

Recommendation for John Black

I strongly recommend John Black for the Rhodes Scholarship. Though I have known John most of his life, I have much better reasons than affection for writing you this letter. John should go to Oxford because he will someday play a key role in solving one of Earth's most vexing problems, and Oxford is an ideal place at which to integrate several disciplines John must master in order to fulfill the daunting mission he has embraced.

The problem John will help solve is "sustainability." While this term is excessively used today, it is sadly the case that we are struggling mightily to find out what it means in actual practices. I know this through my involvement in a major sustainable forestry initiative in South America. The project features unprecedented measures to ensure protection of forest ecosystems, open process, continuous independent monitoring, local value-added manufacturing, living wage jobs for workers and adaptive management over time. Still, environmental radicals are waging a jihad against it, mainstream environmental NGOs remain privately encouraging but publicly skeptical, industry is miffed that we may effectively raise "best practices" standards higher, government is skittish, and the press plays each string of controversy loudly while doing precious little to educate an unformed public concerning the ways in which complex environmental, social and economic interests must be balanced in any development project.

From our company's sustainable forestry venture in South America I derive the following diagnosis and prescription. Formidable structures, vested interests and paralyzing habits of thought all oppose desperately-needed new solutions to the development/environment dialectic of our time. A paradigm-breaking synthesis must be found. Yet too many leaders of my generation remain dug in on both sides of the current tired and hopeless debate. We need a new generation to find undiscovered solutions to seemingly intractable problems. This is where John fits in.

John epitomizes that generation of hoped-for emerging leaders who will be freer, more focused, and better-trained than their predecessors to get this make-it-or-break-it job done. He is exceedingly bright, articulate and strong. At the same time, he displays a sensitivity to the interests of others and a gentleness that does not often accompany the previously-mentioned traits. John is both honest and hard-working, two virtues not in vogue but vastly underrated. He is also unconventional in his thinking, yet not reflexively hostile to the rules we all put in place to just keep traffic moving.

While all this is important for the Rhodes Scholarship Committee to know, the thing truly distinguishing John from his peers is the young man's stunning progress in already weaving three stands of understanding together to set the stage for the forging of new strategies to protect natural systems *and* improve human existence on earth. First, John has the persistent disciplined

curiosity of a scientist noticing all wrinkles while still searching for the patterns and links that tie our natural world together. With equal enthusiasm he delves into abstractions, because he knows ideas powerfully influence human affairs, which in turn generate disproportionate impacts--either for good or for ill--on surrounding nature. Finally, he studies economics which, though known as a dismal science, can be worked as a powerful lever in the hands of anyone determined, as John is, to translate science and philosophy into positive global change.

I don't know when John first acquired his vision of finding ways to simultaneously produce both economic development and a cleaner, safer environment, It clearly pre-dates two internships at this company, since John custom-tailored the internships to aid him in his quest. During the first, nearly two years ago now, John worked with scientists in faraway Tierra del Fuego, Chile, conducting field research for the global EIS on the South American forestry project I already mentioned in this letter. Then last year he arranged a stint in our corporate offices to complement his field experience, investigating the hard-core economics of our sustainable forestry venture. We believe he learned in our midst what few ecologists every grasp—finding avenues for global capital to earn a fair return in truly sustainable economies than all the academic papers and regulatory policies ever to be written.

John displayed an uncanny maturity in both these internships, indicating uncommon progress for a man his age. Time spent cleaning latrines in Ecuador taught John about the cost of development's absence, an insight altogether missing from the heads of too many prosperous North Americans who wish to save nature. John also witnessed hostile reactions within the environmental community when his father accepted the role of "Land Steward" for the project. His father's decision hinged upon his conclusion that ensuring sustainable management of lenga forests made more sense than practicing politically-correct solidarity with the hopeless cause of strict preservation of the trees. Experiences like this have made John far wiser than most fellows his age.

For this very reason, I've sometimes wondered whether John got enough of a turn at carefree childhood. Yet there is a joyfulness in his life which only exists in those whose childhood reached full bloom and survives. This is not a minor point. One paralytic aspect of my generation is that we simply take ourselves far too seriously. John's ability to laugh allows him to shirk off obstacles, both around and within, and will help lift his thinking over the dialectic he's chosen to address.

Kierkegaard said "Life must be understood backwards, but lived forwards." John Black seems already to understand much of what accumulated learning there is on the relationship between the environment and economic development. Now he is searching for a place to "live forwards," which for him involves synthesizing new policy structures and practical economic models to

achieve a declared concrete target--environmentally sustainable development. As I recall from my own days as an applicant twenty-four years ago, this is just the kind of goal--and John is just the kind of person—the Rhodes Scholarship is meant to advance. It is in our interest that John be given the best possible opportunity to complete his mission. Two years at Oxford will help him on his way.