

Students travel to Washington for conference

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More than 50 UNC Asheville students visit Washington, D.C. this month for Power Shift, a climate change conference attracting youth from all over the country.

"Power Shift '09 will be the largest youth gathering ever on the issue of climate change," said Jessy Tolkan, executive director of the Energy Action Coalition.

According to Russell Anderson, the Southern Energy Network's North Carolina organizer, UNCA had the most students registered in the state, beating UNC Chapel Hill by one registrant. Power Shift organizers anticipate more than 10,000 attendees for this year's conference.

The Energy Action Coalition, a partnership of 48 U.S. and Canadian organizations, sponsored the first Power Shift two years ago. Coalition organizers said they wanted to face issues of social and environmental justice together by organizing youth in campaigns to protect the environment and promote social responsibility.

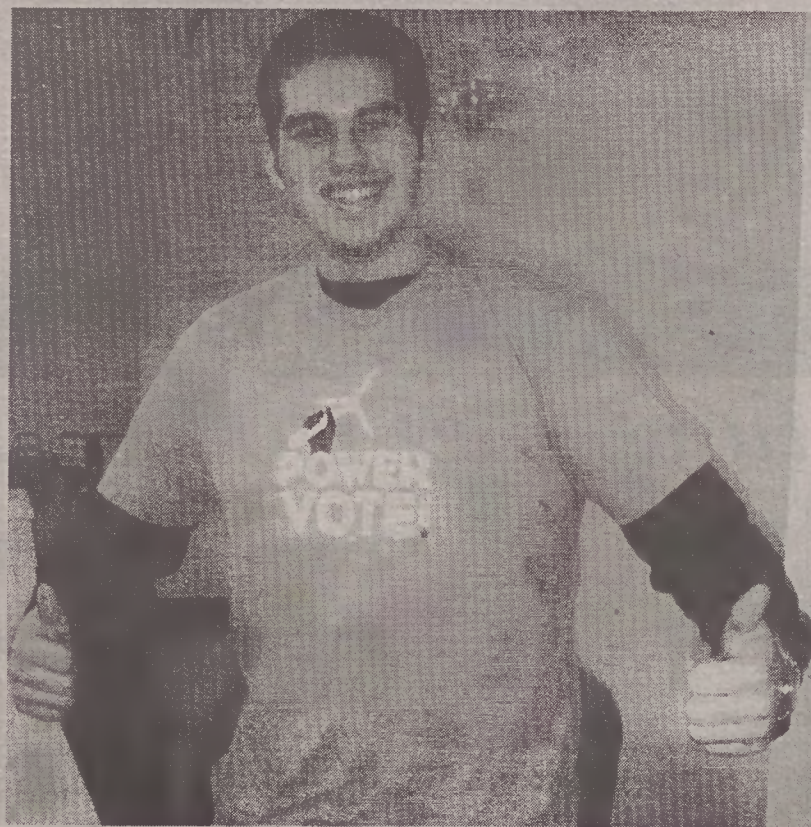
"Power Shift is a bunch of youth from around the country getting up to go to different workshops and panels," said freshman and Power Shift attendee Azaria Miller. "I want to be aware of issues and bring everything I learned back to campus to educate people who weren't able to go. I want to be less sedentary and more active."

Conference participants will attend workshops with a wide variety of topics such as gender, sexism, climate change and event planning. The workshops focus on anti-oppression, corporate accountability, education, environmental justice and international impact, according to the Energy Action Coalition.

"We need to repower our nation and the world with 100% clean, just energy," said Brianna Cayo Cotter, Power Shift communications director. "We need a political power shift that refuses to be dominated and dictated by big, dirty business interest for a minute longer and starts investing in us, in our future, and in survival."

Senior Ellie Johnston, the executive of sustainability for the Student Government Association, attended Power Shift '07 and worked on the Power Vote campaign.

"On the lobby day there was a big stage that the Energy Action Coalition set up on the lawn of our nation's capital. I turned



Kasey Baker, a junior, gives thumbs up wearing his Power Shift T-shirt at a meeting where Power Shift '09 gathered in the Swannanoa Room. Jonah Freedman, right, a junior, plans to attend the Power Shift conference, holds a plastic helmet from the Power Shift conference held in 2007.



Sulkiro Song - Staff Photographer

around to see thousands of youth with signs and banners and with the Washington Monument in the background," Johnston said. "Then we dispersed to meet with our respective congressman to tell them of our support for any effort they put toward clean energy and climate change."

The lobby day is a crucial part of Power Shift, Johnston said.

"It made me feel like I was a part of something that really had the possibility to make a difference."

The conference attendees choose between lobby training or non-violent direct action training. Participants either attend a lobby day on Capitol Hill, or a direct action protest known as the Capitol Climate Action on the last day of the conference.

Last year the students dressed in bio-hazard suits and shoveled coal onto the street in front of Citi-Bank, a coal supporter according to the coalition. Participants laid down in front of the bank blockading the entrance.

"We have said for a long time in the youth climate movement, that our future is at stake," Cotter said. "It is more than our future that is at stake. It is our basic sur-

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vival. It is the survival of peoples, species, entire countries, and of our planet that is at stake here. We don't have time to wait or be patient and polite any longer."

This year demonstrators will gather at the Capitol Coal Plant, which provides Capitol Hill with energy. A Facebook group for the demonstration contains more than 2,000 people who plan to attend.

Al Gore, Noam Chomsky, Bill McKibben and NASA scientist James Hansen endorse Power Shift, according to conference officials. Van Jones is currently the main speaker this year. He wrote *"The Green*

Collar Economy: How One Solution Fix Our Two Biggest Problems."

"Van Jones as a speaker is really powerful because of his commitment leading the green jobs movement," Johnston, who saw him speak at Power Shift '07 and at the Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education conference in 2008.

Johnston said utilizing the skills from Power Shift on campus was the most powerful part of Power Shift.

"Power Shift showed me there are thousands of people across the nation who are equally concerned with the direction of our nature and world are headed in terms of the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and the disparity between rich and the poor," Johnston said.

For more information about Power Shift, visit www.powershift09.org