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National campaign, local action

By Jane Halliburton, chair of the Story County Board of Supervisors, Story County, and Larry Phillips, King County, Wash. Council Member, and national co-chair of Climate Communities

Think globally, act locally, as the saying goes: 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. Sacramento County, Calif., has established an ambitious blueprint to guide sustainable growth and development that will reduce vehicle use.

Story County has joined a national coalition of cities and counties called Climate Communities, aimed at fighting global warming from the ground up by ensuring that there is a strong local-federal partnership to support such local actions.

All over the country, it is becoming clear that city and county governments are eager to reduce our carbon footprint.

Buildings, for example, are responsible for one-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. Localities can use and promote renewable energy options like solar and wind power.

City and county governments also can modernize their vehicle fleets by switching to high-mileage and hybrid cars and trucks. We can establish or improve public transit, make it easier to walk and bike.

Homes, stores and businesses 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.

Cities and counties will be first responders as impacts of global warming are felt. When drought caused by global warming shrinks drinking water reservoirs and threatens communities with wildfires, it is local government that must stand on the front line to prevent harm to citizens. Supercharged storms ravaging a coastline, rising sea levels turning aquifers brackish, or record heat waves causing local health emergencies are all issues that local government must address.

Many cities, counties and other local units of government have woken up to the challenges ahead and are eager to respond and to be part of solutions to avert those problems in the first place. But we must make sure that national climate change legislation recognizes and enhances the essential role of local governments in promoting and implementing cleaner transportation, green buildings, alternative energy and sustainable development to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of climate change.

The United States Senate will soon vote on S. 2191, the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act. This landmark legislation 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 the carbon pollution that causes global warming, and to allow early reducers to trade credits to others still struggling to reduce their own 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 our millennium. Our national campaign to meet this challenge should include effective local-federal partnerships as a key component because local governments are where the action is.

Story County is already making headway in the fight against global warming. The County committed to reducing energy usage in county-owned buildings and built the first Energy Star certified county building in Iowa. Within the past decade, Story County has installed geothermal systems in the new construction of two buildings and replaced chillers and cooling towers in an existing building with geothermal technology. The results, as of 2007, are an annual energy savings of over 40 percent and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of more than 4 million pounds per year.

But Story County and Climate Communities need national legislation to ensure that climate change and global warming

issues can be effectively dealt with here and by leaders at all levels, especially local.

Local governments are asking the Senate to quickly pass S. 2191 and to include us in the solution. Now is the time.

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