UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

April 25, 2014
Sonia Fernandez

Facing the Elephant in the Room

Climate change is a scary thing. The kind of chaos it predicts — environmental, economical and political — is enough to strike fear into the hearts of everyone — from the staunch environmentalist concerned with its impacts on the Earth, to the industrialist fearing for the bottom line, to politicians anxious about their constituencies. Because of its complexity, uncertainty and the constantly emerging figures, people in decision-making positions are often overwhelmed with misinformation, skewed data, partial facts, doomsday scenarios and, on the other end of the spectrum, downplay and outright denial.

However, according to reports recently released by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), at the conclusion of a seven-year endeavor to sort through a multitude of peer-reviewed studies on the issue, one thing is clear: We can't wait any longer to start mitigating climate change. If we want to avoid the domino effect of environmental chaos that climate scientists predict will occur if we don't rein in the greenhouse gas emissions and other global warming practices, the global community needs to get on board, and now. But how can we implement this much-needed effort?

If you ask NextGen Climate founder and president Tom Steyer, the answer lies in making climate change a priority for American policy and politics, something he's been working on for years. It's quite a feat, given opposition to change throughout the political system, and vested interests that influence policy decisions down the line, as well as very real economic concerns that come with making big changes.

In an Energy Leadership Lecture titled “Confronting Climate Change: a Political Reality Check,” Steyer will discuss the very real urgency and complexity of mitigating climate change. As a leader in the struggle to avert the consequences of climate change, Steyer will address the intersection of technology and renewable energy, policy and politics in effecting change on this critical issue.

Steyer’s lecture begins at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, March 6, at UC Santa Barbara’s Pollock Theatre. Admission is free and open to the public. The lecture is hosted by the UCSB Institute for Energy Efficiency.

An investor, philanthropist and advanced energy advocate, Steyer is an active participant in politics to promote both environmental protection and economic development. In California he was heavily involved in successful efforts to close a tax loophole for out-of-state corporations and create jobs in the state, as well as defeating efforts by out-of-state oil companies to dismantle AB32, California’s law that requires reductions in greenhouse gas emissions throughout the state.

In addition to founding NextGen Climate, Steyer and his wife, Kat Taylor, founded One PacificCoast Bank and Foundation with the intention of creating a bank and nonprofit that was both financially sustainable and socially responsible. The couple has also founded the Energy Sciences Institute at Yale University and two renewable energy research institutions at Stanford University, where Steyer serves as its board of trustees’ vice-chair. Steyer also founded Advanced Energy Economy, an association of businesses that work to make energy secure, clean and affordable and Next Generation, which addresses energy and children’s policy issues.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.