



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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SIERRA CLUB TAKES HIKE TO THE RIGHT

"Neither the letter nor the tactics you are increasingly adopting in your candidacy are worthy of the Ralph Nader I knew," wrote Carl Pope, Executive Director of the Sierra Club, responding last weekend to a Nader attack on environmentalists sticking to their Gore guns.

To shamelessly borrow from Mr. Pope, neither the political tactics nor the endorsements by the San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club are worthy of the Sierra Club I knew—the group whose endorsement has been a reliable green stamp of approval for voters if only because Sierra Club's single-minded environmentalism demanded that candidates be the real deal.

This time out, the local Sierra Club chapter put its good name up for sale, endorsing candidates who came with shopping bags full of promises to the club's leadership, but scant evidence of environmental accomplishment.

The result was a spate of campaign mailers festooned with the Sierra Club name that caused reactions ranging from snickering to outrage among people who pay attention to such things.

Probably the silliest example was the cover of a campaign mailer from one Sierra Club endorsed candidate featuring a stunning photograph of Pampas Grass, the ubiquitous pest plant that any green card carrying candidate ought to know obliterates native habitat.

While this faux pas surely turned not one vote, it was as if an AARP endorsement appeared next to the infamous Bushism "They want the federal government controlling Social Security like it's some kind of federal program."

But, the Murphy for Mayor campaign sent the most controversial piece to Republican voters. In it, the venerable Sierra Club name was displayed along side Judy McCarty, the most ardent Fairy Shrimp antagonist on the San Diego City Council, Congressman "Buzz-Saw" Duncan Hunter, an environmental General Custer

with the worst green record in Congress and former Governor George Deukmajian, never an intimate pal of the pine.

The Murphy endorsement was unusual also because for the first time in memory, if ever, a candidate who got a plug in the Christian Coalition Voter Guide received the big nod from the Sierra Club.

While it might be argued that Christian principles and environmentalism go hand-in-hand, which is true, the Religious Right has not historically taken up environmental issues with any degree of enthusiasm, and normally their voter guide favorites reflect quite the opposite.

I suppose the folks who decided on behalf of the 15,000 San Diego Sierra Club members to endorse Murphy, whose environmental record when he was on City Council rated a 7% rating from the League of Conservation Voters, believe the "New Republican Right" is a bunch of Theodore Roosevelt's. I think not. And, I don't think most Sierra Club members think that, either.

But, the local Sierra Club leadership told those who counseled them to do otherwise, that when it came to endorsements, issues concerning human rights were not part of the decision mix—leaving many with a suspicion that these folks were representing a brand of environmentalism that puts the survival of an Australian red ant over the well-being of people.

Even so, Mr. Pope, I don't think that many San Diego Sierra Club members will be burning their cards any time soon, in spite of this trip down a strange, and I'm afraid, divisive road. That's because so many around here remember the Sierra Club that fought to save Carmel Mountain, protect Los Penasquitos Lagoon and San Diego's urban canyons for people as well as endangered habitat.

May that Sierra Club return, soon.