

## Report

### Nebraska Youth Summit on Climate

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#### Summary

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016, over 65 youth came to the Nebraska State Capitol for a day-long climate advocacy training session. The youth were invited by Sen. Ken Haar, a longtime advocate for climate change solutions in the state legislature. The idea for the youth summit grew out of the series of eight sector-based roundtable discussions on the impacts of climate change to key Nebraska sectors held in the fall of 2015 and hosted by the University of Nebraska. Sen. Haar realized the need to bring the voices of youth—who will feel acutely the impacts of climate change by mid-century-- to the table.

#### Implications of Climate Change for Nebraska

Dr. Donald Wilhite, Professor of Applied Climate Science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, gave a presentation detailing the current and projected impacts of climate change to the state.

#### A Message of Hope

Anna Wishart, current Lincoln Airport Authority Board chair and candidate for the legislature, gave an inspiring message. She was the youngest elected member of the Airport Authority at the time of the election. She described how the experiences she has had with Nebraska farmers, ranchers and citizens give her hope for tackling the challenges of climate change.

#### What Climate Change Means to Nebraska's Youth

The attendees broke up into small groups to articulate why they are motivated to work on climate change and what it means to them. In answer to the question of what inspired them to attend today's event, some of the following ideas were shared:

- Love for the great outdoors translated into an urge to preserve it for future generations.
- Signed up at school because it's a pressing issue and we have to be informed and empowered for our turn to step up and take over leadership.
- Needs to know more about what actions she could take and how to convince others to take those actions as well.
- One climatology/meteorology student mentions how his department gets lots of calls from the media, and discusses how it's important to educate the public and to recognize key implications from various sectors both public and private.
- Involvement in Future Farmers of America and his upbringing on a farm – and farmers' duty to “feed the world” – led him to this Summit through his local Extension office.
- Traveling a lot with his father, and seeing some incredibly polluted places as well as some very serene natural places.

- What she does shouldn't affect others, and aims to reduce her own footprint and live a lifestyle that doesn't drive climate change that affects others.
- Loves the outdoors and says he can't imagine living on a planet where people don't respect nature and it helped him become very passionate about this issue.
- Wants her children and grandchildren to be able to see the same natural wonders that she enjoys, so while she's done a lot of private sector work on climate change, she wants to know more about the public side of it.
- Climate change can cause great social displacement, and since many of the more vulnerable people have nowhere else to go, she wants to stand up for them.
- Has family in the wind energy industry and he appreciates how that helps move us toward conserving the outdoors he appreciates so much.

The groups discussed action items that should be taken to address climate change:

- **Education.** The public needs to learn of the scientific consensus on the issue. There is no doubt about climate change, as has been commonly portrayed in the media. People need to know they can make a difference. People need to understand the link between population growth and climate change. Elected officials have shown an ignorance on the issue; need to educate them. Young as well as old need to be educated; local and personal impacts are going to be far more effective than distant ones. Importance of staying on a positive message.
- **Advocacy.** Encourage people to run for office, testify in front of legislative committees and hold elected officials to higher standards. Grassroots movements are important- they show how an issue affects a community. Need to counter the individualistic messages in American culture and show that we are all in this together and that we are a coalition of communities. A pair of students talked about speaking truth to power. They noted there are powerful institutions aligned against us. What we need to do is to harness our youthful hope and parlay it into resilience against such forces and show by our actions that we mean what we say. It should also be pointed out that climate change is not a white people problem. It's difficult to communicate across cultural barriers sometimes, but we need to make greater outreach efforts to breach those barriers – especially considering that many of the most vulnerable are nonwhite, poor, and often disenfranchised.
- **Business impact.** The way to influence corporations/industry is to point out how much money they stand to lose by doing nothing or to point out how much more they could earn by being ahead of the curve. Fill out surveys, and give corporations feedback. Although the globalization of the economy is driving climate change, we can also harness globalization to solve the problem, especially by changing how/when we transport goods.
- **Behavior change.** We all need to make mindful choices in saving energy, water and carbon. Tailor messages to specific sectors; need to amplify the voices of the vulnerable. Shouldn't underestimate the benefit of making climate change solutions seem *cool* (i.e., Tesla motors). Our purchasing options have power too- support green products. Bike sharing and other community programs are great innovations. The increasing adoption of the American way of life around the world is ecologically destructive. More meat consumption, more electronics consumption, more trade, etc.

## **Keynote: Jordan Eversley, Hip Hop Caucus**

Jordan gave an inspiring keynote address in which he described his path out of inner-city Chicago and into climate advocacy. He described a multi-city tour he took with the Hip Hop Caucus which opened his eyes to the inter-connected issues of climate change, social justice and racial inequality in cities like New Orleans, Detroit, Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia and Ferguson, Missouri. Over and over again he saw vulnerable communities at risk from pollution and environmental disaster. He encouraged the youth to stand up, get connected with local musicians and influencers, and to use their voices for change.

## **Breakout Groups:**

After lunch, the students rotated through four discussion topics as follows:

**Session #1** – *Power-Mapping for Advocacy*, with Chelsea Johnson, Nebraska League of Conservation Voters, and Adam Fenton, Friends Committee on National Legislation

**Session #2** – *The Legislative Process*, with Nebraska Senator Ken Haar

**Session #3** – *Talking to your Legislator*, with Ken Winston, office of Sen. Ken Haar

**Session #4** – *Messaging*, with Jordan Eversley, Hip Hop Caucus

**Session #1** – Power-mapping, with Chelsea Johnson and Adam Fenton

- Chelsea and Adam explained the concept of power-mapping as an advocacy tool. It is a process of identifying who in your community has power, and how to influence them. It is a process of figuring out who you need to influence in order to create the change you want to see.
  - Identify who makes the decisions on your issue, and where you have or can build grassroots power to influence those decision makers. Power mapping is an ongoing process, and as you bring people in you realize how to organize to have greater power.
- *Know Your Legislator*
  - Learn their biographies
  - Know their districts
  - Discover their policy interests
  - Learn their community interests
  - Find your shared interests
  - Whose opinions do they trust?
  - Do you know people in common?
- The group divided into small groups to create a practice power map. Topics that were brought up include the Pope's Encyclical on climate change, a Black Lives Matter rally, the need to be open to setting up cold conversation with state senators.
- Major component of organizing is power mapping to coalition building. Think about how to form a coalition to represent those who you might think are not your allies. Different sides working together can create change.

## **Session #2 – *The Legislative Process*, with Nebraska Senator Ken Haar**

- Sen. Haar explained that every vote matters. He was elected in 2008 by just 20 out of 16,000 votes cast. Sen. Heath Mello is the chair of the Appropriations Committee and was elected by one vote of the members of the Legislature.
- The legislative process: every bill has a hearing, once a bill gets out of committee, it goes to General File, then Select File, and then Final Reading, then to Governor, who can sign or veto it. If it is vetoed, it takes 30 votes to override. 60 days is not a long time (or 90 next year) to make it through this cycle.
- Presented a list of the Climate and Energy Bills in the 2016 Legislature. Emphasized that your state senators need to hear from you on these climate change issues and bills. When there is a groundswell, it does help affect change.
- There are several steps where youth could be involved. First, youth can come to a committee hearing and testify. There is a huge variety of bills, and nobody knows everything about every bill. Sen. Haar encouraged them not to be afraid. The most important thing about climate bills is that it affects YOU. Most of the people in the chamber won't live to see the year 2050, but you will. So speak up! Also, get to know your state senator, and talk to them about your concerns. Nobody is going to throw you out of their office; we're nice people. We might disagree, but you shouldn't be afraid.
- Nebraska issues and individuals stopped the Keystone XL pipeline. Thanks to these organizations and coalitions, we can help promote important sustainability issues.
- A student asked what are other state senators' responses around climate change and renewable energy? Not a lot of minds get changed on the floor, but a lot do get affected through one-on-one. We map where the votes exist, and based on knowledge of these votes, we set up meetings to help educate about climate change.

## **Session #3 – *Talking to your Legislator*, with Ken Winston**

- The most important thing is to get involved and stay involved. Young voices can be very effective.
- It is very important to be respectful when you communicate with a legislator, even if your disagreement is strenuous. Be factual, have good information, do your homework—but you don't need to be an expert. It is a good idea to plan your remarks ahead of time.
- Tips: be focused, brief, and researched to have effective messaging during your meetings. After the meeting, be persistent and follow-up, ask for a commitment.
- Things to avoid: arguments, subjects that you don't understand, losing your cool, conceding on subjects that you came to discuss.
- Anything less than a commitment is not a commitment, politicians are experts at waffling.
- When talking with a senator or staff member, stay focused by having no more than three talking points. Ensure that when you interact, you are calm and patient in discussing your issue. By doing that, you build bridges instead of burning it. The next time you may be able to discuss more of those difficult topics.
- Kim Morrow: Elected leaders read letters to the editor as a litmus test, so you can use that as a way to influence. Staffers have Google Alerts that show when state senators' names appear in print. May 6 was a torrential downpour with 9 inches of rain in a 24-hour period.

This was an extreme weather event that was exacerbated by climate change. I returned home from DC to this climate disaster, and was frustrated that US Senator Deb Fischer’s aide wouldn’t recognize that climate change is a challenge for Nebraska. I sat down and wrote an editorial, and named Sen. Fischer and knew that this was a risk. I primarily wanted to call this issue to attention, and this is an effective way to do this.

- Ken Winston: There are times when it may be necessary to be more confrontational (i.e., demonstrations, marches, etc.), especially when the policy makers aren’t paying attention.
- *Tips for Effective Meetings*
  - Make introductions, make clear who are constituents
  - Provide brief, clear statements
  - Personal stories
  - Provide local context to the extent possible
  - Support your case with facts
  - Listen carefully to your legislator’s responses
  - Ask for their support
- *Practice role-playing*

**Session #4 – Messaging**, with Jordan Eversley from the Hip Hop Caucus

Delivering a Winning Message

- The most effective messages are bold, clear, and concise. They establish a link between you and your intended audience. A campaign has delivered a successful message if people feel that their self-interests are connected to the interests of the campaign.
- “Politics is not about left, right, or center. It is about speaking to the concerns and circumstances of people’s lives.” - Paul Wellstone
- Importance of connecting with audiences in message development: A message can be effective only if it is grounded in the experiences and circumstances of its intended audience. A good message will focus on values that are shared between the campaign and its audience.
- Elements of an Effective Message:
  - Credible. It is factually accurate, provides information to back up assertions, and is delivered by people or groups that are trusted on the subject.
  - Clear and Concise. No one will remember a ten-point program.
  - Connects. A good message connects with a person’s interests and values, starting with what a person already knows and thinks, and moving them to where you want them to be.
  - Communicates Our Values.

Exercise: Message Box

What we are saying about ourselves	What they are saying about themselves
What we are saying about them	What they are saying about us

*A message should always reflect our values and the values of the community, and call on supporters to take action.*

### Common themes

There were several common themes in all four presentations, including the importance of getting involved, the need to communicate effectively and respectfully, the need to be credible and the need to connect one's interests and values with those of their target audience.

### Press Conference

The day concluded with a press conference in the Capitol Rotunda. Eight youth spoke at the podium about why climate change is important to them.

### Attendees

Because many of the attendees were minors, we include only the cities and schools/organizations from which they came:

City	School
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln	University of Nebraska- Lincoln
Lincoln	University of Nebraska- Lincoln
Lincoln	Lincoln High School
Seward	Concordia University Nebraska
Aurora	Nebraska Wesleyan University
Lincoln	Science Focus Program/Southeast
Omaha	Creighton
Hastings	Hastings High School
Omaha	Omaha North High Magnet School
Lincoln	UNL
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Omaha	Creighton Prep
Florissant	Creighton University
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Grand Island	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Omaha	University of Nebraska Omaha
Omaha	University of Nebraska- Lincoln
Lincoln	LPS Science Focus Program
Tekamah	Tekamah-Herman
St. Louis	Creighton University
Plattsmouth	Plattsmouth High School
Crete	Doane College

Lincoln	UNL
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Omaha	The University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Lincoln	Homeschool
Lincoln	Lincoln High
Omaha	Creighton University
Lincoln	Graduated from UNL-May 2015
Lincoln	Lincoln High School
Sumner	Sumner-Eddyville-Miller
Elkhorn	University of Nebraska at Omaha
Lincoln	UNL
Lincoln	Lincoln Northeast
Lincoln	Post graduate
Lincoln	Lincoln High School
Hastings	University of Nebraska - Kearney
Lincoln	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Lincoln	UNL
Hastings	Hastings Senior High
Omaha	Creighton University
Phillips	Aurora Public Schools
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Bellevue	Creighton University
Lincoln	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Herman	Tekamah-Herman
Grand Island	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Omaha	Creighton Preparatory School
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln	Lincoln High School / The Career Academy
Ashland	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Omaha	College of Saint Mary
Lincoln	Pius X High School
Omaha	Creighton University
Lincoln	Lincoln High
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Seward	Concordia University
Lincoln	Lincoln Southwest High School
Kearney	Sumner-Eddyville-Miller
Omaha	Omaha North High School
Crete	Doane College
Lincoln	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln	UNL

Omaha	Creighton Prep
Lincoln	Lincoln East High School
York	York High School
Lincoln	UTHS
Plattsmouth	Plattsmouth High School
Lincoln	Lincoln North Star
Lincoln	Lps Science Focus Program
Grand Island	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Rosalie	Bancroft-Rosalie
Omaha	Omaha Central High School
Omaha	Elkhorn South High School
Crete	Doane College
South Africa	
South Africa	
Organizer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Organizer	Nebraska Legislature Staff
Organizer	District 21 Nebraska Legislature
Organizer	Lincoln High School
Organizer	Lincoln High School
Organizer	Nebraska League of Conservation Voters
Organizer	Nebraska Legislature Staff
Organizer	School of Natural Resources University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Organizer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Organizer	Nebraska Legislature Staff
Organizer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Speaker	Hip Hop Caucus
Speaker	School of Natural Resources University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Speaker	Lincoln Airport Authority Candidate for State Legislature
Speaker	Hip Hop Caucus
Volunteer	Pound Middle School
Volunteer	EnviroRun
Volunteer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Volunteer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Volunteer	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Volunteer	Drought Mitigation Center University of Nebraska - Lincoln