then, is McKibben pointing to? What will start to change as of tomorrow -- 2 March 2009? McKibben refers to the "first big protest of the Obama era" but what is it that is being protested? Who is the target of such protests? Why is anyone protesting -- especially liberal activists -- so early in the term of the President so many of them seemed to have fought hard to elect?

As it turns out, the key to understanding this protest, and all the preparations leading to it lies precisely in what President Obama yesterday

called, "the special interests and lobbyists who are invested in the old way of doing business." Specifically, the target of the nation-wide student protest is the energy industry that continues to provide the coal for the antiquated power-plant that powers much of Capitol Hill, the buildings of Congress, the Supreme Court and Union Station. Students, who have been attending meetings of [PowerShift09](#) for several days in Washington, D.C. plan tomorrow to conduct a public protest aimed at



this particular power plant in order to urge Congress to compel the plant to abandon coal as its source fuel and switch to natural gas, thereby cutting down significantly on the plant's CO2 emissions.

Organized in a campaign called, [CapitolClimateAction.Org](#) the students have been enormously successful in rallying support around



the country and within the Obama administration itself. On Thursday, 26 February, Democracy Now interviewed several of the student leaders concerned, and their goals were very clear. (See: "[Power Shift: Youth Climate Activists Swarm D.C. for Weekend of Organizing, Lobbying and Protest.](#)" Democracy Now, 26 February 2009).

These student-organized protests aimed at Capitol Hill tomorrow (2 March) take place against the backdrop of two other highly important developments. First, Democracy Now reported on Thursday, 26 February, that there have been substantial recent increases in the money and effort devoted to pro-coal, anti-climate change activism on

the part of fossil fuel lobbyists who want to continue "business as usual." (See: ["Study Finds Unprecedented Growth in Climate Change Lobbying,"](#) Democracy Now, 26 February 2009).

At the same time, a second more worrying development appears to be emerging from the scientists themselves. In effect, it now appears that the well researched warnings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), issued in their 4th Assessment Reports during 2007, may well have understated the gravity and swiftness of the climate change already underway in the global system. The reason for this is in part a question of data and publication "lag time." The cut-off date for consideration of published material for the 2007 reports was June of 2006. The result is that the data that has come in from field observations and direct monitoring in the arctic, Antarctica and the world's glaciers, including those in Greenland were reported after the effective cut-off date for consideration in the 2007 4th Assessment Reports. The result is that official estimates of the rate, pace and scope of climate change may well be conservative underestimates of what is already underway. (See: ["Member of UN Environment Panel Warns Greenhouse Emissions Rising at Alarming, Unexpected Rate,"](#) Democracy Now, (26 February 2009).

Students and climate activists from around the country are well aware of these "time lag" difficulties in the scientific data. In fact, the students have organized remarkable alliances both with the country's leading scientists and with key figures in the Obama administration. In fact, the scientists



have helped to lead the appeal for people to join the protest (see: ["A Call to Action on Global Warming from Dr. James Hansen,"](#) YouTube - greenpeaceusa, 18 February 2009). In this respect, the scheduled "protest" tomorrow is really targeted

well beyond Washington, Capitol Hill and the new administration itself. Its real target is explicitly what President Obama has pointed to in his speech yesterday: "...the special interests and lobbyists who are invested in the old way of doing business," in short, the fossil fuel industry and the Congressmen in sympathy with the coal lobby in Washington and the coal producing states.



As leaders of the demonstration in Washington, D.C. have made clear, the struggle for tomorrow and the entire future of the human enterprise depends upon our capacity to envision and move effectively to a post-fossil-fueled world. (See: ["Mass Civil Disobedience Against Use of Coal at Capitol Hill Power Plant,"](#) YouTube - mediagrr19, 2 March 2009; and ["Power Shift '09: 12,000+ Students Attend Largest Youth Summit on Climate Change in U.S. History,"](#) YouTube mediagrr19, (2 March 2009).

For further information on the Washington meetings and protest actions see:

PowerShift09.Org

and

CapitolClimateAction.Org