

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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YOUNG ALASKANS JOIN 5,000 PEERS IN NATION'S CAPITOL FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Alaskan high school graduates will join 5,000 youth across the nation in Washington, D.C. November 2-5 to push for national action on global climate change. They are part of the *Power Shift 2007*, the nation's largest youth-run climate change conference.

The students are with the Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA), a program of the National Wildlife Federation. AYEAs first hit the national spotlight in 2006 when they presented Congress a youth petition demanding action on climate change. Over 10% of the Alaskan high school population representing one hundred and fifty villages and cities signed the petition.

One of the students returning to D.C. is Verner Wilson, Yupik Eskimo from Dillingham, now at Brown University. "In Alaska, we are witnessing an invasion of species that are poisoning our food staples...our loved ones are falling through thinner ice, and we are seeing the animals that our peoples have depended on for thousands of years disappear," he commented.

The young Alaskans, hailing from St. Michael village to Petersburg, will join thousands of their peers in Washington, D.C. for the weekend, converging on Capitol Hill Monday, November 5th to let five hundred members of Congress know that the youth movement in America is looking for bold political leadership on climate change. Their message? To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, limit new fossil fuel development, and invest in the millions of "green jobs" created by the renewable energy industry.

The Alaskan group will share direct experiences from "the front lines" of climate change with conference attendees. On Monday, November 5th, AYEAs graduate Cheryl Lockwood will testify before a Congressional Select Committee on climate change impacts in Alaska. Cheryl is Yupik Eskimo from St. Michael village, and has seen parts of her community literally sink into the ocean. "Hopefully [*Power Shift*] will get our Congressional leaders to see how much help Alaska needs and take action," said Ms. Lockwood.

While many of the Alaska students are returning to DC, they have two new things in their favor this year: 1) they are now of voting age, and 2) they are being joined by thousands pushing a unified message for action. With voter registration among 18-29 year olds at its highest level in thirty years, young voters have become an increasingly important demographic; 47% of those young voters in 2006 indicated that their votes went to candidates based on their concern about U.S. energy policy. In addition, the *Power Shift* activities will be amplified November 3rd by the hundreds of events taking place in communities across the nation encouraging Congress to "Step It Up" on climate change action. A gathering of environmental, business and native groups as well as elected officials will gather in Anchorage at Kincaid Park to push this message.

The Alaskan students hope to meet with all three members of Alaska's congressional delegation while in D.C. Senators Murkowski and Stevens have expressed support for AYEAs work to implement climate change solutions, both signing AYEAs 3-2-1 *Efficiency* pledge in 2007.

Shannon Kuhn, an AYEAs graduate originally from Anchorage and currently attending University of Montana, says, "*Power Shift* will bring the focus back to the role youth activism plays in setting policy. We will show the nation that youth care about the world we are inheriting, and that our concerns are merited in shaping the political agenda."

Verner Wilson is optimistic the gathering in D.C. can create real change. "America needs to be a leader, and that is why the leaders of tomorrow are uniting in Washington. We have hope, and from that hope will come action. From action will come results, and from those results will come a better tomorrow for us and for future generations."

Note: the AYEAs group is purchasing "Green Tags" to help offset the carbon emissions produced by travel

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For more information on **Alaska Youth for Environmental Action** (AYEA): www.ayea.org

For more information on the national **Power Shift** conference: www.powershift2007.org

For a complete list of AYEAs graduates attending *Power Shift*, and quotes, *see next page*.

Highlight of Alaskan Activities Monday, November 5th:

9:30 am	Cheryl Lockwood testifies before Congressional Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming <i>Youth Leadership for Clean Energy and a Healthy Climate</i>
11:30 am	Alaskan group meets with Senator Lisa Murkowski
2:00 pm	Alaskan group meets with Senator Ted Stevens

Youth who may be interviewed for this news story:

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Alaskan Youth Comments on Climate Change and Power Shift

Cheryl Ishnook *Newhalen, Alaska*

“I am an Aleut-Eskimo and part Russian. My ancestors have lived on these lands generations after generations, living off natural resources such as berries, salmon, caribou, moose, and seal and I respect the land and heritage a lot. The year 2003 was the hottest year. We were lacking water and vegetation. There are no longer caribou herds. We had caribou herds back in 1999-2000 and all of the years before then. Now winter does not come. We do not get snow until late November, it just rains. It is harder to travel from one village to another because there is not enough snow. Global warming is affecting my subsistence and culture.”



Cheryl “Charlee” Lockwood *St. Michael Village, Alaska*

“This event shows how much our youth care about helping others to prevent global warming issues. Hopefully it will get our Congressional leaders to see how much our state needs help. As we work together we can start to show how strong we can be. Communicating with others around the nation at *Power Shift* will motivate me to try my best to help those who need support dealing with global warming in their communities.”

Shannon Kuhn, Anchorage, Alaska *University of Montana*

“This conference serves as a unique opportunity for Alaskan youth to access our Congressional Delegation and make our voices heard. I believe that this event will bring the focus back onto the role youth activism plays in policy decision-making. *Power Shift* will show the nation that youth care about the world we are inheriting, and that our concerns are merited in shaping the political agenda.”



Tim Treuer, Anchorage, Alaska *Harvard University*

“Not only is global climate change the most important issue facing Alaskans, particularly young Alaskans, it is also our greatest opportunity. The solution to this pressing problem lays in one single principle, sustainability and the painless application of this principle will provide us with countless benefits: everything from healthier lifestyles and a healthier environment to greater energy security. Perhaps most importantly, though, is the fact that by solving this problem we will know that going into the foreseeable future each generation past our own, from every culture around the world, will not be left with an environmentally denuded planet and an economically crippled civilization, and instead will inherit all of the tremendous opportunities that we have enjoyed.”



Verner Wilson, Dillingham, Alaska *Brown University*

“We have had enough with our country being the largest greenhouse gas-emitter. We are ready to make a difference to ensure environmental justice for everyone across the globe. We hear the small island nations and low lying countries that are at risk from rising sea levels and increased storm intensity. In Alaska, we hear the villages that are falling into the ocean and are concerned with melting permafrost that has an impact not only on the people that live here, but the industries that employ us.

We know that our dependence on fossil fuels is not only polluting our environment and fueling climate change, but it is endangering the security and stability of our nation, its foreign relations and economy.”





Celia Miller, Anchorage, Alaska *University of Alaska-Fairbanks*

“I have seen Alaska change in my own lifetime. Global warming is wreaking havoc on our cultures, livelihoods, and communities, and we don't know how much it will change. I grew up in Chugiak, in South Central Alaska, and am currently attending the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which is a center for arctic research. I hope *Power Shift* will give me the tools to come back to my university and push for a unified campus voice on climate change. Youth are the ones that have to deal with the end results of climate change, and Alaskan youth in particular. I have both high expectations and hopes for *Power shift*, because the places I love are in danger, but we still have the time and ability to save them.”

Kaeli Casati, Anchorage, Alaska *University of Montana*

“*Power Shift* is a very important step in rattling the foundation of our national concerns. Our generation cares about the future and has the energy to change the way things are headed. *Power Shift* has the ability to attract the attention of national politics and act as a very valuable learning tool for young people who have stepped up to deal with climate change.”



Drew Cason, Anchorage, Alaska *University of Alaska-Anchorage*

“When society's paradigm shifts from the environment being something we must look after, to humankind and the world being in a symbiotic relationship; when we realize that we need to be conscientious of environmental impacts for our own wellbeing and that of others, then will we be truly able to tackle the concept of long-term environmental justice and defeat global warming.”