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Gioia Lays Out Plans, But Not Dollars (Yet) for Carbon-Neutral Campaign

New Jersey landfill, upstate dairy farm to benefit from public advocate race

Dan Rivoli

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For Council Member Eric Gioia (D-Queens), in the public advocate campaign, green is all the rage—environmentally speaking, that is.

Gioia announced he was running a carbon-neutral public advocate campaign February 2008, and his campaign stresses

the changes he has made to mitigate his carbon footprint. And indeed, he has spent only \$1,444 on campaign mailing last February, saving on paper. Plus, he claims to use hybrid vehicles on the campaign trail.

But for all of his green-mindedness, only buying carbon credits will allow Gioia's campaign to achieve carbon-neutral status.

Gioia's campaign has become a client of Standard Carbon, a Washington-based company that offers businesses and political candidates ways to mitigate carbon production. Standard Carbon is one of the few, if only, places where politicians can calculate and mitigate the environmental impact of their campaigns.

The company calculates how much carbon is put into the atmosphere based on the size of the office space used, miles traveled by candidate and staff, and number of mailers sent.

"In a lot of campaigns, you work 16 hours a day and can't even figure out what a carbon footprint is," said Brendan Woodward, president and founder of Standard Carbon. "We took the time to figure it out."

From there, campaigns can buy enough credits to offset the carbon output or even have a negative impact by purchasing more than necessary.

The Gioia campaign, in a press release, noted that Standard Carbon offers a package that equates \$2 of political spending to a pound of carbon dioxide emission. Using that metric, the \$490,270 Gioia has spent so far has produced over 122 tons of carbon dioxide.

Michael Sanfilippo, director of energy services for environmental consultant of city-based Great Forest, Inc., said that while politicians and businesses are looking at carbon offsets as a quick way to reduce a carbon footprint, this can be difficult in a market that is still relatively new and unregulated.

"There's no one certification body," Sanfillipo said. "There are different calculators across the globe that vary greatly."

Despite the fluidity in the price of a carbon credit or how a footprint is calculated, the money will indeed go to a project that is designed to negate the campaign's footprint. When the transaction is complete, Standard Carbon will send a receipt to the Chicago Climate Exchange, something of a carbon offset clearing house, to eliminate the credit.

As of now Gioia has not spent any campaign money buying carbon credits. As the campaign continues, though, the plan is not just to buy carbon credits, but to have volunteers take time off from canvassing to plant trees.

And no matter what happens in September, Gioia intends to honor his pledge. Win or lose, the campaign insisted, he would put aside enough campaign cash to buy carbon credits.

Nonetheless, Woodward said Standard Carbon is already negotiating on Gioia's behalf with owners of projects in a New Jersey landfill and a New York dairy farm that would mitigate his campaign's impact on the environment.

"We went to find the best carbon offset project that would be above reproach," Woodward said. "Politicians are very self-conscious. They don't want to buy something that gives them bad press."



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