

Rio — June 9

US Senators Encourage Social Activism

Photo by Richard Register



Senator Albert Gore consulted with a youth representative at Global Forum.

On June 8, 40 young activists from the United States discussed their environmental priorities with eight American senators at Global Forum. The meeting was an endeavor by US delegates to present a responsive, united front to their constituents following a controversial letter to President Bush from the head of the US delegation, EPA administrator William Reilly.

In the memo, Reilly proposed that the US sign the Biodiversity Convention, with some alterations, to appease other delegations. Bush responded by forbidding Reilly to renegotiate the convention under any circumstances. After that, Reilly avoided the

thousands of international press representatives asking for comment.

The eight senators — Baucus (D-MT), Chaffee (R-RI), Gore (D-TN), Graham (D-FL), Lautenberg (D-NJ), Pell (D-RI), Symms (R-ID), and Wellstone (D-MN)—expressed their frustrations with the scarcity of environmentally sustainable jobs and voiced desire for a more consistent, long-term economic, social and environmental vision in the United States. "We Americans need to cooperate more," Lautenberg said. "Instead of building tanks, we should be buying railroad cars."

In an informal discussion with the sena-

tors, students and youth activists outlined their priorities for the environment. The need for alternative forms of energy and improvements in education seemed to be primary concerns. "I'm really frustrated because we have the technology, money, and power for appropriate, alternative, renewable energy sources," said Kara Evans, from Aspen, CO. "There's no justification for pumping more money into the war machine." A stronger transportation infrastructure, reform of foreign aid, the democratization of the political process, demilitarization, the injustices of free trade, and environmental racism were among the other issues discussed. Senator Lautenberg applauded efforts by activists to push for social change. "I hope you're never satisfied with the pace that things are moving [at]."

Gore also encouraged social activism. "I have found this so moving... this has been most rewarding, because it has provided the most hope, in the skill with which you express your views, and the determination you have. You need to do more, [and] make things happen."

These young people felt that their voices had finally been heard by the American delegation. Although frustrated by the UNCED process, they left the meeting feeling that the responsiveness of the delegates had encouraged more dialogue on environmental issues of concern to all young Americans.

— Carolyn Whelan