

International Youth: Fired Up About Climate Change

Richard Graves

Richard Graves, a young activist focused on climate change issues, is the blogger and online campaigner with the Global Campaign for Climate Action, project director and founder of Fired Up Media, an associate producer for LinkTV's EarthFocus, and a contributing editor for It's Getting Hot in Here.

Graves says the generations who will inherit the burden of global warming want bold environmental leadership, responsible climate policies, and green jobs — and they are telling the world about it, person-to-person and on the Internet.



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Courtesy of Richard Graves/Photo by Christine Irvine

The most important meeting of the 21st century is happening this December in Copenhagen, yet those who have the most to gain, or lose, are left on the sidelines. Global warming will define this century, just as the struggle between totalitarianism and democracy defined the last one. The decisions that senior officials make today will shape the kind of world that young people, representing nearly half the world's population, will inherit. In a strange intersection of physics and politics, politicians elected today have the most say over the conditions that future governments and societies will have to live with. The world leaders gathering in Copenhagen would do well to look to young people for a timely example in leadership.

Young people in the United States have made clear that they want bold environmental leadership, with 64 percent of young voters saying the environment is very important to their vote. And we haven't just been demanding change from our political leaders: We fought to change the political landscape when we weren't being heard. Every presidential candidate in 2008 faced hard questions about global warming and the environment when they visited college campuses, held town hall meetings, or had any other event where you didn't have to pay hundreds of dollars to get in.

We demanded fair climate policies, including green jobs for those excluded from the dirty-energy economy, and responsibility on a global scale for the United States' historical emissions. In the end, 24 million voters under the age of 30 showed up last November, supporting the candidate who promised change and action on global warming.

However, it is past time for demanding change; we have to work for it. Twelve thousand young people gathered in Washington, D.C., in spring 2009 to meet with every member of Congress and demand bold action on global warming at the Power Shift conference, which continues as a campaign on campuses and as an online advocacy network. More than 100 youth leaders from



Indian environmental activists bring the climate change message to rural areas in solar-powered caravans.

Courtesy of Indian Youth Climate Network

other countries, including the United Kingdom, China, Australia, India, and other major emitting countries, were there to strategize about how to make our governments work together to solve this global problem.

Two years ago, I represented the international youth delegation to the U.N. climate negotiations in Bali, Indonesia. We had all scraped together the resources to travel to

this event, as we were desperate to be heard. Youth leaders from countries all around the world met for the first time. Whether we came from Kiribati, India, Australia, or the United States, we were unified in what we wanted from our leadership. We partnered with UNICEF to tell our stories, and every speaker was united in calling for a fair, ambitious, and binding climate treaty to protect our future.

Once again, world leaders are gathering to finally forge a climate treaty. However, things will be different this time around. Youth from the United States who organized the Power Shift conference are working with young people in the United Kingdom to hold their own conference, while the Australian Youth Climate Coalition had 3,000 participants at their Power Shift conference, in Sydney, last fall. Indian youth who were in Bali launched the Indian Youth Climate Network and worked with colleges, Nobel Prize-winning scientists, and civil society groups to bring messages of change and renewable energy

to the countryside in solar-powered caravans.

If you have ever talked to young people from Kiribati or Bangladesh, who have their whole future in front of them and understand what the scientific community has predicted from global warming, it changes you forever. We are working to gather these stories and tell them to the world. Tech-savvy youth from the developing world are working with youth leaders in developing countries to use Web sites, blogs, and new media to tell their stories. We have helped launch sites like What's with the Climate? Voices of a Subcontinent Grappling with Climate Change [<http://www.whatswiththeclimate.org>] and Youth Climate.org [<http://youthclimate.org>]. Young people from the developed world are moved by how similar young people are from the developing world and how we face a common challenge.

The overwhelming election margin provided to President Obama by young people fired up about global warming has inspired a worldwide explosion of youth

climate activism. Youth leaders in the United States and abroad are expecting great things from new leadership in the United States, but they are also working to change political reality at home.

When world leaders gather in Copenhagen, let's hope that the representatives of the United States are inspired by the bold leadership of young Americans on global warming. I ask that those world leaders look around them, as young people will be there, watching, on the sidelines. However, don't expect them to stay there for long. If this political reality will not assure us a livable world, be advised that nearly half the world's population will not allow an inconvenient political situation to stand between us and our very survival. ■

For more information, see the Global Campaign for Climate Action [<http://tckctck.org>]; Fired Up Media [<http://firedupmedia.com>]; LinkTV: Earth Focus [<http://www.linktv.org/earthfocus%5d>]; It's Getting Hot in Here [<http://itsgettinghotinhere.org>].

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