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Dem States Vote Blue, but Convention Will Go Green

In the waning moments of the 2004 Democratic National Convention, organizers teamed with businesses to recycle 1.3 tons of political signs, paper and cardboard boxes into commemorative posters for conventioners.

Environmentalists hailed the 24-hour campaign as a perfect example of what could be accomplished when the will existed.

And in the shadow of the Boston convention - the most environmentally conscious in history - conditions are ripe for Denver to go further, said Dan Ruben, executive director of the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Conventions, the group that "greened" the 2004 convention.

"What excites me about 2008 is that the mayor and the governor are on board from the beginning," he said.

Efforts to green the Aug. 25-28, 2008, gathering are already taking shape. Organizers today are expected to unveil plans to "green" the housing and communications processes.

"Our goal is to make this the greenest convention ever," said Leah Daughtry, chief executive of the 2008 convention.

Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper on Tuesday said though details are still in early planning stages, he's impressed by the level of community energy around making the convention green.

"The greatest challenge is getting everyone on the same page," he said.

Hickenlooper's commitment to the environment was strong long before the convention. His Greenprint Denver program aims to slash greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 260,000 cars in five years.

As recently as Saturday, the lanky mayor rode his trademark scooter to a free gas promotion that touted the environmental benefits of the machines.

At the 2004 convention, a hydrogen fuel cell lit up the media building in Boston. Hybrid buses shuttled conventioners to and from events. And renewable energy powered the Fleet Center.

Ruben said the goal four years ago was three-fold: green everything, publicize the efforts, leave a legacy. The latter is fulfilled by Denver's efforts, he said.

"Denver will find that there's nobody who can predict the projects that will happen because there will be a wealth of people coming forward with ideas," Ruben said.

Pepsi Center leadership is "absolutely on board" to work with the Democrats for a greener convention, said Allison Hamilton, an arena spokeswoman.

The arena recycles cardboard and paper that accumulate in its "back house" operations, as well as the grease from its food service, Hamilton said.

And conservation efforts have reduced yearly energy consumption by about 2.4 million kilowatt hours - or about 18 percent of its power use - despite added office space and a new full-service restaurant.

But it doesn't recycle cans, paper and trash that pile up during events. "These are all things that we're looking forward to exploring," Hamilton said.

Environmentalists said a primary goal of a green convention is to draw attention to innovation and environmental causes.

The landscape for environmentalism has become increasingly friendlier in the past few years, but plenty of work remains, said Bob Shatten, who volunteered for CERC and helped with the carbon-offset program.

He added that media have gotten better in their coverage of environmental issues and are largely responsible for the increased public consciousness.

Ruben said high-profile efforts by former Vice President Al Gore combined with years of chipping away by activists and citizens has pushed the environment to the forefront. And November's change in political leadership didn't hurt, either.