

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Chicken Little is right

BY CHRIS BRATT



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If you lived through the tornado in Joplin, Missouri, on May 22 of this year, you might have thought the sky had fallen. Following that disastrous storm, a May 29 *Newsweek* magazine article on the tragedy stated, "In a world of climate change, freak storms are the new normal." The article went on to say, "Even those who deny the existence of global climate change are having trouble dismissing the evidence of the last year." Joplin was no hoax.

Do you suppose Chicken Little's proclamation is now coming true, especially given the Joplin tragedy and other extreme weather events happening around the world? Is it time for us to get serious and help our own communities and other countries worldwide cope with the coming dangers brought on by climate change?

The answer is yes. The destruction to homes and communities as well as deaths caused by extreme weather events unfolding today make it clear that climate change is assuredly happening. Since our nation has emitted the most carbon over the past century, we have a moral duty to meaningfully cut our carbon emissions to prevent more widespread human suffering.

Sadly, these critical climate change issues have again been relegated to the back burner nationally because of more immediate problems and crises. With over 14 million people in our country unemployed, tens of thousands more having had their homes repossessed, two ongoing wars and the general faltering of the economies of many western countries, everyone seems concerned with the effects of these everyday troubles on our lives. In addition, I believe many people in our country are angry and frustrated over the lack of any real political leadership or agreement around these major issues. It's no wonder the public is demoralized

when arrogant politicians distort the facts on every question that needs a viable solution. Our political process is definitely in shambles.

Consequently, it doesn't look like there is going to be any real action on a comprehensive national program to address the climate crisis and end a decade of denial, obstruction and delay, given the stalemate in Washington, DC, on every issue.

If we don't begin to address this issue soon, some areas will be literally under water, while others will be without water or face other harsh consequences. The good news is that many people and organizations are stirring up a renewed focus on global warming and climate change. These folks (many local) are proactively addressing the risks of a rapidly changing climate and helping communities find new ways to achieve a sustainable future. The idea is to have professionals in the field of climate change, policy, science and advocacy help local citizens and leaders understand how global trends can impact their communities and assist them in making responsible choices in adapting to the projected effects.

These climate change specialists would provide information and services such as climate change projection reports and maps, educational workshops, science and communication training, climate models, vulnerability assessments, etc. If this strategy is successful, communities that are proactive in addressing climate change will avoid or decrease the impacts. They could see results such as more stable economies, less loss of life and property, and lower restoration costs after natural disasters.

A good example of these ideas in action was a recent free event on a town's sustainability in the face of global warming that took place at the historic Ashland

Armory. It was sponsored by local scientists and the Ashland Conservation Commission, and called the Climate Reality Project. It included presentations on sustainable business; how to take local action; a primer on city energy, water rebates and incentives; and exhibits from Science Works. (As an added incentive to attend, they also served complementary finger food and no-host wine and beer.) This Ashland group thinks, since there is no concerted US government action on climate change, that these local efforts are most empowering and can make a difference. More information is available at <http://sites.google.com/site/climatechangeso/>.

On a larger scale are the everyday efforts of the nonprofit Ashland-based Geos Institute. (I'm proud to say they allow me to serve on their Board of Directors.) The staff at the Geos Institute (www.geosinstitute.org) uses science to help people predict, reduce and prepare for climate change. The Institute has a community-based adaptation program called ClimateWise. ClimateWise assists communities in making responsible choices regarding climate change adaptation that protects not only people, but also ecosystem functions and services that communities depend upon. Teams of ClimateWise facilitators from the Geos Institute partner with communities around the country to provide the latest science and projections on climate change, and coordinate community workshops, report-writing and public outreach.

The first ClimateWise planning project was completed in the Rogue Valley in 2008. It produced multiple strategies for helping Jackson and Josephine Counties prepare for climate change. In 2010, a follow-up "Phase II" project was initiated in collaboration with the Rogue Valley Council of Governments that focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the valley.

Other Geos ClimateWise projects completed in 2010 include San Luis Obispo and Fresno Counties in California, Deschutes Basin in Oregon and Missoula County, Montana. The most important strategy for reducing their communities' vulnerability to climate change was, not surprisingly, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many other



The tornado that hit Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, was classified as an EF-5, the highest on the Enhanced Fujita Scale. 123 people were killed, the largest number of tornado fatalities in the US since 1950. Photo from insurersworldblogger.blogspot.com.

risks also were addressed, including water supply shortages, severe wildfire risk and hot days, air pollution, health effects, flooding, wetlands restoration, higher nighttime temperatures, and protecting quality of life, to name a few. The Geos ClimateWise program hopes to initiate 11 more full processes and 15 partial processes or projections in the coming year in areas around the United States.

Does your area have a cohesive strategy or integrated plan to prepare both our human and natural communities for rapidly changing climate conditions? Are you ready for the real impacts of a changing climate on your life?

Let me know.
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