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Earth Day, 40 years later: Struggles of the green generation are far from over

Activists helped create environmental laws, but haven't sparked big efforts to halt climate change

ROCKY BARKER - rbarker@idahostatesman.com Published: 04/19/10

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In 1966, when Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson introduced a bill to ban the pesticide DDT that was linked to the rapid decline of bald eagles, peregrine falcons and other raptors, he could not find a single senator to co-sponsor the legislation.

"Papa had struggled through the 1960s," said his daughter, Tia Nelson. "There was no such thing as an environmentalist then."

Things changed after the first Earth Day, on April 22, 1970.

Denis Hayes and the other activists Nelson tapped to organize the first Earth Day left the streets and turned to political action.

They raised \$50,000 for a national campaign to defeat the 12 members of Congress they dubbed the environmental "dirty dozen." Seven of the 12 were ousted, including the powerful chairman of the House Public Works Committee, Democratic Rep. George Fallon of Baltimore.

In the next decade Congress passed the 28 major initiatives that became the foundation of the nation's environmental laws. Those included the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, and amendments strengthening the National Environmental Policy Act.

Many passed in the first three years and were signed by President Richard Nixon.

In 1972, the government banned DDT.

GLOBAL WARMING: AN EARLY WARNING

Today, a major environmental issue is the threat of a changing climate caused by the burning of fossil fuels that could dramatically reduce the productivity of the planet and cause mass extinctions. Ironically, the first major government warning of the threat of global warming came on Earth Day 1970.

Federal climatologist J. Murray Mitchell released a widely covered report that day that said air pollution was causing the world to get warmer through a "greenhouse effect," and that it would melt the polar ice cap and cause massive flooding within 200 years.

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ADDITIONAL DETAILS

One man, one moment: How Earth Day changed the world

ELSEWHERE

- The Bullitt Foundation Earth Day org www.nelsonearthday.net/earth-day/start.htm Boise State's plan for Earth Day

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Treasure Valley Earth Day events:

- APRIL 19, 11 A.M.-1 P.M. - Boise State University will kick off Earth Week on the Student Union Patio with free ice cream and sorbet and a live band, Owl Right. Student and community environmental groups will have booths. APRIL 22, 8 A.M. - BSU will host an Earth Day Panel Discussion in the Student Union Lookout Room. University and community experts will discuss the EPA's proposed strengthening of the ozone standard and the consequences for Idaho and the Treasure Valley. APRIL 22, 10 A.M.-2 P.M. - Carnival, BSU Quad. APRIL 22, 6-9 P.M. - Film: "No Impact Man" about human beings affecting the Earth, BSU Centennial Amphitheater. Free food during the film. APRIL 23, 6:30 P.M. - Land Trust of the Treasure Valley hosts the Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival on Tour, Egyptian Theatre, Boise. APRIL 24, 9 A.M. - Boise Foothills hike, beginning at the Boise State Quad. Hosted by BSU and the Idaho Conservation League. APRIL 24, 9 A.M.-3 P.M. - Idaho Native Plant Society plant sale, MK Nature Center, 600 S. Walnut St., Boise. APRIL 24, 9 A.M.-NOON - Earth Day work day, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge visitor center, 13751 Upper Embankment Road, Nampa. Help improve wildlife habitat by picking up litter, removing noxious weeds and improving landscaping surrounding. Bring

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Climate change has been an especially frustrating issue for Denis Hayes, the student tapped by Nelson to organize the first Earth Day. President Jimmy Carter, elected in 1976, named him the director of the Solar Energy Research Institute. At age 35, he was the youngest director of a national laboratory in history. During the Carter years, evidence supporting global warming gained scientific strength, underscoring the need for new energy sources.

But when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, Carter's alternative energy programs were scrapped. Hayes returned to Stanford, finished law school and went into practice. In 1988, Hayes left the law firm and began raising money and organizing for Earth Day 1990. That worldwide effort got 200 million people involved and turned Earth Day into the largest secular holiday on the planet.

Hayes was warning anyone who would listen then that the world was running out of time to slow global warming and avoid catastrophic impacts. He says today the world has passed that tipping point.

"If we're saying it is too late to avoid painful consequences," he says, "we passed that in 2000."

He still thinks the massive trend can be turned around. But it will take a major shift in human behavior and a high price on use of carbon-producing practices to make it happen.

"If you get the price wrong, everything else doesn't matter," Hayes said. "If you get the price right everyone does things voluntarily."

TIDE CHANGES IN 1980

Nelson, who'd served in the U.S. Senate since 1963, was turned out of office in the conservative tide that swept Reagan into the presidency in the 1980 election. Nelson went to work as counselor for the Wilderness Society.

Daughter Tia was 13 on the first Earth Day and largely unaware of the Earth Day phenomena. She did not set out to follow in her father's footsteps. But when she decided she didn't want to be a veterinarian anymore as a student at the University of Wisconsin, she decided to go into wildlife ecology.

"It was always a part of my culture and values," she said. "But I don't have a conscious memory of following Papa. It seems all obvious now but there wasn't some moment."

After college Tia Nelson went to work for the Nature Conservancy, rising to its director for climate change programs. In 2004 she returned to Wisconsin to serve as executive secretary of the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, managing 78,000 acres of forests and trust funds worth more than \$600 million.

Sen. Nelson died in 2005 at 89. The Wisconsin Legislature, with Tia Nelson's lobbying, established the Nelson-Knowles Stewardship program in his name and the name of his successor, Wisconsin Republican Gov. Warren Knowles, protecting half a million acres of state lands.

A CRISIS OF 'TRULY BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS'

Richard Cizik got active in the 1970s to save the trees on Spokane's Whitworth College campus. But his path changed course.

He became a Christian as a college senior. He joined the staff of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1980 to lobby for the Moral Majority as it gained power in Washington, D.C. He rose to become vice president for governmental affairs and one of the most powerful Christian lobbyists in the Capitol.

In 2002, Cizik said he had another conversion, this time on climate change. At a conference in Oxford, Sir John Houghton, an evangelical scientist, presented the evidence of shrinking ice caps, rising temperatures, increasing hurricane intensity and drought patterns.

"I realized all at once, with sudden awe," Cizik said, "that climate change is a phenomenon of truly biblical proportions."

He became a leader of the "creation care" movement, using scriptural references instead of science to make his case for protecting the Earth, bringing along 30 million evangelicals and shifting the political debate about global warming.

ONE ACTIVIST'S DIFFERENT PATH

Not every Earth Day activist agrees that climate change is serious.

Oregon's Randal O'Toole was transformed by his success organizing Earth Day in 1970. Instead of becoming an architect, he decided he wanted to be a forester. At Oregon State University, O'Toole took an economics class, and later got a graduate degree in economics.

He was deeply into the left-leaning Oregon environmental scene of the 1970s, working for the Ralph Nader-inspired Oregon State Public Interest Group. In the 1980s, O'Toole used economics to help stop the harvest

water and gloves. Register by calling 467-9278 or e-mailing deerflat@fws.gov.

APRIL 24, 9 A.M.-2 P.M. - Blacks Creek Reservoir Earth Day Cleanup, hosted by Golden Eagle Audubon Society. Meet at the MK Nature Center parking lot, 600 S.Walnut St., Boise. Info: Call Pam Conley, 869-0337.

APRIL 24, 9 A.M. - ReLeaf Boise, at Boise City Urban Forestry, 4969 Dorman, Boise. Free trees for right-of-way planting. Info: 384-4083.



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of old-growth timber in national forests. Armed with O'Toole's forest-by-forest analyses, environmentalists showed many timber sales cost the government more than they made. He became one of the leading voices of libertarian environmentalists, who use the free market to promote environmental values. Those views made him less popular with his traditional allies.

"The environmental movement has become less tolerant of ideas," O'Toole said.

Today the Cato Institute fellow believes the only role of government is to ensure that free markets are working, which makes him skeptical of climate change science.

"Global warming was the ideal big government issue, because it requires big government," O'Toole said.

STILL A WAYS TO GO

Marilyn Laurie went from organizing Earth Day events in New York City to a job as environmental program director for AT&T. She rose to vice president of public relations as one of the first wave of women executives.

Today she is a consultant who has made a career of "convincing businesses to do the ethical thing." The movement she helped to create has become a part of the framework of all institutions, she said.

Climate change demonstrates how much farther there is to go.

"While we have awareness," Laurie said, "we don't necessarily have scientific and public credibility to the challenges and solutions that are proposed."

Tia Nelson is spending this week trying to convince the Wisconsin Legislature to pass the Clean Energy Jobs Act, which would double the state's investment in renewal energy programs. For her, the issue is having the political will to act as her "Papa" did for future generations.

"We will always have environmental challenges," she said. "We will always have additional work to protect our resource base, the quality of our soil, the land, water and air."

Rocky Barker: 377-6484

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[Pale Writer](#) wrote on 04/19/2010 01:33:17 AM:

Perhaps the green movement continues to struggle because their Prius won't go fast enough to get them anywhere. April 22: Happy Thursday Everyone!

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[Hollies](#) wrote on 04/19/2010 07:46:17 AM:

Another silly headline. Yesterday Earth Day changed the entire world. Today I see that this generation is the "green" generation. lol. Right. Huge consumption and huge population increases are never green. And so much HOT AIR to convince people that so much is being done! And laws which continue to allow the biggest polluters of all - big companies - are allowed to continue to spew because they complain of the cost of change...yet manage to lobby Washington to death.

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