

Lewis Green Environmental Service Awards Party

October 14, 2018

Tom (Yusha) Sager's five minute talk

It's a great honor to be chosen to receive the Louis Green Environmental Service Award. I thank all of you, especially Katy and Beatrice.

I met Lewis Green over 20 years ago. I was looking for an attorney to defend Buehler Park, a dedicated park in Rolla, Missouri which was about to be sold to commercial interests. Everyone I asked said, get Lewis Green. This fight went on for 11 years. After Lewis's death, Great Rivers and Bruce Morrison won a landmark decision. For the first time since 1910, Missouri courts ruled that users of public property have standing in court to sue to maintain that use.

Another 11 years have passed. The city of Rolla is finally beginning to realize what a great treasure Buehler Park is. Some, I believe, are glad we prevented them from selling it.

I have been a plaintiff four times for Great Rivers, including our current suit against the State of Missouri for passing an unconstitutional law hostile to state parks. I consider it a great honor to be plaintiff on a Great Rivers suit. I have never understood why it is so difficult to find people to sue in the public interest. We should not be afraid to use the Courts. The Courts belong to the people, not the Kavanaughs.

The case that I am most proud to have been a party to is the suit against the US Army over the pollution generated by Fort Leonard Wood. I once asked Lewis if he really felt that he could beat the army. I don't recall his exact words, but he said something like, "We have a chance." Lewis understood that polluters must be challenged. No one, no matter how powerful, should get a pass to pollute.

It's difficult to sue the military. They have virtually unlimited resources. Their base budget now approaches 700 billion dollars; but including supplementary appropriations, the CIA, and the military parts of the Departments of Energy and Homeland Security, it is considerably more.

Besides having a virtually unlimited budget, The US military is almost certainly the worlds largest user of fossil fuels and the worlds greatest emitter of greenhouse gases. I say almost certainly, because the military has never submitted to an independent audit and so much of what it does is outside the public view.

And the US military is only one of the world's many militaries; although it is by far the largest and accounts for 35% of the more than 1.7 trillion dollars the world spends each year on war. And this number is growing as the world becomes more and more unstable and chaotic.

Imagine, if this 1.7 trillion dollars were used to improve our environment. Imagine, if all the research on military weaponry was redirected toward our environment. We could clean up the Earth. We could generate renewable energy for every person on Earth. We could reverse global warming. There's virtually no limit to what we could do. This is why I join with Katherine Ball in saying, "The most eco-friendly thing you can do is be anti-war."

So now we have a choice. We can continue to fight against each other while the Earth becomes less and less habitable. Or we can pull together, all 7.5 billion of us. Not just those of us who live in wealthy countries like the United States and China, but all of us, from Afghanistan to Palestine to Zimbabwe, all of us. Working together we can reverse the downward spiral. We can transform the Earth into a paradise for all 7.5 billion of us. The choice is ours.

Thank you again for this great honor. Thank you for coming to the Lewis Green environmental service awards party.

###