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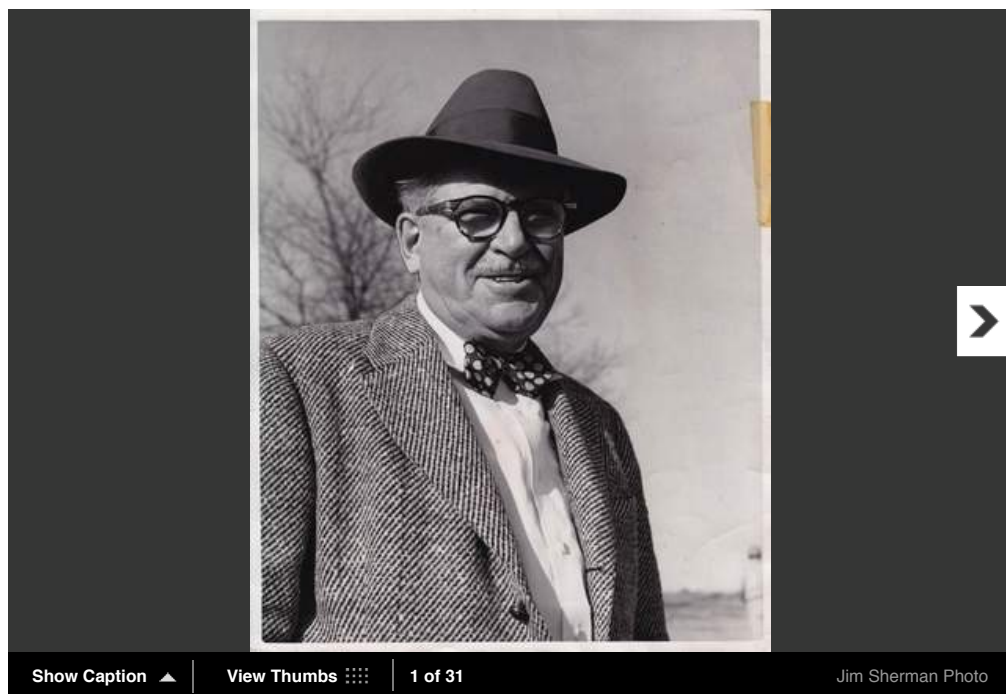
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Obradovich: We're already paying for not listening to Ding Darling

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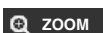
Opinion
Kathie Obradovich

Have you ever noticed how once you discover something — say a fashion trend, a certain car model, or an iconic photograph — you start seeing it everywhere? It's so common, there's a psychological term for it: perceptual vigilance.

Maybe that's why, after writing a couple of weeks ago about a documentary about Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling, the guy seems to be following me around.

I returned Monday from a week away on vacation to find an entire wall in the Register office near my desk covered with a tribute to the cartoons of Darling and Frank Miller, the Register's two Pulitzer-winning editorial cartoonists.

On my way in to the office that day, Iowa Public Radio was replaying an interview with Samuel Koltinsky, producer of the





Frank Miller

documentary about Darling. On Tuesday, Koltinsky and the Register announced a partnership to preserve and display more than 3,800 antique printing plates of cartoons by Darling and one of his colleagues.

It's not just Darling's history and cartoons that have crept into my peripheral vision. It's his concern for the environment and leadership in conservation. Darling, who died in 1962, was a pioneer in preserving wildlife and natural resources, stemming from his days as a child in rural Sioux City. He warned throughout his life of the dangers of despoiling nature and squandering its resources.

On Sunday, I noticed a front-page story in the New York Times, reporting on an international climate change conference in Warsaw. Developing countries, such as the Philippines, are noticing they are bearing the brunt of extreme weather conditions. They are pointing the finger at wealthier, industrial nations like the U.S. for contributing disproportionately to climate change.

The fact is, though, most of us don't pay much attention to the environment unless it slaps us in the face. If you ask people whether they care about it, most will say they do. But whenever the Register's Iowa Poll asks voters to rank their political priorities, the environment typically sinks to near the bottom of the list.

Most of our political discussion gets hung up on who is responsible for pollution and who pays for it. I agree with the majority of the scientific findings that humans have an effect, but there are others far more qualified than I to argue about that. I'm not asking you to buy into any particular solutions today, either. But when it comes to the question of who pays, I'd submit that you and I are already paying.

Take a few minutes to consider all the ways you're already paying for documented



'Ding' Darling

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changes in the weather patterns in Iowa and the world.

How much earlier in the year are you turning on your air conditioner, and what's the added cost? Does it equal the amount you may be saving on winter heat? How much has your

homeowner's insurance gone up due to the increased threat of damage from the high-intensity storms of the past few years? The federal money to recover from weather-related losses in Iowa was \$848 million in 2008 alone.

How much more are you and your family paying for allergy medication and treatment these days? Warmer, more humid conditions in Iowa have allowed more pollen-producing plants to survive in the state and more production of mold. Climate change globally has been linked to greater incidences of melanoma, insect-borne disease, asthma and other public health problems.

These are just a few examples of how climate change is already affecting how Iowans live. They were documented in a 2010 report to the Iowa Legislature by researchers from Iowa's three universities. Other costs may be harder to quantify on an individual level, but predictions of reduced agricultural productivity and higher costs for road repair, disaster mitigation and water treatment affect all taxpayers.

Protecting the environment is a far less partisan issue for young Americans than it is for older adults, which stands to reason. Young people will be paying a much larger share of the cost than my generation will. It's an issue that demands cooperation not just among Americans but among all nations. But first, it needs to get more attention.

Once you've started to notice the environment and the costs of doing nothing, it gets much harder to ignore. It's like your brain goes, "Ding."

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