

Society Of Environmental Journalists Bring Host Of Issues Front And Center

■ The group takes on high government officials and celebrities.

By Ron Karten

The 14-year-old Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) met in Pittsburgh late in October with sky high and ocean deep ambitions. The annual conference took aim at green buildings and brown fields, mining travesties and sewage backups. It looked at whether environmental reporting has left minorities behind and the extent to which politics infects federal scientific inquiries.

U.S. Department of Energy Science Director Raymond Orbach said "There would be hell to pay" if he thought politics was playing any part in the scientific decisions coming out of his office, but he did not convince *The New York Times* Senior Science Writer Cornelia Dean, who said, "It's not just coming from one side of the aisle or one political persuasion. It's coming from all over."

"Private money," she said, "is driving scientific projects."

She said that today in the Grand Canyon, a book for sale insists that the world is 6,000 years old and that the Grand Canyon was formed by the floods for which Noah built the ark.

In describing scientists who seek to review her articles before publication, she quoted them saying, "But we're objective seekers of truth and we have no ulterior motives," which is, she added, "you know, hilarious..."

Navajo Times Senior News Reporter Marley Shebala (Navajo/Zuni) asked Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Leavitt about a 50-year-old case of government radiation poisoning on the Navajo reservation.

It needed more study, he said.

The cast of characters included not only top environmental reporters from across the U.S. and Canada, but some heavy hitters from politics, government, education and entertainment.

In a presentation examining the role that celebrities play in spurring environmental causes, actor Ted Danson was joined by Pittsburgh Steelers famed running back Franco Harris in

responding to a question about whether celebrities help with environmental issues or trivialize them.

"We provide access," said Danson, a Board Member of the ocean-focused group, Oceana (www.oceana.org). He described how when he is able to do a photo-op with a senator, staffers for Oceana get together with staffers for

finance system for a failure to keep the public informed.

In noting that "the administration went and tore the heart out of the Clean Air Act by getting rid of the New Source rule which was the rule that required the plants to clean up in the first place he said that, according to EPA, that decision alone kills 30,000 Americans

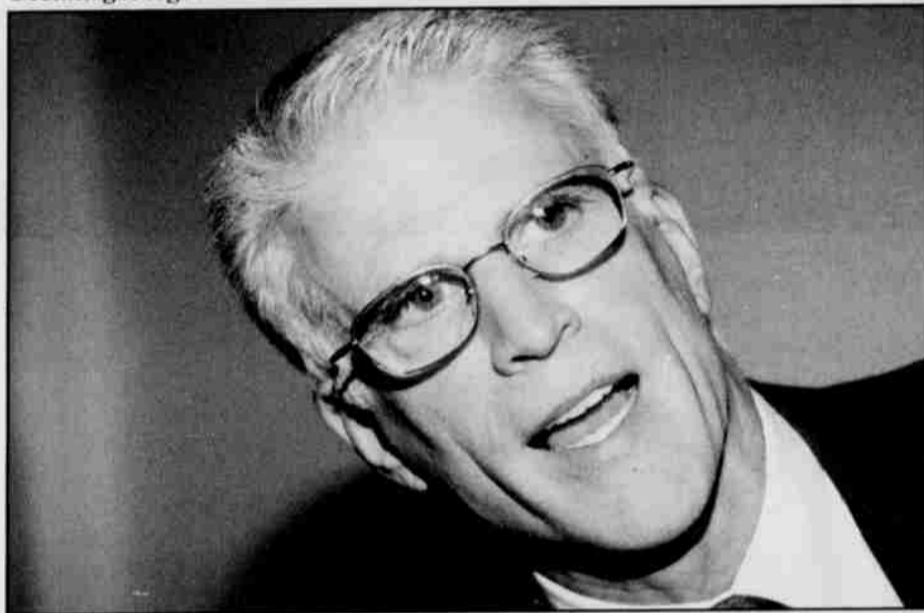


Photo by Ron Karten

Celebrity Support — Actor Ted Danson appeared with celebrities including former Pittsburgh Steeler Franco Harris in a panel on "Celebrity, The Media And The Environment" at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists in Pittsburgh, October 20-24. Danson said his celebrity made him feel "like a five-year-old in a room full of adults."

the senator, and the real work gets done among the staffers.

The audience also had a surprise visit from Teresa Heinz Kerry, wife of the presidential candidate John Kerry, during the session. The Kerry campaign had stopped at Carnegie Mellon University that day. Carnegie Mellon also was host for the conference.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., senior attorney for the National Resources Defense Council and supporter of many environmental efforts, blamed a languid press held back by corporate consolidation, the Reagan-era death of the Fairness Doctrine and the campaign

every year. Ten World Trade Center attacks every single year. This should be the headline of every newspaper in the country."

The New York Times Environmental Reporter Andy Revkin acknowledged that the press has in recent years "screwed up many aspects of this," but added that "even if the information got through those filters... there's a general lack of scientific and technical literacy of the American public now. In other words, we can carry the water to the horse, but we can't make that horse drink. In fact, Corey Dean, my old editor, used to say that our job is not to

educate. Our job is to inform."

EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt ticked off five areas where the Bush administration had made real strides, but in an interview afterwards, *Greenwire* Senior Reporter Darren Samuelsohn said that the administration could really only take credit for one, reductions of emissions as a result of a so-called 'clean diesel rule' for non-road vehicles, though he noted that the industry already was forced during the Clinton administration to change the fuel mix and engine technology for on-road vehicles.

On clean air standards, a subject the President raised as a success story during the last debate, Samuelsohn noted that the Bush administration was forced under a 2001 Supreme Court decision to implement Clinton-era standards.

But this conference was not attended by 700 people walking in lock step. If many of those attending complained about Bush administration prevaricators, just as many, it seemed, expressed frustration with progressives like Kennedy.

"He's head of all these environmental groups, but he didn't say a thing about what they are doing," said Myra Thomas, a New Jersey freelance journalist. "It was just a political stump speech."

Debra Kroll (Salinas), Book Editor for *Native Peoples*, asked about Kennedy's efforts in behalf of Klamath River Tribes losing their water rights. She got no answer.

Marley Shebala said, "Natives are coming together and voting and they have made Arizona a swing state, along with New Mexico, which is where you have large Native populations." She asked Kennedy how do people — not just Natives — keep national leaders to the promises that they make.

Kennedy passed the ball back to the press.

Staff Writer Ron Karten received a fellowship to this conference. ■

Road Widening Project Will Save Lives In Grand Ronde

■ October meeting gives local residents a voice in the 2005 project.

By Peta Tinda

Grand Ronde Road, the mile-and-a-half long main artery between Highways 18 and 22, is set to be widened, starting in May 2005.

The road widening is a collaborative effort between the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who participated in the design and provided some of the funding.

The amount of kids walking to and from the school has increased since the building of Grand Meadows and new Tribal housing; both of which lie adjacent to the road.

Local residents' safety concerns have also increased.

"Basically the project was deemed to be of high safety value," said Larry Fuhrihan, a BIA designer. "Particularly because of all of the pedestrians and truck travel on the road. The problem is there is no refuge for pedestrians."

A meeting was held on Tuesday, October 19, by Eric Scott, Tribal Projects Manager, to hear from local residents.

Most were supportive of the widening, although some expressed concern over losing property to the road.

To accommodate the residents, a plan that included two-foot wide planter strips was scrapped in favor of the less intrusive plan now in the works.

The revised plan calls for new 10-

foot wide lanes with 5 foot bike lanes, new sidewalks and new cross walks at



Photo by Peta Tinda

In Danger — Children dodge truck traffic as they walk home from school on Grand Ronde Road. The road is scheduled to be widened to include bike lanes and sidewalks in 2005.

friendly," said Bill Gilley, Public Works Director for Yamhill County. "There's just no room to walk. I think it will

all of the major intersections.

There will be lights at the cross walks along the 7,800-foot road.

There are also plans for new water and sewage lines, as well as storm drains.

"It's not pedestrian friendly," said Bill Gilley, Public Works Director for Yamhill County. "There's just no room to walk. I think it will

save lives and most people understand that."

Gilley also said that he thinks the widened road will be a tremendous asset to the community.

In addition to widening the road, the Highway 22 intersection will have a larger turn radius, so that trucks won't have to turn into oncoming traffic, like they do now.

The project is expected to take a least two working seasons, with work starting at the south end at Highway 18.

"The purpose of the project is to make coming here safer," said Scott. "People have been supportive. We'll also be putting in a new sewer main to replace the one from McPherson Road to Highway 18."

The new road will be 44 feet in total width "with most of the main improvements taking place between the existing ditches," said Scott. ■