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Roger Dickinson: How acting locally can effect global change

By Roger Dickinson - Special to The Bee
Published 12:00 am PDT Monday, May 5, 2008

Think globally and act locally, as the saying goes; in cities and counties throughout the country, government leaders are doing just that. King County, Wash., is purchasing 500 new hybrid buses for local mass transit. Nassau County, N.Y., has launched an energy savings program for homeowners. Here in Sacramento County, regional leaders have established an ambitious blueprint to guide sustainable growth and development that will reduce vehicle use.

Sacramento County is one of the founding members of a national coalition of cities and counties called **Climate Communities**. Signing on with **Climate Communities** is more than just adding another name to the roster. There are endless benefits to a national-local partnership that will pay off both in environmental and economic terms. Plainly put, a coordinated approach with support at the federal level can help us leverage the efforts we make locally. The goal is to fight global warming from the ground up, relying upon a strong local-federal team.

All over the country, it is becoming clear that city and county governments are eager to reduce their carbon footprints. Not only do these local actions demonstrate leadership, they are already making a difference.

Buildings, for example, are responsible for a third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Local governments can adopt green building codes and incentives to make them more efficient, thus helping reduce one of the top causes of global warming. In Sacramento, we are using solar panels on the roof of an office building to offset some of its power use.

City and county governments are modernizing vehicle fleets by switching to hybrid cars and trucks. Our Waste Management Department maintains more than 100 trucks that run on liquid natural gas. They are significantly cleaner to run and cost less than a third of what it takes to power a diesel fleet.

For nearly a decade, Sacramento County has operated a methane gas collection system at its landfill that produces enough power to run 9,000 homes. We have been at the forefront of using new technologies.

Businesses and homes can operate more efficiently in communities that have the right tools to reduce global warming and sustain their prosperity amid a changing economy and climate. Local governments make that happen, and Sacramento is already developing environmentally sound and economically smart policies to support those efforts.

Cities and counties will be first responders as impacts of global warming begin to become apparent. When drought caused by global warming shrinks drinking water supplies and threatens communities with wildfires, we will stand on the front line to prevent harm to citizens. When record heat waves prompt health emergencies, we will step up to the plate.

Sacramento has already stepped up and accepted the leadership role with pride. In addition to being part of [Climate Communities](#), we were the second county to join the highly effective Chicago Climate Exchange, which binds us legally to either reduce our emissions or buy carbon credits. Many local governments are talking about what they hope to do; we're backing up those discussions with action and have been for years.

And while local governments have awakened to the challenges ahead and are eager to respond, we recognize there is much we can do to avert those problems in the first place. National climate change legislation that recognizes and enhances the essential role of local governments in promoting and implementing cleaner transportation, green buildings, alternative energy and sustainable development is a necessity in order to make this a reality.

The U.S. Senate will soon vote on S. 2191, the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act. This landmark legislation, with bipartisan support, calls for a 65 percent reduction in U.S. carbon emissions by 2050. The bill creates a carbon "cap-and-trade" system to set limits on carbon pollution and to trade credits for others struggling to reduce their carbon footprint.

[Climate Communities](#) is working with key Senate leaders to make sure that this legislation provides incentives and resources to help more cities and counties become early adopters of global warming solutions.

Climate change may well be the greatest challenge facing not just this generation but future ones as well. Our national campaign to meet this challenge must include effective local-federal partnerships as a key component, allowing us to truly think globally, and act locally.

Local governments are asking the Senate to quickly pass S. 2191 and to include us in the solution. Please contact Sen. Dianne Feinstein and urge her to press for quick action. Sen. Barbara Boxer has pledged her support; let her know you appreciate her backing of the bill. Now is the time.

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Phone: (916) 321-1000

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