

# AL SHARPTON

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## BIOGRAPHY

Al Sharpton, Jr. was born October 3, 1954 in Brooklyn, New York. Ordained a Pentecostal minister at the age of 10, he attended Brooklyn College and went on to found the National Youth Movement and the National Action Network. He has, for many years, been a high-profile activist in the African-American community. In 1978, he ran unsuccessfully for the New York State Senate. In the past decade, he has also run for New York Mayor and for the U.S. Senate. He and his wife, Kathy, have two daughters.

## OVERVIEW

The Reverend Sharpton's history of urban activism has left him ideally suited to address environmental justice issues, such as childhood lead poisoning in New York City. Beyond that, however, his record on the environment is not extensive. Although in recent months he has taken strong positions on topics like fuel efficiency standards and global warming, his positions on many key environmental issues remain unknown. Sharpton participated in LCV's June 2003 presidential environmental debate.

## ISSUE AREAS

Al Sharpton's campaign had not returned LCV's presidential environmental questionnaire as of [date].

### ► CLEAN AIR

Reverend Sharpton has criticized the President's Clear Skies plan, opposed by environmentalists because it would weaken air quality standards for coal-burning power plants from the current Clean Air Act: "I think what the President has done is come with an alternative Clear Skies Act, which is nothing but a gift to his friends in big business."<sup>1</sup>

### ► CLEAN WATER

At LCV's presidential forum in June 2003, Sharpton declared his support for the Clean Water Act: "I think the Clean Water Act clearly is not only correct, I would even strengthen it."

In an interview with National Public Radio, Sharpton noted:

"According to government studies there are 1.7 billion people in the world today that need clean water, almost

3 billion that need sanitation systems that work. I would train engineers with incentives to young people to go to schools to become these engineers that would export people that would help with these things."<sup>2</sup>

### ► TOXICS

During his race for mayor, Sharpton advocated measures to deal with childhood lead poisoning in New York City. He has made statements in support of the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning.<sup>3</sup> He has also been active in protesting U.S. military exercises at the Vieques bombing range on Puerto Rico on the grounds that it was "hazardous to the environment" and the people of the island.<sup>4</sup>

### Superfund

At the 2003 League of Conservation forum in California, Sharpton said if elected he would focus on environmental justice issues, including Superfund toxic waste cleanups.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CANDIDATE IN HIS OWN WORDS

The administration must enforce the law and regulate business, so that both operate in the interest of the people. Instead of punishing environmentalists for protesting environmental degradation, as when I was arrested in Vieques, we need to implement and enforce the law on emissions, clean water and air, and make sure the polluters pay.

Our challenge as environmentalists and global citizens is to mobilize around broad issues that impact us all. This means that we need to get information into communities, because if people understood the imbalance of toxic waste and environmental degradation, they would get out and vote, and they would get involved with the environmental community. People of many different races, communities, and socio-economic backgrounds must unite and actively strategize if we are going to be able to accomplish anything.

The Clean Water and Clean Air Acts are under attack from the Bush administration, and as president, I would strengthen their impact and reach. In reality, what the administration is doing is taking away the ability to enforce clean water provisions on a state level, and reducing the Clean Air Act to commentary, rather than enforceable law. The result is unclean water and dirty air, which is dangerous for the health of American people.

I am concerned about the amount of money and influence in current politics coming from oil, energy, and automakers. They have bought their way into government and have rendered the American people in an environmentally precarious position. In terms of dependence on Middle East oil, we are in a hostage situation. The current situation in Washington is so oily it's downright greasy. There is also a conflict of interest in the administration itself with all of the cabinet members and politicians who are or were previously involved in the oil industry. They make decisions that are benefiting themselves or their interests and are horrific for the environment. This needs to be exposed on behalf of the American people.

— Al Sharpton, in a statement submitted to the League of Conservation Voters

### ► PUBLIC LANDS

Sharpton's position on public lands issues is not known.

### ► ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT AND REGULATORY REFORM

Reverend Sharpton opposed the nomination of Christine Todd Whitman to be administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, noting that as New Jersey's governor, Whitman failed to address racial profiling by state police and would be equally unlikely to deal with environmental justice issues. "For one to say that she should head the Environmental Protection Agency and then explain how she will then deal with environmental racism—the disproportionate

amount of toxic-waste dumps in minority communities and other things—would be irresponsible."<sup>6</sup>

At LCV's presidential forum in June 2003, Sharpton criticized the Bush administration's lack of commitment to environmental law enforcement: "I'd have an Attorney General that would enforce the law. That's something new that you haven't heard for two years."<sup>7</sup> In an interview with MoveOn.org, Sharpton said:

Strengthening and enforcing our environmental laws would be one of my top priorities. For me, the scriptural mandate that 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof' is a religious and spiritual mandate to be good stewards of what God has given the human race for sustenance, beauty and enjoyment. Protecting, preserving and sustaining it must be one of our highest priorities.<sup>8</sup>

## ► ENERGY

Sharpton has strongly criticized the Bush administration for its oil-dependent energy policy:

I think what we must do is we must not allow this administration to continue to use the bogeyman in every argument. They've used it to justify Iraq. They're using it to try and do what they are doing in the environment and to try to stop us from moving from an oil dependent economy...The fact of the matter is we should not try and act as though we have a choice in terms of moving to what is more efficient, more healthy, more life sustaining and is better for our grandchildren and their grandchildren.<sup>9</sup>

### Nuclear Issues

Sharpton's position on nuclear issues is not known.

### Fuel Economy/Energy Efficiency

At LCV's presidential forum in June 2003, Sharpton stated his support for raising fuel economy standards: "You need to clear up on oil-based economy, free ourselves. Build jobs by building hybrid vehicles and by building electric vehicles. And I think that as we raise the standards of the corporate average fuel, we should have a goal of trying to do 45 miles per gallon. We are now about—what—27 miles."<sup>10</sup>

### Oil Drilling

Sharpton's position on oil drilling issues is not known.

### Renewable Energy

In an interview with Moveon.org, Sharpton said: "Converting our economy to renewable fuels as rapidly as practical and feasible would be one of my top priorities. I believe that protecting the environment is also labor intensive. Thus, creating a clean, safe and sustainable environment would also create jobs, not cost jobs."<sup>11</sup>

## ► GLOBAL WARMING

As a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1992, Reverend Sharpton said that he favored the Earth Summit limits on emissions of greenhouse gases.<sup>12</sup> "I would also fight for the absolute cap on carbon dioxide. I would absolutely re-enter the discussions around the Kyoto Accord."<sup>13</sup>

## ► WILDLIFE

During his Senate campaign in 1992, Sharpton stated, "I support the Endangered Species Act, and I think it's criminal what we've done to endangered species. I can identify with them because I'm almost an endangered species myself."<sup>14</sup>

## ► INTERNATIONAL

### Population

Sharpton's position on international family planning issues is not known.

### Trade

Sharpton has declared strong opposition to past trade agreements and support for the inclusion of environmental issues in future trade agreements:

First of all, I'm opposed to many of the trade agreements, including NAFTA and others in the 90's. I think that for any trade agreement, though, that I would support as President or advocate in this campaign you must have a strong environmental part of the trade agreement that is enforceable. We cannot in the name of trade go against the best interests of the people of the world. We have too long allowed government to say we must sacrifice environment, sacrifice health in order to stimulate the economy, either globally or domestically. And I don't think that's a fair exchange.<sup>15</sup>

## ► RECORD ON STATE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In his race for mayor of New York in the early 1990s, Sharpton was the only candidate to publicly discuss environmental issues—speaking out on the issue of lead poisoning. He has continued to be publicly supportive of efforts to end childhood lead poisoning in New York City. However, he has not made other New York City environmental issues a priority for his organization.<sup>16</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA, 26 June 2003
- <sup>2</sup> National Public Radio, Morning Edition, 13 June 2003
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Peggy Shepard, West Harlem Environmental Action, 4 August 2003
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Sisk, "Marines Honed for Battle on Vieques Range," *New York Daily News*, 29 November 2001

- <sup>5</sup> Darren Samuelsohn, "Campaign 2004: Dems Target Bush in First Environment-Specific Debate," *Greenwire*, 27 June 2003
- <sup>6</sup> CNN, The Spin Room, 5 January 2001
- <sup>7</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA 26 June 2003
- <sup>8</sup> MoveOn.org interview, 17 June 2003
- <sup>9</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA, 26 June 2003
- <sup>10</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA, 26 June 2003
- <sup>11</sup> Moveon.org interview, 7 June 2003
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Abrams, "The New York Democratic Senate Candidates on the Issues," *New York Times*, 6 September 1992
- <sup>13</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA, 26 June 2003
- <sup>14</sup> Todd S. Purdum, "Sharpton Brings Surprises to 4-way Senate Race; As a Candidate, He's Restyled and Determined About His Political Goals and Impact," *New York Times*, 27 July 1992
- <sup>15</sup> LCV/CLCV Presidential Environmental Forum, Los Angeles, CA, 26 June 2003
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Peggy Shepard, West Harlem Environmental Action, 4 August 2003