

Government Openness

Written by Grant Cameron
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Presidential Candidates Queried on Environmental Openness

WASHINGTON, DC, August 17, 2007 (ENS) - New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, a Democrat, is the only presidential candidate of either party to sign a pledge to adhere to principles of open government if elected, especially with respect to the environment.

Developed by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, PEER, the Public Service Pledge calls upon candidates to commit their presidency to conduct the public business in the open, keep vital documents in the public domain, protect scientists "who report inconvenient truths," and protect whistleblowers.

Beginning in mid-June, PEER contacted all the campaigns by phone, fax, email and letter asking whether the candidate would abide by policies that avoid suppression and political manipulation of science, particularly on environmental issues - practices that have become a hallmark of the Bush administration.

The organization, which represents government employees in natural resources agencies, has followed up repeatedly with each campaign.

"We applaud Governor Richardson for being forthright and committing without hesitation to protecting the values of public service," said PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch.

"Frankly, it is disquieting that the other candidates need so much time to ponder whether an unambiguous pledge of open and transparent government fits within their campaign strategies," Ruch said.

Joining PEER in this effort is a group of prominent Americans, called the Leadership Council, whose members include political activists such as environmental attorney Robert Kennedy, Jr., former Congressman Pete McCloskey, and entertainer Al Franken.

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In addition, the Leadership Council features public servants notable for being honest at great cost, such as climate scientist Dr. James Hansen, ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley, and former U.S. Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers.

Former Senator John Edwards sent an equivocal letter offering "to discuss where I stand on the issues that you have presented..."

Only one other candidate, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, gave a definitive answer, rejecting the pledge "at this time" via a phone call from his campaign staff.

"We are mystified that these candidates seem unable to express a clear opinion on these basic issues," Ruch said. "Presumably, voters want to know whether a presidential aspirant values honesty over message control."

[[Source](#)]