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Obradovich: Citizens must work together on climate

Feb. 16, 2014 | Comments



Written by
ON POLITICS
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When I started writing last fall about the environmental legacy of The Des Moines Register's own Jay N. "Ding" Darling, I heard from lowans who were concerned about their world but didn't know what they could do.

I wrote last Sunday about initiatives proposed at the Statehouse dealing with the environment. This weekend, I wanted to highlight some opportunities for lowans from a variety of political perspectives to learn more and get involved. I'm not turning this column into a tree-hugging, Birkenstock-wearing, Prius-driving zone every weekend. But governments will never resolve the threat of climate change unless individual citizens find ways to work together.

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And since I hear that Gov. Terry Branstad signed a proclamation to declare a day in honor of Darling on Feb. 12, I thought I would hit the issue one more time before moving on for a while.

It's easy to find groups on the political left that are involved in climate change, and there are many in Iowa. One group that helps people get started with grassroots political advocacy is the Citizens Climate Lobby, (citizensclimatelobby.org) which has chapters in several Iowa cities. That group is pushing specifically for a revenue-neutral tax on carbon.

Iowa Climate Advocates

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(lowaclimateadvocates.org), a group founded by Sen. Rob Hogg in Cedar Rapids, has been hosting forums with candidates for Congress on climate-change issues.

For the really hard core, consider former state Rep. Ed Fallon, He's the founder and director of the Great March for Climate Action (climatemarch.org). The walk across the United States kicks off March 1 in Los Angeles and travels to Washington, D.C. The group reaches Des Moines on Aug. 11.

Fallon said over 220 people nationally, including about 20 lowans, plan to make the entire trek. That's hundreds of people making a "tremendous sacrifice" to try to raise awareness of climate change. It's symbolic, he said, of the sacrifice we all need to make in order address the environmental threat to come.

People who aren't quite so committed can still help the march in a variety of ways, including donating money and environmentally friendly services. The march will use a 65-watt mobile wind generator, green portable toilets and truck entirely fueled by vegetable oil to reduce its own footprint and educate the public, Fallon said.

There are fewer conservative groups in the conversation, but that might be changing. Alex Bozmoski of the Energy and Enterprise Initiative (energyandenterprise.com), says his group plans to visit to Iowa soon, although details are not yet available. The Washington, D.C., organization looks for market-based solutions to energy and climate issues.

Bozmoski said one way conservatives get into the conversation about green energy is through concern about national security. "We'll never be able to escape Saudi Arabian oil, no matter how much we produce, because they'll always control the price," Bozmoski said.

He said his interest in climate issues springs from a free-market economics perspective. That includes acknowledging the risk of climate change and socializing the cost. "A lot of conservatives think we should prudently manage risk in the most pro-growth manner possible," he said.

Another way lowans of different political perspectives are finding to approach issues related to climate change is through their faith.

One of the more active organizations that work to facilitate education and action in faith communities is Iowa Interfaith Power &

Light. This tends to be mainly progressive congregations, but a panel discussion I joined a few months ago included an evangelical pastor.

The group and its director, the Rev. Susan Guy, help congregations make their own facilities more environmentally friendly and challenge their members to reduce their families' carbon footprint. Their website, www.iowaip.org, also has talking points, resources and tips. A coming forum at 2 p.m. March 30 at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames (my home church when I was growing up) will explore agriculture and climate change.

Climate change remains a divisive political issue, but the rest of us don't have to wait for our politicians to make the environment a priority. It's only the future of the world that's at stake, after all.

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