

Producing Green Soldiers to Lighten The Burden

At the very first Produced By Conference in 2009, I was surprised to see a panelist in a US Army uniform. Speaking on the topic of green productions, there was Dr. Kevin Geiss, then the head of the US Army's Energy Security program. In his opening statement, Dr. Geiss mentioned that many of the American soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq had died while guarding fuel convoys and not in combat. The news was dispiriting, but left me wondering what it had to do with green production. Dr. Geiss explained that troops being deployed to remote locations need mobile energy supplies to provide power for essentials like computers, walkie-talkies, lights, etc., and that power from solar and algae fuels were being implemented by the Army to help save lives and cut our dependence on oil. The same technologies could be used on sets. The next day, I was off to produce a renewable energy conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York, so after the panel, I introduced myself and invited Dr. Geiss. He and some colleagues from the Department of Defense came to the UN a week later to meet with ambassadors and explained that one of the biggest threats to US national security was climate change and that the implementation of renewable energy was vital.

US soldiers inspect a solar array.



I was shocked to hear such an admission from the Pentagon. My experience was that the only people who understood the threat of climate change were scientists and tree-hugging liberals. They gave me a book by the RAND Corporation, titled Green Warriors, emphasizing how our soldiers must not only clean up the environment after leaving a field of battle, but leave it better off ecologically. Since then, I've been frustrated that this message is not coming across to the American people. The production company I founded with my son to make his short film about global warming in 2008, Save It, has since expanded into a consulting firm focusing on getting that message out. This is why Brandon Hurlbutt, former Chief of Staff of the Secretary of Energy, connected me to Roger Sorkin. Roger is the producer, writer and director of The Burden, and was



raising funds via Kickstarter to complete a short-length documentary on freeing America from fossil fuel dependence.

Roger and I agreed that the military's initiatives could be the unconventional way to get everyone's attention and he asked me to come on to executive-produce The Burden. The making of the film was driven by frustration with the polarized way we discuss climate change and renewable energy, in the hopes of providing an airtight tool for policymakers and advocates to puncture the miscommunication around these topics.

After reading the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, in which climate change was mentioned as a "threat multiplier," Roger found the frame with which to tell this story. "It's not about Al Gore and saving polar bears; it's about four-star generals and admirals saying that what's at stake is nothing less than American blood and treasure." In addition, he wanted to convey a story that steered clear of the frightening climate change narratives we've heard so often. As a former strategist for the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised him after an interview, "Stay away from doom and gloom. Fear is inherently a contractual condition. Capture people's imaginations. You need to inspire people if you want them to take positive action toward finding solutions."

Roger resolved that he would focus on solutions, featuring, among others, former USMC logistics officer and current Republican Mayor of Indianapolis Greg Ballard, who's taking concrete steps to wean his city off oil. He avoids preaching to the liberal choir, with a narrative conservatives can embrace, with its emphasis on national security, economic prosperity and how the solutions to our problems run through the private sector, including the defense industry. As Gen. Anthony Zinni points out in the film, "If they want the contract, that's where industry is going to have to go." Now Roger finds himself trying to convince some liberals of the good faith of his allies in the military-industrial complex. Many of my own clients are military contractors, including Maddox

Jon Gensler, Col. Russell LaChance, Roger Sorkin



GGE Maddox, Going Green demo at Produced By 2012

Defense, co-founded by a former Navy SEAL, Mark Semos. He heroically showed up to deliver a bullet-scarred Solar Mobile Power Mod system fresh from a combat zone in Afghanistan for use at the PGA Green booth at the 2012 Produced By Conference. The Department of Defense's strategic thinking about energy should easily translate across party lines to reach the general public.

The film has now been completed as a 40-minute short, with an option to expand into a full-length feature if more funding is secured. The Truman National Security Project and Center for National Policy served as fiscal sponsors and are hosting private screenings with key decision makers including lawmakers and business

leaders in Washington, D.C., who can tip the balance on policy and public opinion. A rough-cut screening was hosted by the US Military Academy at West Point this past April, featuring Jon Gensler, a graduate and Iraq War veteran, who's parlayed his experience guarding fuel convoys in combat zones into a career in renewable energy. There was also a private screening hosted by Congressman Scott Peters (CA-52), clean energy campaign Operation Free, and CleanTECH San Diego, followed by a discussion on defense energy issues where Congressman Peters proclaimed, "We must give our military the tools necessary to increase self-sufficiency and protect our troops while simultaneously reducing our energy consumption. Reducing the amount of fuel we use is a national security imperative, and the Department of Defense should continue to lead the way toward a more diverse and renewable-focused energy future." Roger Sorkin believes you must never underestimate the power of storytelling to create a national security narrative that can cross the bipartisan divide. As producers, we're in the unique position to bring important messages to the public by producing both non-fiction and fictional films like Roger Sorkin has done with The Burden.

-NICOLE HANSEN

Producer Roger Sorkin, right, with Col. Bob Charette

