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Letter -- Can-do spirit will pull us through

Monday, July 3, 2006

By Will Steger

As a Minnesotan I am proud of our state's can-do spirit. It helps gives us the ability to overcome challenges that may seem impossible. When I was a kid this spirit is what first inspired me to be an arctic explorer and today it pushes me to keep venturing to this fascinating place.

This spirit also compels me to take a stand in the face of a crisis. And right now we there is a crisis brewing over the future of the arctic. Global warming is destroying the arctic.

Unfortunately this isn't speculation or a theory, over the past 20 years I have seen it with my own eyes. As an explorer I have seen first hand how glaciers that seemed so vast and imposing have shrunk or disappeared in a short amount of time.

The connection between climate change and melting ice caps is very simple. Right now pollution from factories and cars around the world is collecting in our atmosphere and increasing the Earth's temperature. These rising temperature are causing the pack ice to melt in the arctic.

The effects of climate change aren't confined to the arctic. Here in the United States climate change means more intense hurricanes, longer droughts, and other potentially catastrophic changes to our weather in the years ahead. In Minnesota, climate change will bring hotter summers, heavier blizzards, and the potential for flooding from more driving rain storms.

Although climate change is a serious threat, there is still time to take action. Dealing with this challenge, which may seem impossible, holds many great opportunities for Minnesota farmers, workers, and businesses.

So what can we do to protect the arctic from the effects of climate change? The best way to combat this problem is for Congress to put a limit on carbon -- which is the biggest cause of climate change -- while allowing industry flexibility in how they make the reductions.

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Agri News
2005

The legislation would open markets because it would spur the private sector to invest in new sources of energy that don't give off large amounts of greenhouse gas pollution, such as ethanol and wind power. The results would be greater energy security for America, less pollution, and less destabilizing climate change.

Recently I toured the state with the Minnesota Natural Legacy Campaign -- a group dedicated to raising awareness on the need to combat climate change -- and met farmers who would benefit from increased demand for the corn and soybeans they grow that would be used to produce ethanol and biodiesel, or the revenue from wind turbines on their land, or methane digesters producing energy at their dairy farms.

In addition to spurring demand for ethanol, under a cap on greenhouse gas emissions many analysts believe wind power would be a big area of investment- bringing high tech, high wage jobs to Minnesota.

Right now foreign companies are getting a windfall of new investment to develop energy efficient technologies, because most industrialized countries have already capped greenhouse gas emissions. Minnesota businesses can get in on the action if the United States joins the effort to limit greenhouse gas pollution.

There is no denying climate change is a threat we have to face. But now is the time for us to summon our can-do spirit and face this crisis, confident that we have strength and the resources to overcome another new challenge.

Steger is a well-known arctic explorer who lives in Minnesota

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