



U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's *Rhode Island Energy, Environment and Oceans Leaders Day*
July 20, 2018

Young people were inspired and energized at **U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's *Rhode Island Energy, Environment and Oceans Leaders Day***. The Stone Soup Leadership Institute was invited to bring youth leaders: **Lya Perez, Alex Curran, Nathan Cruz** and team: **Brittany Fulgione, Namgyal Gyaltschen** and **Marianne Larned**. This 9th annual event celebrates the progress of local leaders and national experts explore actionable ideas for the coming year.



Welcome remarks from **U.S. Senators Whitehouse, Jack Reed and Governor Gina Raimondo** led to announcements about progress: The Carbon Utilization Bill, Marine Debris Bill, Nuclear R&D Bill. Governor Raimondo announced her Resilient Rhody and goal of 1000mw clean energy by 2020. **"It is going to happen. Today, we are well on our way!"**



Alex Curran, one of Rhode Island youth, was especially intrigued by Governor Raimondo's Executive Order to move away from Single Use Plastics with community level actions.

Namgyal Gyaltschen, Brown University Economics graduate was interested in Treasurer Seth Magaziner comments on the social environmental responsibility of corporations and the role of the RI Infrastructure Bank as a central hub for green infrastructure financing initiatives. *"Treasurer Magaziner's emphasis on the financial repercussions of climate change is important. The disconnect between the sustainability field and the financial industry is alarming. I was impressed to learn about how Rhode Island is bridging this gap"*



Nathan Cruz was fascinated with how Kate Orff's landscape architecture and urban design company, SCAPE is creating positive change in communities by combining regenerative living infrastructure and new forms of public space. The labyrinth of tunnels is designed to protect New York City's waterfront from rising sea levels and coastal erosion.



Brittany Fulgione, Roger Williams University Environmental Science Departments graduate was thrilled to meet one of her idols, Dr. Michael E. Mann and hear first-hand account of the systemic fake news of climate deniers and his humorous, tongue-in-cheek testimony of attacks through his book, “Madhouse Effect.” She was proud that Dennis Nixon, RWU’s Professor of Marine Affairs and the director of the Rhode Island Sea Grant Program received Service Recognition Award.

During lunch, youth shared their enthusiasm about the conference. *“It looked as though Senator Whitehouse was looking right at me!”* said Alex. They also talked how they were excited to share their newfound knowledge with their communities. During the **Institute’s 14th Youth Leadership Summit for Sustainable Development**, youth envisioned Sustainability-In-Action projects for their communities. Inspired by their Summit experience with **Clean Ocean Access**, youth wanted to clean up their community. Just in July they’ve held 3 events, cleaning up and recycling trash.

Nathan Cruz shared his vision with his employers too. He’s even begun envisioning a whole recycling system. Under this plan, each family would receive a recycling bin and there would be a fine if these weren’t used.

He also talked to his employers at K-Mart and got his supervisor to offer a recycling drive and provide reusable bags. He’s excited to work with his team to engage everyone - from young children, to political leaders in the community. These weekly clean ups had already inspired local 6-year-old youth to pitch in. Nate was happy that he was helping to educate the younger children not to litter and pick up trash.

Other speakers included **Alaska U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski**. The Senator started off with the differences between Alaska and Rhode Island, then emphasized: we were connected and brought together by the ocean. *“We need to address these issues together. There needs to be shared responsibility.”* **Barry Gold** spoke of the **Walton Family Foundation’s Environment Program** to restore the health of ocean and freshwater ecosystems by promoting sustainable fishing, *“fishing with a future”*. *“We need more champions for our oceans.”*



Afternoon session on **“Powering Forward: A Renewable Future”** with Jamie Dickerson, Northeast Clean Energy Council, Chris Kearns, RI Office of Energy Resources, Erika Niedowski, Acadia Center, Paul Murphy, Deepwater Wind, Sheila Dormody, The Nature Conservancy moderator. Block Island’s offshore wind project. Rhode Island’s progress towards realizing the 2030 electrification goals. *“I was fascinated to learn RIFTA will begin this fall,”* said Alex. *“I hadn’t realized it would start so soon!”*



RI Congressman David Cicilline emphasized the importance of responsible environmental stewardship. ***“We don’t shrug our shoulders. We gauge the issue and challenge them head on.”***

Young people were more inspired! Shyly at first, then more confidently, they proudly took photos with their new sustainability champions. It was a fantastic experience and opportunity for the youth to understand the different ways they could be involved with the environmental movement. ***“This was really eye-opening and something that I would like to take and share with other people”***, said Lya Perez.

Alex Curran agreed with her sentiment,

“I knew Rhode Island was a leader in sustainability but I hadn’t realized the extent to which they were working towards their goals. A lot of these resources and proposals aren’t very well advertised!”



To celebrate, we dined at Jacky's Waterside. *It was great to join my peers at dinner to hear of their great day at Senator Whitehouse event. They were full of great stories! Alaska U.S. Senator Murkowski stood out for me. I learned how climate change was really affecting people's lives. It is destroying their homes, and it was hurting their businesses and economy. This got me thinking about what could happen to our communities. Rhode Island is a small state by the ocean. We go to the beach. We fish. We sail. We do so much with the resources around us. I'm worried about the rising sea levels and how many families and communities it will affect. Rising water level eat away at the land, little by little. It also got me thinking about what we could do in Rhode Island to help other states with these potential problems. Climate change is real. It kills animals, makes our earth hotter, drains our planets of its beauty. We need to take a stand against it so we can save our planet. It's not only one person's problem, it's everyone's problem. It doesn't matter where you are or how old you are, we can all do something. We can vote for people who believe can help make changes and believes changes can be made. Even if you can't vote yet, you can petition for cleaner energy alternatives for your area. We can do this if we all come together. We can turn it around. It will take some time but we can do it. Our bright future depends upon us all.*

**Eltonya Higgins
Highlander Charter School**



Lya Perez, Highlander Charter School

It was an honor to be invited to be a youth representative at this event. U.S. Senators Whitehouse and Murkowski are two of the many people who inspired me. They realized the planet's challenges have to be solved in order to save it for the next generations, especially decreasing the plastic our waters. It is an eye-opening journey for many people that want to help our community and the environment. The big projects that I learned about had my jaw dropped! I didn't realize we had such a strong committed team in Rhode Island to really make changes in peoples' lives and to save our island state. Spending this day with these leaders who care enough to protect our future really made me respect these dedicated people who work on a day-to-day basis in their lives. You guys are very well appreciated - Trust me! As a high school junior, I want to be a Pediatrician and study medicine. I joined the Student Council to be a leader of my school. Although my future career doesn't involve climate change, cleaning beaches, and oceans, I realize all young people have to have the knowledge and take action now before it's too late. I learned many things I never knew before. Climate change affects fishing industries. Alaskans depend on fishermen to provide their food. Not only does climate change affect our food sources, the summers get

hotter because of heat waves and fossil fuels destroy our planet's ozone layers. Climate change melts icebergs and causes wildfires. Climate change is also very expensive. Climate change is something to be alarmed about because it affects many areas. Everyone wants their homes and family safe.



At the Institute's Youth Leadership Summit for Sustainable Development at Roger Williams University in Bristol, I was inspired me to help my community and environment. Young people can really make a change in the world. I'm sure there are many hands among Rhode Island youth who are willing to get their hands dirty. I will inspire my friends to help me to do beach clean ups and clean our streets on Earth Day. This summer I want to volunteer in different organizations and businesses to lend an extra hand to the committed people helping and making a change. As a team we need to get rid of single use plastic to keep our water source clean and prevent sea life from death or poisoning. I really want to thank everyone for this new experience and opportunity. This is something that will never forgotten and fun to tell others. It makes want to do better and be part of something that is life changing. I hope you can have us young people again at future events. I am really interested in learning more. My mind is blown as to what the future holds for us and all the improvements being done in today to ensure a better world. Thank you.

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.soup4worldinstitute.com