Bush Administration dresses up its retrograde environmental policies

PSR joined a coalition of Members of Congress and advocacy groups to denounce these changes.

And with good reason. Environmental health protection has gone mainstream, almost to the point of being taken for granted. Recent polling indicates Americans strongly support clean, healthy environmental policies, and oppose the industry-driven rollbacks of the Bush Administration.

Sometimes, the Bush Administration issues plans that reverse 30 years of environmental health policies, dressed up in green clothes to soothe a public worried about spiking rates of asthma, respiratory illness, and global warming. So the Administration issues plans...
Despite the terror that gripped the Washington, DC area during the sniper spree this fall, and in spite of the growing death toll in cities across the country, the Bush Administration continues to stall proven plans to track down murderers and to keep guns off the streets and out of the hands of criminals.

It is well known that Attorney General John Ashcroft is no friend of gun control. He unilaterally changed 29 years of federal firearm policy by adopting the National Rifle Association’s position that the vaunted Second Amendment grants gun ownership rights to individuals, not just to a “well-regulated militia.” President Bush has countered arguments that he is soft on guns by touting his support of Project Exile, a Virginia program that automatically turns any felony involving a firearm into a federal offense. Although PSR supports this program, problems have emerged: simply put, federal law enforcement simply can’t keep up with the case load. Moreover, the program would be more effective as part of a comprehensive national gun control strategy.

Twenty-eight thousand Americans are killed with firearms each year. That’s after a decline in the murder rate to a 50-year low, although the homicide rate has spiked alarmingly in major cities like Los Angeles, Oakland, and Washington.

Despite this still-high and rebounding rate, the Administration offers no solutions other than Project Exile and “enforcing the laws we already have.” It ignores legal gaps—such as the loophole waiving background checks at gun shows—and new, innovative ways to track down guns and the criminals who use them. For example, during the sniper spree, the Administration proposed to further “study” ballistics fingerprinting, which would allow law enforcement to keep track of guns used in crimes.

No study is necessary to determine the utility of ballistics fingerprinting. President Bush’s own law enforcement professionals know how useful this technology can be in crime prevention and prosecution. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) issued a report this year on the successful use of gun fingerprinting and tracking in solving crimes.

The ATF’s own pilot National Integrated Ballistic Information Network Program is a successful model of such an initiative. The network provides Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) equipment to state and local law enforcement offices, so they can collect and compare gun crime evidence from scanned digital images of the distinctive markings on discharged firearm cartridge casings. Since this technology’s debut, ATF and its partner agencies have logged more than 4,400 “hits” of matches useful to investigations.

This intelligence, crucial for solving and preventing crimes, is not yet available nationwide. In fact, only a handful of states currently have access to IBIS. The President would like to keep that way, while the body count continues to mount.

In further efforts to keep law enforcement in the dark, the Attorney General has proposed that the data collected through background checks be kept for only 24 hours, which would make it impossible for law enforcement officials to monitor gun purchases for fraud. In the dragnet after September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration had no problem suspending habeas corpus for nearly 2,000 alleged material witnesses but absolutely refused to allow the FBI to determine if they any of them had purchased firearms. Apparently, some rights are more important than others.

The Administration’s hear-no-evil approach to firearms has real consequences. For example, we still don’t know how many Washington area sniper suspect got his hands on an M-16 knock-off that he allegedly used to kill more than a dozen victims.

As a nation, we need to demand that the President stop ignoring international terrorists, now stand up to the NRA. President Bush must rely on the ATF’s strong evidence that ballistic fingerprinting can help track down violent criminals and prevent death and injury. His effort to stall implementation of this technology by “studying” it is a transparent ploy.

Without ballistic fingerprinting, guns owned by international terrorists, when and closing the gun show loophole, there will simply be no systematic way to keep track of guns in this country and to make sure that they aren’t used by criminals, children, and the insane. The President’s blind eye to the science of violence prevention is only the most recent and unfortunate forfeiture of the trust he holds to protect the public.

The Infeasible $7 Billion ABM Boondoggle

Nowhere has science in the public interest been more blatantly ignored than in the government’s ballistic missile defense program, designed to shoot down rockets lobbed at the United States or our allies by so-called rogue states.

Even when the technology “works,” we learn belatedly that tests have been rigged or run under less than realistic conditions. Results are then misinterpreted, and accomplishments are trumped up just to justify continued funding for a program that attempts the impossible: hitting “a bullet with a bullet” — perhaps many of them—in space, under actual combat conditions in the fog of war or crisis.

Proponents of the new missile defense routinely ignore evidence of un-realistic tests, botched intercepts, and missed results. This is hardly the kind of rigorous, scientific approach that we expect from our public servants.

Faced with disappointing trial results, President Bill Clinton put off a decision to launch the program and opted to continue with research and testing. But President George W. Bush and his cabinet appointees, notably Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, promptly reinvigorated the U.S. Missile Defense Agency with the hope of building a true “hit to kill” antiballistic missile defense system. The scientific challenges and mounting evidence that discouraged President Clinton have simply been ignored under his successor.

While PSR works to eliminate all nuclear weapons, it opposes ballistic missile defense as a wasteful, costly program that destabilizes the strategic balance. A defensive system effectively gives a shield to our leaders, behind which they may feel emboldened to strike first. An undeclared country, seeking to overwhelm such a defense, will simply build more missiles, thus causing a classic, upwardly spiraling arms race, like the one that threatened us during the dark days of the Cold War and which we continue to pay for today. But neither cost nor instability deters this Administration from playing off the public’s fears of vulnerability to attack at any time from any opponent.

Missile defense systems come with their own vulnerabilities. In addition to throwing off the strategic balance, these systems can be foiled by a number of enemy countermeasures, and cannot be realistically tested until they are required in use. Even the Bush Administration, under favorable testing conditions, barely half of all intercept tests have failed. The science of missile defense is unproven and ultimately infeasible.

The Missile Defense Agency is unique in its freedom from standard Pentagon procedures for monitoring new weapons programs. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld announced last year that the agency would be exempt from the regulation that military commanders specify requirements for new weapons, as well as from traditional reporting on program timelines and costs. Finally, the testing efforts of the Missile Defense Agency are free from oversight by the Pentagon’s test evaluation office.
**World Summit on Sustainable Development**

This past fall, PSR participated in the historic World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The “Rio + 10” conference was convened to establish an agenda to combat environmental threats to the global population.

PSR was actively engaged from the beginning, with professional staff attending the Johannesburg preparatory meeting in Indonesia earlier this year, actively promoting health and environmental issues—and specifically children’s environmental health—with delegates and NGOs in the preparations for the summit. In the months leading up to the conference, PSR developed a “Pre-Script for Johannesburg” which was signed by several public health organizations as an advocacy agenda for vital health and environmental issues.

“We’re all working together to promote the environmental health of children, and in particular, the idea of developing and implementing a set of indicators to measure children’s environmental health,” PSR Executive Director Bob Musil wrote in a letter from Johannesburg. “These indicators—tools such as lead blood levels and the availability of safe drinking water—will provide standard global benchmarks by which we can evaluate progress towards environmental health.”

PSR’s delegation of staff and international physicians to the Summit advocated assentively for American leadership on global environmental health protection while educating foreign governments on the links between environmental quality and public health. PSR provided a number of letters that focused on children’s environmental health and speakers spoke to the dangers posed by air pollution and climate change. PSR was joined by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the International Society of Doctors for the Environment, the International Network for Children’s Health, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the United Nations Environment Program. The Summit was an unprecedented opportunity to expand and solidify PSR’s reputation as a premier public health advocacy organization with government, the research community, and NGOs both in the United States and around the world.

**The health of our children and families depends on the best science, uncontaminated by preconceived political agendas.**

Similarly, Secretary Thompson appointed five industry-supported scientists to the Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention. Lead has long been linked to developmental delays and reduced intelligence in children, but these new appointees threaten a planned review that might have resulted in a new, lower standard for the level of lead in the blood that is considered safe for kids. The authorizing statute for the federal advisory committees states that their membership must be balanced and free from conflicts of interest. The sheer scale of the new appointments, and the appointees’ often close relationship with those who produce environmental contaminants, should draw attention. And they have, but only in the scientific periphery. Criticism for the most part has been confined to professional journals such as The Lancet and Science.

Not content merely to stack advisory panels, the Administration has simply disbanded two before their work was complete. The Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing was convened to propose regulations for the currently unfettered market in dubious “home gene tests,” now trotted out for sale over the Internet with shaky data linking heredity to disease. The National Human Research Protections Advisory Committee, instituted under President Bill Clinton after serious problems in human research projects came to light, was also shut down.

The pattern is clear: the Administration is determined to weaken or destroy oversight by dismantling these bodies or replacing members with enough like-minded industry cronies to block common-sense, sound-science approaches to protecting public health. These attacks are being made below the level of scrutiny given to major laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. This year’s election sweep virtually guarantees that President Bush will face no serious examination or opposition in Congress. A rubber-stamp legislature will help the Administration push an extreme agenda that favors industry over public health.

It’s time to get these changes out in the open. The American Public Health Association, the largest organization of its kind in this country, recently called for government officials to ensure balance and fairness on these panels and to follow closely the guidelines set out in the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Their concern is that the public’s health could be threatened if science is for sale to the highest bidder. The health of our children and families depends on the best science, uncontaminated by preconceived political agendas. Yet the President is serving the constituencies that paid his way to the Oval Office by appointing them to the very decision-making bodies that monitor their industries. This is an abandonment of core protections that all Americans expect and deserve.

**Political Science**

The President is stacking federal scientific panels with pro-industry advocates. The consequence could be weaker environmental and public health protections.

When President George W. Bush posed for a photo op with American Nobel science laureate last November, he probably didn’t tell them that his Administration is quietly working to get science out of federal policy-making. In particular, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson has been stacking science advisory panels with industry advocates who are more concerned with an anti-regulatory political agenda than with sound scientific assessments of public health threats.

Knocked hard early in his administration for allowing industry to dictate energy policies and blocking updated arsenic standards for drinking water, the President and his cabinet have since launched a stealth campaign to replace public health professionals in places where they most directly affect policy but where they attract little public attention. These advisory groups work in the background, helping to protect Americans from dangers ranging from lead and mercury to regularly conducted human experiments.

The Administration summarily replaced 15 of the 18 members sitting on the Advisory Committee to the Center for Disease Control’s National Advisory Committee on Environmental Health. This group coordinates the response to public health threats ranging from anthrax to natural disasters. At least four of the new appointees to the advisory panel have direct ties to industry, including a California toxicologist who testified for Pacific Gas and Electric in the environmental health lawsuit of the film “Erin Brockovich.”

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PSR Says Vote No on Preemptive War!

On behalf of tens of thousands of American doctors, nurses, health professionals and scientists working together with concerned citizens, Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) calls upon all members of the United States Congress to vote against taking our great nation into war against Iraq.

The case has not been made.

Iraq has not attacked us, nor is there evidence that it plans to do so. U.S. intelligence agencies have confirmed that there is no evidence that either Iraq or Saddam Hussein were involved in the heinous attacks on U.S. citizens and cities on September 11, 2001. We believe that Iraq is obliged under UN Security Resolutions to admit inspectors from the IAEA for the purpose of ensuring that Saddam Hussein does not have weapons of mass destruction. If only when inspectors, now being prepared, fail or are definitely rebuffed, should the United Nations Security Council, under international law, decide how to enforce compliance.

Instead, a U.S. war on Iraq, approved in advance by the U.S. Congress without a clear casus belli, even against a bellicose tyrant like Saddam Hussein, would:

- DESTABILIZE the Middle East, exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and lead to the loss of many innocent civilians.
- RISK the possible use of weapons of mass destruction in the region.
- COST an estimated $100–200 billion, not counting rebuilding Iraq, at a time when the need to meet human needs for health, education, environmental protection, decent jobs, old age security and more have never been greater and are being neglected at home and abroad.
- LEAD to an insecure world for our children and grandchildren where might makes right and the United States is perceived not as a leader in international cooperation and law, not in health and human rights, but as an arrogant superpower seeking to impose its will.

Military operations against Iraq may indeed lead to a relatively swift victory in the short-term. But war is characterized by surprise, human loss, and unintended consequences. Even with a victory, we believe that the legal, moral, political, diplomatic, environmental and medical consequences of an American preempive attack on Iraq would undermine, not protect, U.S. security and standing in the world.

We are particularly concerned that this war is being sought as part of a new, wider, unilateral U.S. policy that relies primarily on wounding worldwide military supremacy, preemptive strikes, the potential use of nuclear weapons, and the overthrow of governments whenever the U.S. feels its interest threatened.

We need a foreign and military policy based on the forces of law, not on the law of force.

VOTE NO ON WAR AGAINST IRAQ.

I want to add my name and support to the PSR Campaign Against War in Iraq.

NAME (or degrees if applicable)__________________________

ADDRESS ____________________________________________

PHONE ___________________________ FAX __________

I am enclosing a contribution of $_______ to help stop war against Iraq and policies of unilateral preemption and possible use of nuclear weapons that will harm, not help, the United States.

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Drs. John and Mary Frantz

“We’d like to give you a $50,000 interest-free loan.” The note from Drs. John and Mary Frantz was unlike any PSR had ever received. But as we started to talk to them, we learned it was typical of a handful of others the Frantzs have sent to progressive organizations over the years.

While interest-free loans are a common giving vehicle used by the American Friends Service Committee, few nonprofits encourage—or even know about—this method of supporting an organization. Thanks to the Frantzs, we’re learning.

Interest-free loans work this way: the donor and the organization sign a loan agreement (see box for sample) stipulating that the organization will pay to the donor the value of the loan, without interest, upon request. The loan is cancelled, and [can] becomes a gift, upon the death of the donor(s).

While the organization holds the loan, it earns the income from it. Because the Frantzs increased their loan to $100,000, each year income generated from it will equal $5,000 or more. If PSR holds the loan for 20 years, it will earn its full value in interest.

The Frantzs benefit from this agreement in several ways. First and foremost, they enjoy the feeling of investment and involvement in organizations doing work important to them. Furthermore, they have effectively reduced their taxable estate while retaining flexibility should they need to call in the loan. “I tell my children, ‘I’m worth more alive; than dead!’” says Dr. John Frantz. “I can’t say it’s why they treat us so well, but it can’t hurt.”

Their generosity and energy extends to many fields. Both internists in their 80s, the Frantzs continue to practice medicine, bicycle, kayak and hike around the world and write on topics that interest them. And just about everything interests them. Their writings covering such topics as Love Canal Disease, the War on Drugs, Research Funding, Collegiality, Radar and Estate Planning have been published in a booklet that is a hot seller at the Monroe Clinic Hospital where they practice.

The Frantzs’ dedication extends to their first-hand experience with PSR’s core mission. They witnessed directly how problems are compounded, not ended, by military intervention following their Peace Corps mission teaching medicine in Afghanistan from 1968 to 1970. That country entered a tragic decline fueled by civil war and neglect. The campaign that liberated the country from the Taliban, they say, must now be more than matched with resources to reconstruct the country and reconstitute its culture.

EMPEROR’S CLOTHES

Continued from page 1

called “Healthy Forests” that destroy trees and “Clear Skies” that produce more air pollution.

It’s the same thing with the New Source Review (NSR). The stealth plan will relax air pollution controls on power plants and refineries, effectively allowing greater emissions of pollution that harm human health. EPA’s NSR revisions will make it easier for utilities to upgrade and expand old power plant, without improving their pollution controls at the same time.

“Children will be affected the most,” said Susan West Marmag, M.P.H., PSR’s Director of the Environment and Health Program. “Pound for pound, children breathe more air than adults, making them more susceptible to air pollution released from generators and refineries. It’s no wonder childhood asthma is on the rise, and these NSR provisions will only accelerate that.”

“The Clean Air Act wasn’t a cosmetic piece of legislation,” said Robert K. Musil, PSR’s executive director. “All Americans need this protection. Air pollution contributes to thousands of cases of asthma, respiratory illnesses, and even premature death each year. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. The Administration’s actions today represent a give-away to industry and contradict EPA’s mission of protecting the public’s health.”

The exhaust from power plants contaminates the air with particulates, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur and other polluting chemicals. Health professionals have long expressed concern that more than half of our nation’s population lives in urban areas with unhealthy air. Air pollution claims a mounting toll on America’s health and their quality of life every year, from respiratory disease like asthma to premature death. Even though the Clean Air Act has been in effect for 30 years, the latest public health research indicates that pollution from power plants shortens more than 30,000 lives annually.

In late September, more than 1,000 doctors, nurses, and public health professionals wrote to John Graham, Director of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs—the office with final say on all new federal rules—to ask him to block changes that would weaken NSR rather than strengthen it.

PSR is working with a coalition of environmental and public health groups to block the Administration’s NSR rules. Because the consequences are the health of our children and communities.
LEADERSHIP CIRCLE MEMBERS

PSR gratefully acknowledges those members who contributed $1,000 or more in unrestricted gifts to PSR over the last year:

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Fiscal Year 2002 (1/1/01 to 12/31/01)

INCOME

Grants $1,425,527 (49%)
Other $38,844 (1%) Contributions $1,708,126 (54%)

EXPENSES

Program Services $2,754,038 (80%)
General and Administrative $264,054 (8%)
Fund Raising $429,746 (12%)
This lack of oversight provides political cover for continuing testing failures. Despite its infeasibility, the Missile Defense budget has grown past $7 billion since President Bush came into office. The bureaucratic politics around this program has perpetuated a classic pork-barrel program in which every near-miss becomes an excuse for more funding to get it right the next time.

Yet despite the astronomical influx of cash, the failures continue. The Pentagon admits to some testing failures (such as those of January 18, 1999, July 8, 2000, December 13, 2001, and April 25, 2002), but other failed tests are subject to the Pentagon’s selective reporting of results.

M.I.T. Professor Theodore Postol has opposed the U.S. Missile Defense Program on the grounds of faulty science and a blinded political agenda. Following leads from a former employee of defense contractor TRW, a TRW retiree, and a U.S. Department of Defense investigator, Postol discovered that the Missile Defense Agency and its contractors deliberately misrepresented and distorted the results derived from a missile defense test conducted on June 23, 1997. “These deliberate actions have hidden the system’s critical vulnerabilities from the White House, Congress, and the American citizens whom the missile defense program was designed to protect,” Postol writes.

Dr. Postol uncovered evidence of other distorted test results. A test similar to the one on June 23, 1997, was launched on January 16, 1998. In this test, the agency removed the decoys that were the most difficult to discriminate from the warheads. “The implication of this carefully contrived choice of new decoys is chillingly clear,” Postol writes. “All the problematic shortfalls in the defense system discovered in the first two experiments have been removed through the painstaking designing of a set of decoys that would never be used by any adversary, but would make it possible to distinguish warheads from decoys in flight tests.” Compare these rigged results to the usual double-blind tests that form the foundation of the scientific method. Doctors and scientists would never try a chickenpox vaccine on children who have already had chickenpox and then claim to have given them the immunity. Yet that is essentially what the Missile Defense Agency and its supporters both inside and outside the Administration are doing. They are playing with the safety of the taxpayers and wasting billions of their dollars.

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HAVE YOU INCLUDED PSR IN YOUR WILL?

By leaving a bequest to PSR, you can ensure that your values and dedication live on. A bequest can also lower your taxable estate, increasing what you leave to your family and loved ones. Check with an attorney or tax advisor to see how a bequest to PSR would fit into your estate plans.

For some bequest language or more information about including PSR in your will, please contact Ruth Swanson, Associate Executive Director, at the address below or rswanson@psr.org.

GET ACTIVE

Would you like to be more involved in PSR’s advocacy efforts? A great place to start is PSR’s Activist Updates. Each of PSR’s program areas reaches out to members through Action Alerts and e-mails by learn more about the Activist Update, contact us here (information below) and be sure to mention what issues interest you most.

Coming to Washington, DC, and have an hour to spare? How about visiting one of your elected officials to talk about the issues of most concern to you? Contact the PSR office at least a week in advance, and we’ll help schedule a meeting, provide you with background materials, and possibly even accompany you on your lobbying call.

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GET RESOURCES

PSR has created a wealth of publications on many of the issues of our work. If you’re looking for out-of-print titles or an Issue Brief on the National Missile Defense, we’ve got it. Many of these publications are available on our Web site, as well as from our office directly. Contact our program staff at the address below to find out more.

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ABM Boondoggle

Continued from page 2

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Winning Without War

These are dark times for the nation and for PSR. I would be foolish to say otherwise. We may be needlessly at war in Iraq as you read this. All branches of the government are in conservative hands that itch to take us back to the presumed golden days of Fathers Knows Best. Renewed attacks on the environment, on the assault weapons ban, on sound and independent scientific review in government, and on the Comprehensive Test Ban, are planned or underway.

At the same time, international law and treaties are ignored or abandoned and a tide of famine, disease, and misery—with women and children the principal victims—continues to rise in the developing world, particularly in southern Africa. Meanwhile, the United States stands idly by and squanders billions on war preparation, missile defenses, and advanced weaponry. Can anything be done to reverse these disastrous and reckless trends?

Again, in the short term, I would be less than honest if I answered with a simple yes. But there are clear signs that PSR is growing stronger and that our work is having a positive effect. We should recall, for example, that only a few months ago, the Bush Administration was prepared to launch a preemptive attack on Iraq without so much as an appeal to Congress, let alone the United Nations. PSR’s campaign against invasion—which has featured nationwide ads, organizing, email blitzes, media work, intense lobbying and more—was an early and important blitz, and in the short term, I would be foolish to say otherwise. We may be needlessly at war in Iraq as you read this. All branches of the government are in conservative hands that itch to take us back to the presumed golden days of Father Knows Best. Renewed attacks on the environment, on the assault weapons ban, on sound and independent scientific review in government, and on the Comprehensive Test Ban, are planned or underway.

At the same time, international law and treaties are ignored or abandoned and a tide of famine, disease, and misery—with women and children the principal victims—continues to rise in the developing world, particularly in southern Africa. Meanwhile, the United States stands idly by and squanders billions on war preparation, missile defenses, and advanced weaponry. Can anything be done to reverse these disastrous and reckless trends?

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The result? The Bush Administration has been forced, in effect, to negotiate and more—was an early and important voice against preemption. The U.S. may yet attack, but much of the world and a majority of Americans have been convinced that war is not the best way to check for disarmament cheating by any country. The political costs of war will be much higher now, as well. PSR stands as a major part of the Win Without War Coalition, a broad array of organizations that includes the National Council of Churches, NOW, the NAACP, Working Assets, Ben and Jerry’s True Majority campaign, MoveOn.org, the Sierra Club, and others actively opposed to preemptive war.

Never in our history has there been such powerful opposition to a war before it might begin. Even a majority of Democrats in Congress, despite feeble leadership, voted against giving the President authority to go to war. Concerns are likewise mounting about North Korea, where again the Bush tendency toward preemption provides no solution for the latest proliferation crisis. If there is hope to be had, it is that public opinion, at home and abroad, will continue to push President Bush toward constructive engagement and new arms control arrangements.

There is a growing realization, buried in the stymied press coverage and the approval ratings for a wartime President, that the country is headed in the wrong direction. I have seen it at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where the puny contributions of the United States were greeted with disdain and even hostility.

I have seen it at the World Health Organization in Geneva, where PSR has joined a global partnership to improve children’s environmental health and prevent some of the nearly 10 million childhood deaths a year. And, as I travel across America, I have seen it exhibited in continued growth in PSR membership and activism, and in the return of many former PSR members looking for leadership and a strong advocate for peace, environmental sustainability, and the force of law, rather than the law of force.

Through a new Campaign for Global Security and Health, PSR intends over the next two years to provide the leadership so woefully lacking in our political life. Based on the ancient and abiding principles of the medical and public health professions at their best, we will offer a clear, positive agenda to the public, policy makers, and the media.

We will not settle for security and health based on unilateralism, militarism, and policies that harm, not help our citizens and those around the world. I urge you to reach out to colleagues, friends, and neighbors to help them become actively involved with PSR. We are truly making a difference. If we continue to increase our numbers, our activism, and our giving of time and money, we can win. We can win without war.