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# Students rally for climate change in capital

By Jackie Palochko | Assistant News Editor

Approximately 12,000 students from around the nation joined together from Friday to Monday in Washington, D.C., at the Power Shift 2009 conference to lobby and discuss climate issues.

The students rallied on Capitol Hill, met with Congressional leaders, assembled with other students and listened to speakers and entertainers like independent politician Ralph Nader and musical group The Roots.

New York state had almost 1,000 students at the rally – the most for any state. According to Dominic Frongillo, Central New York Delegation Power Shift 2009 coordinator, 20 students from Ithaca College, 90 students from Cornell University and approximately 35 students from local high schools attended.

“The energy of 12,000 young people feeding off each other was amazing,” he said. “There were people cheering, singing chants for cleaner energy. Our generation is realizing it’s up to us to make a change.”

The first Power Shift conference took place in 2007, and approximately 7,000 students were present, according to Power Shift’s Web site. Whit Jones, program coordinator for the Energy Action Coalition, said this year’s rally was a “smashing success,” and students felt that their voices were heard.

“We saw record numbers of people turning out,” he said. “We were warmly received and listened to. It was different than the 2007 Power Shift with the Bush Administration.”

Frongillo, who attended the first Power Shift, said though students were exhausted on the way back home, they were already planning events, such as a green jobs fair, to host on campus.

“The students are all excited,” he said. “They’re thinking about educational opportunities to work with peers to teach about climate change.”

On Monday, 2,000 students participated in the “Capitol Climate Action” rally – separate from Power Shift – outside the Capitol Power Plant to protest against coal power. The rally was the nation’s largest act of civil disobedience against coal power.

“Save the world,” they chanted.

“This is what democracy looks like,” they yelled.

As sophomore Nancy Webster marched in a green hard helmet, she said she traveled to Washington to help inform the White House about climate change.

“We need to be here and show them that we actually care,” she said. “The U.S. needs to step it up. We need to continue awareness until things change.”

Over the weekend, students were able to attend workshops to learn skills and share ideas for sustainability. Panel discussions were also held to discuss climate issues. Jones said students attended the conference to promote a greener way of life.

According to Power Shift’s Web site, the students lobbying demanded that politicians listen to the science and reduce emissions, create jobs and re-engage globally to fix the climate and economic crises.

The students from the college traveled down on buses and slept at a hotel in Virginia. Though students said they were exhausted after the rally ended, they were happy they attended Power Shift.

Junior Bryan Davis said he and many of the other students at Power Shift are optimistic about the Obama administration and the current climate problems.

“With Obama in office, there’s hope that a lot of things are going to be changed,” he said. “Just learning about the new administrative policies, I’m optimistic that we will have a clean energy bill by the end of the year.”

Davis said he met a number of other students fighting climate change.

“I am by no means alone in this fight,” he said. “It was really inspiring to be with so many other students and citizens who felt exactly the same way as me. There’s a lot of power in just talking and meeting with people.”

Senior Melissa Bruhn attended Power Shift ’07 and ’09 and said marching in the rally reassured her that students actually do care about the environment.

“There really are a lot of youth that are interested in this issue and passionate about it,” she said. “And a big thing that we learned ... [was] that if we really want to see a change in this country, then we have to attract the politicians and administrators.”

Despite the cold weather, sophomore Emma Hileman said she saw many students passionately showing their concern for the environment. She said if students leave the conference knowing they can write to Congress or form awareness groups on campus, the climate conflict will see changes.

“If one person goes home and does something about it, we will see great strides in the next couple years,” she said.

Hileman said, while at the conference, she met with students from other institutions to discuss ways to spread sustainability. She said the college has positive ideas for sustainability but more can be done.

“We need to practice what we preach,” she said. “Students need to act on their ideas.”

*Senior writer Tristan Fowler contributed to this article.*