

Remarks by County Supervisor Joe Simitian

Sierra Club Guardians of Nature Event

October 5, 2018

It is of course a pleasure to be singled out for individual recognition this evening—in fact, it means more to me than you know. In truth, however, the good work any one of us does is built on the foundation laid by others...

The folks who came before us, the ones who blazed a trail, who led the way, so that any one of us who stepped up knew we could build on their good work.

Now, this can come as a surprise for elected officials, who sometimes think the world began on the day of their election. Or who think that any issue that's new to them is in fact a new issue. And maybe it is, but probably not.

More likely, long before any of us arrived on the scene, rolled up our sleeves, and started to work, other good men and women were already on the job—understanding that each of us does what we can during the time that we have. And then we pass the baton to those who follow, and we hope against hope that they build on our work.

So it was in my case when I arrived in the California State Assembly 20 years after my predecessor, Byron Sher, had first been elected to the California State Legislature. Before I'd ever given a serious thought to renewable energy issues, Byron was already hard at work with a ground-breaking piece of legislation calling for the use of 20% renewables by 2017—which back in the day seemed an audacious goal.

The bill was a tough sell. I did what I could to help, but as a first-term member of the Assembly's Utilities and Commerce Committee, it wasn't a lot. I listened and learned, and agreed to co-author the bill, and working with Byron, came to understand the truly transformative nature of Byron's legislation. And I was glad for Byron, and for all of us, when the bill was passed and signed into law.

And then, when Byron's effort to accelerate the effort to 20% by **2010** died in the final hours, of the final day, of Byron's final term, I sat in my chair at the back of the Assembly and I thought to myself, "Well, now it's on me." And up I stepped.

Two years later, 20% by 2010 was law. And then, the long hard push for 33% by 2020. All of which, we were told, was impossible. Except that now, ahead of schedule, we've already done it.

And when I left the Senate my work—forgive me—our work was carried on by State Senator Kevin De Leon with a mandate for 50% by 2030. And now, 100% renewable and/or carbon-free by 2045.

All of which is possible because there are people who come before us, and there are people who will follow, and the work is never "done", so we hand it off to the next, and the next, and if each of us does our work during the time we're privileged to serve, then the world gets increasingly better.

As Sierra Club members (and I am a Life Member), we are each of us, every one of us in this room, part of the long green line stretching back to John Muir—who founded the Sierra Club—more than 125 years ago.

And let's be clear, when it's our time to step up, we don't do it alone, because we can't. We need others. We need allies, and we need partners. And I have

been fortunate over the years to have the Sierra Club as an ally time after time after time. At every step of the way.

The bill we did together on timber harvesting—a decade and a half ago—is a perfect example. The bill itself, and the protections it provided, were a direct result of the conversations I had when the Loma Prieta Chapter Forest Protection Committee crowded into my office conference room at Town and Country Village (Karen Maki, Gary Bailey and all the rest of the gang).

Once the bill was introduced, Sierra Club California became an official co-sponsor, and their capable Capitol advocates were there to lobby the bill in Committee after Committee.

And when the day of reckoning was at hand, and the bill was on the floor of the Legislature, members of the Forest Protection Committee from the Loma Prieta Chapter were on the phones calling Sierra Club members in other chapters around the state urging them to call *their* legislators in support of the bill. And the votes were there.

Partners. Beginning, middle, and end.

Thank you for that, and for all the times you've put the Sierra Club's good name next to mine. Over and over and over again. In the Legislature, and, most recently, your timely and important letter just two weeks ago in support of affordable housing measures pending at the County. (Thank you Gita and thank you Gladwyn.)

And finally, let me thank you too for your advocacy. Almost always I have had the good fortune to have the Sierra Club as my ally—as an advocate for good works.

Over the years, as an organization and as individual advocates, you have been unrelenting, unremitting and sometimes, altogether unreasonable; and I mean that as a compliment—although it took me some time to understand and appreciate the indispensable nature of persistent advocacy.

I remember coming home from a meeting—many years ago now—frustrated with the intransigence of the community advocates who had spoken. In my exasperation I turned to my wife Mary Hughes and asked, “For God’s sake, why can’t these people be reasonable?”

To which she wisely replied, “Honey, that’s not their job. That’s **your** job. They’re advocates, and their job is to advocate. They’re not there to be reasonable; they’re there to advocate. That’s what they’re supposed to do.” And so it is.

As the playwright George Bernard Shaw once observed, “The reasonable man adapts...the unreasonable one persists...therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”

And the value of that persistence, the importance of it, is that it reframes the debate. You expand our sense of what’s possible. Over time, the “center of the debate” is moved by virtue of your advocacy, to a place along the continuum somewhere closer to progress.

You push, you prod, you poke, and you pummel us into submission, and thank God you do.

Otherwise:

- We’d settle for the status quo;
- Think that good enough is good enough; or
- Accept the tepid incrementalism that sometimes passes for progress.

You are persistent, which some call stubborn. But you know what? Stubborn is under-rated.

And one final thought.

It occurs to me that any of us who has ever hiked, backpacked or camped was probably admonished at some point to “Leave it as you found it”—and so we should.

But the Sierra Club—and the Loma Prieta Chapter in particular—has always done more than that. Through conservation, education, political action and outings, wherever they travel—be it hiking at Castle Rock or walking the halls of the Capitol—thankfully, they leave our planet better than they found it.

Which is why I am so deeply touched by the Club’s kind recognition this evening. And thank you so very, very much.