

2/4/2009

**Video Conference w/ Rep. Brian Baird**

The Evergreen State College

Evergreen Students and Staff met via video conference with Representative Brian Baird Wednesday afternoon, February 4<sup>th</sup>, as part of the National Teach In on Global Warming. Participants included five students from the Clean Energy committee, President Les Purce, the Evergreen Director of Facilities, and the Director of Sustainability.

Representative Baird has been involved with energy issues for over 30 years and is currently a member of two House committees.

*Committee on Science and Technology*

- Subcommittee on Energy and Environment Subcommittee, Chairman
- Subcommittee on Research and Science Education
- Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

*Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure*

- Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
- Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
- Subcommittee on Highways, Transportation, and Pipelines

Representative Baird started the discussion by emphasizing that we are facing a critical crisis. He feels that the terminology currently used to discuss climate change is quite inadequate. The use of words like 'change' and 'warming' fail to capture the severity of the problem. It's rather like calling cancer 'accelerated cell growth'. The issue at hand, according to Baird, is really lethal overheating of the planet, as well as de-oxygenation and acidification of the oceans. He feels that the proposed remedies under common discussion are really too little, too late.

Baird is recommending immediate personal action such as '20 in 20'. Cut your personal carbon footprint by 20% in 20 wks simply by changing your behaviors. We can take shorter showers and other steps to reduce our personal energy consumption. Cities could turn off every other street light. Rep. Baird thinks that the Pacific Northwest can be a leader for the rest of the nation. Cutting our footprint by 20% will also save money, lower energy costs, reduce our dependence on petroleum, and show US leadership on this critical global issue.

Waiting for the government to reach agreement, according to Baird, is like if our doctor told us we had accelerated cellular growth, but we'll have to wait for a consensus on when we can deal with it. Most people would prefer immediate action and solutions.



Representative Baird had to take a short leave to return to the House for a vote and Eban Goodstein, faculty at Lewis & Clark College and a Teach In organizer, sat in to talk with us. He pointed out that the climate change issue is much more urgent than was realized, and everyone needs to act now to hold global warming to merely 3 or 4 degree F. If we don't act in time a higher degree change is much more likely, along with associated catastrophic changes around the world.



Rep. Baird returned from his vote to take questions. (The following is paraphrased and *not* verbatim.)

TESC – *20 in 20* is very aggressive and will take significant personal commitments. How do we raise the general awareness of urgency with the populace?

REP. BAIRD – This country pulled together for World War II in a remarkable manner, and we could do it again. Ideally, President Obama, Senator McCain, other political leaders, as well as popular leaders and personalities would join together to make a definitive statement that it's time to act now, that it's a patriotic duty, and long term benefit for all of us. We can also use new viral media and pass the message along at personal level. We can use local leadership within communities. Also, it's been determined that the most effective message is based upon a social norm, 'everyone else is doing it, why aren't you?' 'Save the Earth' doesn't work very well in getting people to act. But messages such as "*Everyone else does it, Join the team, Do your part...*" are much more effective at getting people engaged.

TESC – How do we measure positive results so people know that they are making a difference?

REP. BAIRD – What about just measuring the change in your shower habit? We can easily see a 60% decrease in water/energy usage by cutting our shower time. We can make it personally measurable by acting on simple changes that can have large impacts. Local municipalities could join in by removing the bulb in every other streetlight.

TESC – Should we provide incentives or sanctions to get and keep people engaged?

REP. BAIRD - This issue is too critical to bargain over it. I say start with youth through the schools and community organizations. Get it going locally with personal initiative, don't wait for congress or political leaders to agree upon incentives and/or sanctions, take charge and do the right thing.

TESC – What about financial barriers to investment in facilities? For example, short payback periods.

REP. BAIRD – I'm proud of local community leadership and The Evergreen State College's accomplishments. I would prefer that the stimulus package currently under discussion put more into green infrastructure investment instead of tax cuts, but that may not happen.

TESC – We hear that the stimulus package will have provisions to help with green energy investments. Will those be accessible for residential improvements?

REP. BAIRD – There is currently provision in the stimulus package for residential improvements. (He introduced Senator Patty Murray who had entered the room, and relayed the question to her.)

SENATOR MURRAY – We are still negotiating those provisions in the Senate. I'm not sure what will result.

The video conference ended on that note. But the discussion continued among Evergreen's participants. Our thoughts and comments included:

Clean Energy solutions can create long term economic benefits.

Tax cuts by government don't cause cash or credit to flow into productive economic activity, particularly for change. Government can effect major infrastructure change more effectively than an open market economy.

Where is the reinforcement for positive behaviors that need to be there to motivate people through change? Immediate solutions require us to sacrifice a level of comfort. How will we know that it's worth it?

We manage what we measure; making it easier for people to learn how and what to measure.