

Smokey the Bear Joins Clinton Administration

Most bears hibernate in the winter. Smokey the Bear, longtime mascot and symbol of the U.S. Forest Service, likes to go south from the depressing seriousness of Washington, D.C., to the deep delta country to meet with "Teddy" cousins, the Louisiana black bears, and to hang out on St. Charles Avenue during the New Orleans Mardi Gras. There, Smokey can scramble for beads thrown from the floats, swig Dixie beer, and no one knows that he is THE Smokey the Bear: on Mardi Gras everyone assumes Smokey is someone costumed as Smokey. As usual, Smokey gave an impromptu interview to a Delta Sierran reporter.

Delta Sierran: Smokey! Good to see you again. I almost didn't recognize you without your usual 1918 campaign hat.

Smokey the Bear: That headgear is passé in Washington. Too old-fashioned, militaristic. After Bill Clinton got elected, the folks on the transition team told me that the hat had to go if I wanted a job after January 20, 1993. By the way, how do you like my headband? (bowing head to display ribbon across the top)

DS: What?! You're dressing like Mrs. Clinton?! What has Smokey the Bear come to?!

STB: That's Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, friend. And don't call me Smokey the Bear anymore. I might lose my job.

DS: What are you talking about? What's going on in the Clintons' Washington?

STB: If you please, from now on refer to me as "Smokey La Osa." Being male and anglo doesn't cut it. If I was to keep on representing the Forest Service, I had to be a Hispanic female. In case your Spanish is rusty, amigo, "La Osa" is the feminine form of "The Bear," a surname of some of us who trace our ancestors back to Spain.

DS: This is amazing. For over forty years Smokey the Bear, with his campaign hat and blue work pants, has been telling Americans about forest fires, the value of forests, planting trees, et cetera. Now you're pandering to the politically correct-

ethnic diversity ideologies. Just who do you think is going to be inspired by "Smokey La Osa," the head-banded bear broad, to be careful with fire in the woods? The only thing you inspire me to do right now is to throw you into a forest fire.

STB: Cool off, cap. And don't call me a panda. I'm a 100 percent American bear, just trying to keep my job. I didn't hire any illegal aliens as domestic servants — unlike my distant relative, Zoe the Bair-d — and I've paid all the social security taxes I owed. Look, I've got enough to do without listening to your criticism. After Mardi Gras I'm heading out west to grapple with the wise guys of the "wise use" movement.

DS: You speak of the anti-environmental movement led by the notorious, infamous former Secretary of the Interior, James Watt?

STB: That's it. They're the ones who say "wise use" of the national forests means government subsidies for the timber and mining industries and that "environmental protection" means protecting their commercial interests from harassment by environmental groups. If you listen to these characters long enough, you'll hear them say that birdwatchers and hikers are pagans or devil-worshippers or communists or worse.

DS: And you're going to talk to these people wearing that headband and calling yourself "Smokey La Osa"? If they believe you while you're in your ethnic diversity mode, you can get rich selling snow to the eskimos.

STB: Yeah, maybe I should get my old hat and blue dungarees back on. But speaking of credibility problems, I'm running a whispering campaign out west to put ex-secretary Watt in a very defensive position with his supporters: the word is being spread that he and J. Edgar Hoover used to be very close friends.

DS: Smokey, you're a terrorist.

STB: Adios, Amigo.

— Earl Higgins



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