

## Greening Hollywood: How the Entertainment Industry Promotes Environmentalism

By Joseph A. D'Agostino

*Summary: Groups like the non-profit Environmental Media Association (EMA) are urging Hollywood producers and screenwriters to insert discreet environmentalist messages into popular movies and TV shows. It's called 'eco-messaging'—soft-core ideological product placement—and it's Hollywood's latest marketing tool to drive home the left's global warming agenda.*

The most casual filmgoer or network TV viewer is surely aware that Hollywood bombards the public with environmentalist messages. But does the public know how much careful planning goes into the process? Since 1989, the Environmental Media Association (EMA) has tried to make sure that Hollywood screenwriters, producers and directors engage in what is now called 'eco-messaging.' It's not by accident that films and television have environmentalist storylines. Los Angeles-based EMA and other eco-messaging outfits work with the entertainment industry, identifying the issues it should cover and the positions it should take. EMA representatives offer suggestions on story content and hover over script revisions. Says Oscar and Emmy winner Al Gore of EMA, "I greatly admire the work of this organization. No group has had a larger impact on the thinking Americans bring to the environment, on the way we, as a nation, converse with the problems that beset the environment."

"I am a phone call away from everybody," says EMA president Debbie Levin. Levin notes that plenty of big studio executives and stars are associated with her organization.



**Greens harnessing the power of celebrity: EMA president Debbie Levin (left) with Adam Levine (right) of the band, Maroon 5, at the Environmental Media Awards in Los Angeles in November 2006.**

"Most television networks are represented on our board. We have a very powerful board." EMA is no research group waiting passively for information requests from filmmakers and TV producers. Instead, it makes a conscious effort to embed green propaganda in major studio productions.

"I will literally go out and pitch storylines all year long," Levin says. EMA's website boasts, "We regularly network with writ-

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ers, directors and producers, helping shape plotlines that seamlessly incorporate environmental messages... EMA's network of environmentally-conscious celebrities, tastemakers, not-for-profit organizations and corporations continues to be one of our greatest assets."

"We helped launch the Toyota Prius," Levin brags. "We've gotten hybrids on screen in hundreds of films." Recent productions on which EMA has done major work include *The Simpsons* movie as well as the TV series "The Simpsons," "Boston Legal," and "Bones." "I'm on the advisory board of the Sundance Channel and Planet Green," says Levin.

A Los Angeles Times profile (September 2, 2007) characterizes Levin as "the lighter, more comfortable shade of green." Levin believes putting "celebrities together with stuff" promotes the cause. "I'm a big proponent of changing the world through shopping," she told the newspaper. "I remember when I started eight years ago, I thought, 'This is an elitist thing. How can you promote organic food when nobody can afford to buy it?' Now it's in Wal-Mart. It's in Target. It's everywhere. That wasn't happening before."

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## Organization Trends

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## Issue Advocacy in the Movies

Advocacy moviemaking is not new. Ideologically-motivated activists of all stripes have always tried to come up with ways to influence the content of Hollywood-produced mass entertainment. Sometimes they do it by protesting films and boycotting their sponsors. But it's much more effective to influence the content of movies and television shows from within the industry.

Ironically, social conservatives were first to learn this lesson. In the 1930s the burgeoning movie industry was attacked by church groups for film immorality and faced a variety of legal challenges from state censorship boards. The major film studios reacted by devising a single moral code for film production, successfully preempting the threat of political censorship: They adopted what was officially known as the United States Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (also known as the Hays Code, after the first president of the Motion Picture Association). The code banned obscenity, sexually explicit scenes, graphic violence, and the flattering portrayal of evil characters in movies. Ridicule of religion was outlawed as was the depiction of clergymen as comic characters or villains. In general, the Hays Code sought to prevent the production of any commercial film that would "lower the moral standards of those who see it." Hollywood was able to secure voluntary compliance until the 1960s, when the studios and independent producers began to ignore it, and it was replaced in 1968 by an age-related ratings system.

The left also believed boring from within was the best way to influence Hollywood productions. During World War II, Communists and their fellow travelers began producing admiring depictions of the Soviet Union, America's wartime ally. In 1943 Hollywood produced *North Star* featuring an Oscar-nominated Lillian Hellman screenplay, which never mentioned the Soviet Union or Communism as it depicted brave Ukrainian peasants resisting Nazi invaders. The same year there was also *Mission to Moscow* in which an American ambassador's eyes are opened when he discovers that Stalin's purges are really meant to rid the USSR of pro-Nazi elements. In recent decades Hollywood has been awash in left-wing message movies like *Norma Rae* (1979), an ode to labor organizing, industry-as-corrupt-polluter films like *Silkwood* (1983) and *Erin Brockovich* (2000) and the films of

Michael Moore: *Roger and Me* (1989) against corporations, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) against Bush administration foreign policies, and *Sicko* (2007) against private sector health care.

Liberal philanthropists like George Soros are well aware of the power of cinema. "Non-fiction film can spur awareness and action, sometimes touching audiences beyond the reach of other methods," observes Soros's former lieutenant Gara LaMarche. Movies "teach us about the world, what is happening to our fellow travelers on the globe—what is happening to us—and what we might do about it," said LaMarche, who left OSI in April 2007 to head the Atlantic Philanthropies. For more than a decade, Soros's Open Society Institute has been underwriting "social justice" documentaries to win converts to liberalism. In 2001, Soros joined forces with actor-director Robert Redford, allowing Redford's Sundance Institute to take over his Soros Documentary Fund. (See "George Soros, Movie Mogul: 'Social Justice' Cinema and the Sundance Institute," by Rondi Adamson, *Foundation Watch*, March 2008)

Or consider the political messaging of Participant Productions, whose motto is "changing the world, one story at a time." Founded in 2004 by former eBay president Jeffrey Skoll, the company is expanding and has changed its name to Participant Media. In 2005, Participant produced the Oscar-nominated films *North Country* (on sexual harassment), *Syriana* (the politics of oil), and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (on journalist Edward R. Murrow's fight against Red-hunting U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy). In 2006 Participant produced *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's film on global warming, and in 2007, *Charlie Wilson's War*, on the origins of American aid to Afghan Muslim fighters who would turn against the U.S. (For more on the company, see "Audience Participation: The Activism of Jeffrey Skoll's Participant Productions," by Joseph de Feo, *Foundation Watch*, March 2006.)

## When Celebrities Attack

"We provide accurate information when stories deal with environmental issues, and we encourage writers to address this subject whenever possible—but never at the expense of story, character, or the entertainment value of the episode. . . . [I]f the audience isn't entertained, they won't stay around for any message." That's the rationale for the Environmental Media

Association as explained by its co-founder, leftist TV producer Norman Lear.

EMA's Debbie Levin says her group mainly tries to promote incremental lifestyle changes. For instance, EMA's Green Guidelines list waste- and pollution-reducing tips that can be introduced in film and TV story lines. Those helpful suggestions include "Come back from grocery shopping carrying a canvas bag," "turn off lights when leaving the room," "donate old household items to charities, shelters, schools etc.," and "eat with and drink from reusable kitchenware and mugs (no disposable paper, plastic, or styrofoam)." Eco-friendly props include having characters wear t-shirts with environmental slogans and showing blue and green recycling bins on a set depicting a kitchen or yard. Other tips are more questionable. EMA urges screenwriters and producers to create characters who "buy organic food and other products from farmers markets or health food stores" and "employ electric or hybrid cars" as if cost is no consideration for a typical viewer.

EMA hosts annual awards programs to honor productions and highlight celebrities who promote its message. Recent honorees included the animated children's film *Happy Feet* (where a little penguin discovers the dangers of over-fishing) and the Fox television network comedy "My Name is Earl" (in which Earl becomes environmentally conscious after he steals an air-conditioner). The EMA Green Seal Awards honor ad agencies, talent scouts, and production companies like Participant Media that go green 'behind the scenes.' And EMA gets the attention of agents and managers by promising to publicize young celebrities like Mary-Kate Olsen, Gwyneth Paltrow and Cameron Diaz who agree to send green messages to the impressionable youth market.

EMA president Debbie Levin observes that Norman Lear has a long track record of "getting social messages into programming in an entertaining way and [he thought] we can do this with the environment, too." Lear and his second wife Lyn co-founded EMA in 1989 along with Warner Brothers Entertainment president Alan Horn and his wife Cindy. Lear is the creative force behind such TV comedies as "All in the Family" and the activist organization People for the American Way, which spearheads liberal opposition to conservative judicial nominees. He is also a member of the

Democracy Alliance, the George Soros-led consortium of wealthy liberal donors that aims to create a permanent political infrastructure of nonprofit think tanks, media outlets and leadership schools. (For more on the group, see "Billionaires for Big Government: What's Next for George Soros's Democracy Alliance?" by Matthew Vadum and James Dellinger, *Foundation Watch*, January 2008.) In 1987 EMA co-founder Alan Horn joined activist/

Council (2007 budget: \$75 million), whose vice chairman is Al Horn, announced that it would work closely with Horn's Warner Brothers studio. The groups say they will tackle such issues as reducing beach pollution and promoting food based-biofuels (even though the evidence suggests biofuels cause food shortages and raise food prices worldwide). NRDC's far-reaching literature offers energy-saving tips way while also demanding



**Actresses Rosario Dawson (left) and Heather Graham (right) appear in an EMA campaign encouraging cell phone recycling.**

director Rob Reiner and others in starting Castle Rock Entertainment, which produced films and the "Seinfeld" TV comedy series. Horn later became CEO of Warner Brothers, which has produced even more immensely profitable movies, including the five "Harry Potter" films.

EMA's board of directors includes both little-known Hollywood insiders and popular performers such as pop singer Lance Bass, actor Pierce Brosnan, actresses Laura Dern and Daryl Hannah, and media mogul Ted Turner. EMA's total revenue in 2006 was a modest \$1,173,778. Institutional donors include the BP Foundation (\$150,000 in 2004), Lear Family Foundation (\$145,000 from 1999 through 2001), David Family Foundation (\$100,000 in 2006), Horn Foundation (\$100,000 from 2000 through 2005) and the (Ted) Turner Foundation Inc. (\$55,000 from 2000 through 2005).

Recently, the Natural Resources Defense

that the U.S. remove its nuclear missiles from Europe.

### **Rupert Murdoch, Global Warming Alarmist**

If it seems odd that a strident liberal like Norman Lear endorses EMA's soft-sell approach to environmentalism, then odder still is the media company most alarmed by global warming: News Corporation, controlled by Rupert Murdoch. Liberal commentators and media critics usually describe Murdoch and his Fox News Channel as conservative, but do they know that News Corp. has a company-wide goal of becoming "carbon-neutral" by 2010?

"Almost two years ago, we set out to tackle the climate problem," says Hugh Strange, News Corp.'s director of energy initiatives. The company would go green. "We aim to significantly transform our business practices in order to significantly reduce our energy use and carbon emissions," says News Corp.'s

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website. “Each News Corp. business unit is on the path to achieving carbon neutrality, net zero carbon emissions.” The company openly proclaims its intent to saturate its viewers with green propaganda, pushing not only fairly uncontroversial goals such as energy conservation and pollution reduction, but also the scientifically dubious theory of global warming. News Corp. promises to “engage our employees, our business partners and our audiences on the issues of energy use and climate change.”

News Corp. even promotes “carbon-neutral” DVDs. “We at Futurama, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment are committed to reducing our impact on climate change,” the company says. “We have set the target to make *The Beast With a Billion Backs* the company’s second-ever carbon-neutral DVD release.” (The first was *Futurama: Bender’s Big Score*.) To make DVDs carbon neutral, News Corp. says it has come up with ways to measure how much greenhouse gas is emitted when it produces DVDs. The measure includes the carbon produced by executives’ air travel and lighting in staff offices as well as the actual manufacturing of DVDs. Then News Corp. claims to compensate for the carbon emissions by introducing energy efficiencies, including increased recycling and switching to renewable energy sources.

Besides changing light bulbs and recycling wastepaper, News Corp. is committed to green messaging to end global warming. “Media companies... can have the biggest impact with our shows,” said Strange.

For the past year, News Corp.’s Fox Entertainment division has injected global warming alarms into its creative process. “We’ve acted as a liaison between some of those guys and our shows at Fox,” said Strange. “We’ve had meetings with each one of our creative teams at Fox to brainstorm. How can we connect with our audience in a way that isn’t preachy?” Strange says Fox has had two rounds of meetings where it tells its creative teams to consider how green content can be “integrated into your usual decision-making process.”

Strange mentions *The Simpsons* and *Ice Age 2: The Meltdown* as recent Fox films with big environmentalist themes. He also cites light-hearted TV moments such as the “My Name is

Earl” episode in which a character leaves open a refrigerator door in order to cool the earth, and the “Family Guy” episode in which “Brian the dog trots around in a hybrid.... Once the character Stewie puts a can in the garbage and waits to see if Brian takes it out and puts it into the right container.” Fox’s hit television show “24” typically combats terrorists, not global warming, but it boasts that it is the first fully green production in the industry, “one of the only shows that is fully green from a production standpoint,” said Kristen Banach, director of Fox corporate communications.

News Corp. consults with Harvard earth and planetary sciences professor Dan Schrag, director of Harvard’s Center for the Environment and a global warming alarmist.

“In my earth science courses, I teach that burning fossil fuel is raising atmospheric carbon dioxide to levels not seen on Earth for more than 30 million years. In public lectures, I show pictures of what would happen to Florida and the Gulf Coast if half the Greenland Ice Sheet melted, asking people to imagine abandoning New Orleans and Miami. I tell people that, unless we take action to reduce emissions, the question is not whether this is going to occur, but when,” Schrag wrote in a December 17, 2006, Boston Globe op-ed.

Myron Ebell, director of energy and global warming policy at the Washington, D.C.-based Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), is not impressed. “His rhetoric is extremely loose and wild,” says Ebell. “His position is that it is irresponsible to put any carbon dioxide into the atmosphere because it’s an experiment that we don’t know the outcome of. He doesn’t talk in a scientific way.”

But that doesn’t stop News Corp. which knows a good story line: “We believe many other environmental issues are related to climate change,” Strange says. “Our approach to the climate problem is, regardless of where you think the science on climate change is going, it’s good business.... There are cost savings and maybe some PR value for adopting solar panels and other technologies.”

News Corp. also knows the importance of appearing earnest. Several years ago Hollywood was stung by a study conducted by UCLA professors Richard Turco and Charles Corbett that labeled the entertainment business the second-biggest polluter in California. That

kind of stinging criticism prompted a defensive reaction from Hollywood, and groups like EMA have rushed forward to defend the industry. “That’s changing,” says EMA’s Levin. “I think that it’s a huge business and people don’t realize that it is a business. Every studio has an environmental division now. They are making a huge effort to change.”

In many respects green activists in Hollywood have taken their cues from anti-smoking activists who successfully bent Hollywood to their will. Anti-tobacco groups reasoned that showing smoking on the big screen encourages smoking, and they got the studios to comply with their demands.

Since 2004, News Corporation’s 20th Century Fox Film division has forbidden the depiction of a principal character smoking in a G, PG, or PG-13 movie set in the present day unless the studio’s production head agrees to a waiver. Universal Pictures likewise bans virtually all “smoking incidents” in its youth-rated films. The Walt Disney Company will ban smoking in Disney-branded movies and it is pushing its Miramax and Touchstone units to do the same in youth-rated movies. Sony Pictures Entertainment says it discourages showing tobacco in its films—although it allowed tobacco use in all three of its PG-13 rated *Spider-Man* movies (New York Times, October 1, 2007). Time Warner “strongly discourages” smoking in youth films by its Warner Brothers and New Line units.

## Hurray for Hypocrisy

Drew Tidwell, a producer for CEI Studios, the video production division of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, faults the Hollywood studios for their “hypocritical” promotion of green messages. Tidwell worked as a production coordinator on *I Am Legend* (starring Will Smith), “CSI: Special Victims Unit,” and *Eagle Eye* (starring Shia LaBeouf). He was well-placed to observe the environmental practices of the major studios (“Anything you don’t see on the screen, I worked on,” he says), and he concludes that they have a long way to go to correct their wasteful production practices.

Tidwell notes that producers will order an SUV to arrive on the set an hour early and have it sit idling the entire time. “The amount of cases and cases of paper we use is insane... The food waste is out of hand,” Tidwell reports. And “they will build big, beautiful sets using an godly amount of lumber. At the end of

the shoot, right into the trash.” Recycling sets is too difficult and costly, he says.

Tidwell’s eyewitness account echoes media reports of studio production excesses and the lavish lifestyles of producers and stars who spout green slogans. “It’s the Al Gore syndrome,” says Tidwell, referring to the former vice president’s penchant for lecturing others on the need to reduce carbon emissions while he lives in a large house that uses several times the energy of the average American home and travels the world by private jet.

Like Gore, NRDC board member Laurie David, a TV producer and the estranged wife of comedian Larry David, is famous for sending mixed signals: She drives a Prius but flies in private aircraft and lives in a large house. “My philosophy about this stuff is, it’s not all or nothing,” she told Grist in June 2004 interview. When the Grist interviewer noted that driving a Prius did not make up for the house and other accoutrements, she replied, “Everybody has to strike their own balance between how they want to live and how they can reduce their impact.”

“Laurie’s not involved with our organization,” EMA’s Levin carefully notes. Levin observes that Hollywood is always less than eager to abide by its own green messages, and she admits that EMA was slow to advise studios on green production techniques. Until five years ago, it mainly advised studio productions to depict recycling, not practice it. Now EMA is pushing the studios to look at themselves.

“OK, it’s been nearly 20 years of EMA working with the entertainment industry to scream (I mean message) environmental content within TV, film and music,” Levin wrote in the Summer 2008 issue of *Green Light*, EMA’s newsletter. “For the last 5 years, with the EMA Green Seal, we’ve been greening behind the scenes as well. All the while, working in the same old office space since 1995! So...when our lease was up, the hunt began to find the perfect space that we could build out ‘green.’ And we found it. Almost 20 years later, with green on everyone’s mind, we’re thrilled to be working in a showcase of sustainable design!”

Reel Green Productions is another organization pushing to “green” studio production practices.

Founder Lauren Selman, founder of the

one-year-old for-profit startup, expects eco-messaging in Hollywood productions will inevitably increase because green behavior is “sexy and cool.” Green messaging will “transform and become the norm at this point,” she says. “Characters will live the lifestyle.” But will the studios? Selman’s firm helps studios overcome the poor environmental practices that plague Hollywood. “Yes, sometimes they will portray a character driving a Prius in the film,” she admits, but the production will “have seven diesel trucks running on set.”

EMA board member and veteran actor Ed Begley, Jr. also hopes Hollywood will practice what it preaches. “It is a business that was built upon excess, built upon the notion of the lavish lifestyle, and it is hard to change that overnight...,” he told Hollywood Reporter. “I am very proud of what many of them have done.”

But Begley also rejects Hollywood hypocrisy: “If you’re going to drive around in a big ol’ Hummer and then buy carbon offsets to mitigate that, that’s like getting drunk on the weekends and throwing some money through the window of an AA meeting and thinking you’re doing something.”

### Will Hollywood Ever Get It Right?

CEI’s Myron Ebell recalls, “CEI in the late ’90s got a grant to make inroads into Hollywood.” A staff member was hired to develop contacts in Hollywood who might be interested in promoting an understanding of how a free market can serve the environment while at the same time allowing Hollywood to profitably make movies. Ebell said the project went nowhere and was halted after a year. It was an uphill battle that would have required years of effort and great expense.

A few entertainment production companies are skeptical of environmentalist dogma. “South Park,” the animated television program created by the libertarian duo Matt Stone and Trey Parker, regularly lambastes politically correct shibboleths, including those of the green movement. The libertarians “Penn & Teller” who have a Las Vegas stage show, movie, television and book projects, are also informed critics of environmentalism. They even had CEI’s Ebell and property rights advocate R. J. Smith on their show.

Michael Crichton’s anti-environmentalist

novel *State of Fear* could be made into a major film. “He told me six months ago that he thinks it will take two to three years before the money is raised,” Ebell says. “He’s looking for investors.”

Ebell believes heavy-handed green messaging can’t work. Reviewing the 2004 film *The Day After Tomorrow*, which imagined a frozen Earth caused by global warming, Ebell scoffs, “That movie was ridiculous and didn’t help their cause. I think most people are good at filtering out political messages in entertainment. [Green messaging] will have an impact, but not as much as they want.”

One movie that did have a big impact, due to excellent timing, was *The China Syndrome*, which was about a nuclear disaster and was released just before the accident at Three Mile Island. “I think that had a tremendous impact,” Ebell says. “I think it stopped the nuclear industry in its tracks.”

Still, if promoting an environmentalist message makes Hollywood celebrities seem “sexy and cool,” especially to the young, then expect Tinseltown to continue to parrot the party line. But if the entertainment industry truly aims to convert its audience to environmentally responsible behavior it would do well to set a better example and clean up its own act.

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Terrence Scanlon  
President

# Briefly Noted

The radical left-wing 'community organizer' group **ACORN**, which community organizer **Al Sharpton** has praised for its "cutting edge" voter registration techniques, is doing all it can to steal the presidential election in Michigan. According to the Detroit Free Press, several municipal clerks across the state have reported fraudulent and duplicate voter registration applications, and most of them come from ACORN. The group has reportedly registered 200,000 voters in Michigan in recent months, and brags that it has registered 1.1 million voters in the current election cycle. Its goal is to register 1.5 million voters this cycle.

Ignoring the hype from global warming alarmists like **Al Gore**, the Old Farmers Almanac says that the planet is now entering an era of global cooling. "We at the Almanac are among those who believe that sunspot cycles and their effects on oceans correlate with climate changes," meteorologist and climatologist **Joseph D'Aleo** wrote. "Studying these and other factor suggests that cold, not warm, climate may be our future." As the **Competitive Enterprise Institute's Christopher C. Horner** wrote in the April 2008 *Organization Trends*, global warming peaked in 1998 and there has been no net warming since 2001, according to U.S. government data.

Is it now acceptable for enviro-terrorists to attack whatever building or site they blame for global warming? In the United Kingdom it is. As The Independent reports a green British jury has perverted an ancient legal right known as jury nullification, using it to excuse eco-terrorism. A jury sitting at Maidstone Crown Court cleared six **Greenpeace** activists of criminal damage charges after they caused more than £35,000 worth of damage to a coal-fired power station, finding that the threat of global warming excused their vandalism. Nullification has traditionally been used when a government has prosecuted under a law deemed unjust, not to excuse common vandalism. (For more on eco-terrorism, read "Eco-Terrorism: When Violence Becomes An Environmentalist Tactic," by John Berlau, *Organization Trends*, February 2007.)

**Children's International Obesity Foundation** is angry that swimmer **Michael Phelps**, who won a record eight Olympic gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, has agreed to grace Frosted Flakes and Corn Flakes cereal boxes instead of the more typical athlete's choice of Wheaties. "As a role model and Olympic hero to America's children," Phelps, who consumes 12,000 calories a day, should "reconsider any connection to substances suspected as agents of obesity, including sugary cereals, soft drinks and other foods with refined carbohydrates, saturated fats, trans fats and high fructose corn syrup."

The New York Times reports that the sons of **Julius** and **Ethel Rosenberg** now accept that their father was a spy for the Soviet Union based on the belated admission of a confederate, **Morton Sobell**, age 91, that he had lied for more than a half century when he said they were innocent of a conspiracy to give U.S. military secrets to the U.S.S.R. The sons' desire to vindicate their parents spurred their political radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s and led them to establish the **Rosenberg Fund for Children**, a charity for the children of leftist activists, which was profiled in the March 2001 issue of *Foundation Watch*.

The **Internal Revenue Service** is streamlining its approval process for charities and other nonprofits groups seeking tax-exempt status, The Bond Buyer reports. The rule changes are aimed at bring the process into line with the redesigned Form 990, the informational form that most nonprofit organizations are required to file with the U.S. government. IRS officials said streamlining the burdensome process makes sense because before the rule changes entities had to seek an advance ruling to receive preliminary tax-exempt status, subject to review. Under the old system, the preliminary status was reviewed at the end of a five-year period, but under the new system, the status will be granted upon application and the IRS will monitor the 990s to determine if the status needs to be reviewed.