

Lobbying for Climate Solutions

Columbia ★ Star

By Jan Collins

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With a little more than two weeks left in the year, 2016 remains on track to be the hottest in our 136 years of modern data-keeping, according to NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. We heard the same thing in 2015, and 2014, and 2013, and so on. Each successive year has been warmer than the previous one.

As a woman, as a mother, as a grandmother, and as a citizen of the world, this scenario terrifies me.

Remember July? At my house, we remember it still as we gaze at our water-stained living room ceiling. It was probably caused, according to our roofer, by a few errant nails popping up because of the torrid heat and subsequently poking holes in a few shingles. The same thing happened all over our neighborhood, he said.

Then, after a drenching rain in early September, voila! The water stain.

More than 97 percent of climate scientists agree that human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas), produce the greenhouse gasses that are responsible for most of the climate change that we are currently seeing.

These signs of climate change are everywhere. Scorching summers and warmer-than-usual winters, droughts, wildfires, powerful hurricanes, floods. Because of sea-level rise, some downtown streets in Miami and various other locales now flood at high tide or even after a minor rainfall.

In Columbia, the terrible flooding caused by that extraordinary downpour in October 2015 is not far from our minds. And, homeowners in South Carolina's coastal areas are said to be preparing for "sticker shock" in the near future as federal subsidies for flood insurance are expected to be phased out after a federal law expires in 2017.

The Island Packet newspaper, based on Hilton Head, says that “no one knows exactly when the subsidies will end and be replaced with risk-based rates that reflect the true cost of living in a flood zone.” But in anticipation of rising rates, coastal property owners in the Palmetto State and elsewhere in the Southeast are already taking steps to “better protect their buildings, including raising the structures higher off the ground.”

Raising a 3,000-square-foot home – not including the expense of disconnecting and reconnecting the home to the property – costs about \$35,000. And, some private Hilton Head homeowners’ associations are already raising residents’ fees to recover costs from the recent Hurricane Matthew.

Most Americans are starting, finally, to take climate change seriously. A March 2016 Gallup Poll revealed that 64 percent of American adults worry “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about global warming, up from 55% the year before. This is the highest reading since 2008. Moreover, 41 percent told Gallup that they believe climate change will eventually pose a serious threat to them or their way of life.

I am certainly one of that 64 percent. I worry for my children and my grandchildren and for all the other children and grandchildren out there – and for their future descendants, too. But what to do?

If you want to feel like you are *doing something* to help, check out the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization that is focused on national policies to address climate change. My husband and I, along with several friends, attended the kickoff meeting recently to form a Columbia chapter of CCL. (Chapters in Clemson and Charleston already existed, and chapters in Greenville and Myrtle Beach are in the process of being formed.)

According to the group’s website, there are 360 active chapters throughout the United States and the world.

The organization’s mission is intriguing: “to empower citizens to connect with and influence their members of Congress, and to spread the idea that each one of us can address climate change.” This is especially important when you realize that for each and every member of Congress, there are **four** energy lobbyists (most from the big oil, gas and coal companies) on Capitol Hill, according to Donald Addu, Mid-South Regional Coordinator for CCL.

Why shouldn't regular people like us also have an organized way to promote our energy priorities, such as solar and wind?

In today's raging, partisan political climate, CCL's mission is refreshing: to build "constructive, working relationships with members of Congress" in order to find climate change solutions that "bridge the partisan divide".

For CCL, the first step toward a solution would be a Carbon Fee and Dividend, which would place a fee on fossil fuels at the source (well, mine, port of entry). The fee would start at \$15 per ton of carbon dioxide and equivalent emissions, with the fee being increased steadily each year by \$10.

If this is done, alternative sources of fuel -- such as wind and solar -- would soon be more competitive in price with the fossil fuels that exacerbate global warming. But gasoline and other fossil fuel prices would also rise. How to address this? The CCL plan proposes to ensure that 100 percent of the net fees would be returned to American households via a monthly check, on an equal basis, thereby protecting middle-class and lower-income households. The plan, CCL says, would add jobs to the economy and help slow the effects of climate change.

If you've always wanted to be a lobbyist, volunteering for the Citizens' Climate Lobby (citizensclimate.org) would be an excellent place to start. You'd be trained in how to find common ground with your congress people in Washington and help the country find "fair, effective, and sustainable climate change solutions."

Not a bad way to start out the new year.

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