

OPINION

Opinion: As all else fails, local action is the best bet to save us from climate catastrophe

Guest opinion

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“Think Globally, Act Locally.”

We have heard this phrase for years, but when it comes to global climate change, acting locally may be our best way forward. The United Nations International Panel on Climate Change has issued a Code Red for humankind on climate change.

This existential threat has been called a climate crisis, a climate emergency and many other things but it really doesn't matter what it's called. It's time to stop talking about climate change and actually do something about it. Everybody talks about the extreme weather and the climate, but who is going to do something about it?

The United Nations is holding its latest climate change conference in Glasgow, Scotland, from Oct. 31-Nov. 12. This climate summit is called COP26, which stands for the 26th Conference of the Parties and will be attended by the countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change — a treaty that came into force in 1994.

The entire international community of nations has been setting goals for greenhouse gas reductions since then, but the concentration of carbon dioxide has risen well above the 350 parts per million that is considered a safe level for Earth. The current CO₂ concentration is approximately 413 ppm, according to NOAA.

Working globally doesn't seem to be producing the desired results we need to reach our stated goals. We can only hope that the world's leading contributors of greenhouse gasses can somehow show the leadership needed to address the urgent crisis.

The United States has often expressed the desire to lead the world on climate solutions but hasn't been able to muster the political will necessary to actually provide that leadership. With a political system that is often sold to the highest

bidder, we can't seem to stop burning fossil fuels even though we can build wind farms and solar arrays at breakneck speed.

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President Joe Biden's Build Back Better Plan has plenty of climate-related plans but they may be removed to appease a senator from a coal-mining state who makes his millions from the coal industry. Again, we have to remember that the U.S. has the best political system that money can buy.

Iowa can lead us on climate action, right? Iowa can lead the country in building out wind energy, but does not have enough new transmission lines to carry the renewable energy to the load centers that need it. Iowa could be a leader in solar energy but our state couldn't find the political will to extend the state tax credit on solar.

Iowa can build pipelines to move fracked oil and gas from the Bakken and Alberta to be exported and maybe even CO₂ in the reverse direction for enhanced oil recovery and storage, even though this greenwashing pipeline has yet to be approved by the IUB. We can also lead the nation in biofuels that have questionable climate change benefits and now Iowa wants to build large manure biodigesters that will enable even more environmentally destroying factory farms.

It now seems that we can't rely on international, federal or state action to move us forward on the climate action needed to save us from the worst impacts of climate change.

So all hope is lost? Not at all.

There is hope, and it rests in local action by concerned citizens and communities. In 2005, after the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the U.N. Climate Protocol from Kyoto, Japan, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickel created the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement to meet those climate actions called for in the treaty.

Since, thousands of U.S. cities have signed on to take the action that the federal and state governments have failed to do through local leadership and action. Many Iowa cities have created Climate Action Plans of their own, including Iowa City, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.

These Climate Action Plans mainly focus on buildings, transportation, food and energy. We applaud these communities and encourage other cities and counties to create their own Climate Action Plans.

But not all Climate Action Plans are cut from the same cloth. We encourage as much “local” in these plans as possible. Local citizens giving input for local solutions like locally sourced organic foods and locally produced renewable energy.

Some Climate Action plans exclusively rely on the major utility companies to meet their renewable energy goals. Investor Owned Utilities that claim a certain amount of clean energy and then fail to close coal and fracked natural gas plants are being intellectually dishonest and are really pulling a bait and switch.

What we really need is locally produced renewable energy from local wind and solar farms. That would create many local jobs and local economic development and create energy that doesn't leave behind pollutants like mercury, soot and other harmful gases and particulate matter.

Not all communities have the expertise or staff to create their own Climate Action Plans, so some are getting help from local nonprofits. Whether a community chooses to do its own Climate Action Plan or gets the help it needs, they need to act now. The clock is ticking, the house is on fire and it's time to take local action before it's too late.

This opinion piece was written by Mike Carberry and Tom Carsner, Iowa City Sierra Club; Mike Wyrick, Cedar Rapids Sierra Club; Jason Snell and Scott Roland, Sunrise Movement Cedar Rapids; Ayla Boylen, Climate Strike/Fridays for Future Cedar Rapids; Miriam Kashia, 100 Grannies for a Sustainable Future Iowa City.