

There's much to celebrate, much to grieve on Earth Day

Rawling

April 22 is the 48th anniversary of our country's first Earth Day celebration.

Gaylord Nelson, a Wisconsin Democrat senator and environmentalist, is considered the founder of Earth Day. He, along with California Republican Congressman Pete McCloskey cosponsored the event on April 22, 1970.

The goal of the first Earth Day was to educate the public and bring environmental protection to the national political agenda. Earth Day, 1970, is credited for the changes our country has made regarding how the government manages our natural resources.

By the end of 1970, Richard Nixon, a Republican president, established the Environment Protection Agency (EPA). This agency is responsible for regulations that protect human health and the environment.

Within a decade of the establishment of the EPA, protection of the environment continued with the enactment of The Clean Air Act, The Endangered Species Act and The Clean Water Act.

Earth Day celebrations went global in 1990, as people from 141 countries participated in the event.

This led to the 1992 United Nations Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, where countries came together to discuss is-

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Your Turn

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sues of sustainability. They addressed toxic poisons, waste, alternatives sources of energy to replace fossil fuel, public transportation to decrease carbon emissions and water usage.

In 2000, the focus of Earth Day changed to global warming and a push for cleaner energy.

December 2015, the United Nations Paris Climate Agreement was signed by 194 nations. This is the first time nations agreed to move forward together in protecting our planet by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It was also the first time the United States and China, the two countries most responsible for carbon emissions, agreed to work together with other countries.

As we celebrate Earth Day 2018, there is much to celebrate but also much to grieve. After many decades of forward movement from our government finding better ways to care for all life on Earth, our country is now

dismantling many of the policies put in place to protect the environment.

At a time when we are seeing the devastation climate change is causing around the world, our current federal government is cutting and eliminating the EPA's power to protect us. They are cutting the EPA's budget, weakening the Clean Water Act, cutting the standards that reduce toxic emissions, and have backed away from the United Nations Paris Agreement.

These are just a few of the policies being put in place to dismantle environmental protections. All of this is a great loss for our planet, our people and all life on Earth.

The EPA is no longer protecting our environment or health. Instead, it is pulling back regulations that were enacted to keep our lakes, rivers, streams, air and soil healthy. We will not survive without clean air, clean water or clean soil to grow our food.

It is time to change the way we live on this planet if we want to survive.

The extreme extraction of fossil fuels is causing the destruction of everything we need for life. More than 90 percent of scientists who study climate change have been telling us for many years that atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide above 350 parts per million is unsafe for life on Earth. They are also saying it is caused by human activity, especially from the use of fossil fuels.

We know what we need to do to create a more sustainable planet. We have the technology to change how we live. What we don't have is the political will to put in place policies that take us away from our addiction of fossil fuels and make the transition to renewable, cleaner energy.

Along with this is the reality that the fossil fuel industry has been lobbying our legislators and supporting them financially. We need to put a stop to policies that say it is OK for corporations to put profit and greed ahead of people, the water, the land and all living creatures.

In National Geographic's film "Before the Flood," Leonardo De Caprio takes us around the world as he interviews scientists and also ordinary people whose lives have been devastated by climate change. The film also gives us solutions that could help reverse what the film calls "the most catastrophic problem humankind has ever faced."

The film goes on to say: "politicians do what the people want them to do. If you want action from our legislators on climate change, they need to hear from us about what we want them to do."

We can all do something to help. One of the most important things we can do is decide to become an environmental voter. Vote for candidates who will fight climate change by ending subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and invest in renewable energy. If your elected official in office now is not working on environmental issues, ask them what they are doing to protect the environment and let them know what you expect of them.

We do not just want candidates and leaders who believe in climate change, we want candidates and leaders who will put it into action.

The Wisconsin Chapter of The League of Conservation Voters can help you learn how your state leaders are voting on environmental issues. You can find the Wisconsin Chapter at conservationvoters.org and the national chapter at www.lcv.org.

Get involved in educating yourself and others about climate change. Watch the National Geographic's film "Before the Flood." You can find more information at www.beforetheflood.com.

Since the withdrawal of the federal government from the Paris Agreement, mayors and other leaders around the country are taking action locally on climate change. Tell your mayor and other city, county and town leaders you are ready for 100 percent clean energy for all. Join one of the many local or national groups working to

protect the environment. Learn about The Sierra Club's program "100 Percent Clean Energy" or the U.S. Conference of Mayors program "The Alliance for a Sustainable Future."

The DNR's Wisconsin Conservation Congress meets in every county in the spring for a listening session. At this event, attendees vote on several advisory questions that are on the ballot. In Manitowoc County, 72 percent of those who voted this year responded "yes" when asked the question, "Would you encourage legislators and the DNR to support science and market-based legislation and rules to reduce the results of global warming and increase the use of renewable energy resources?"

We are all being called to do our part to reduce the impact of climate change. It is time to put our differences aside and work together no matter our political beliefs.

In 1970, the first Earth Day was organized by Democrats and Republicans working together. Climate change is not a Democrat or Republican issue; it is a human issue, a human crisis.

For information about joining the Manitowoc County League of Women Voters' Environment Committee, email circleofsong@tds.net.

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