

Finding Hope Where You Are

I stand before you today a hopeful warrior for our planet.

For the past 100 days we have seen and heard day after day threats to undue recent progress put in place to alter the course of climate change. Like you, I have felt my heart sink with each pronouncement and penstroke. And I am astonished and saddened to watch the cheers that still come from many who continue to put the health of our planet and the fate of their own offspring at grave risk.

Yet I am learning each day that despite the chaos and calamity we see playing out on our newsfeed and TVs each day, all is not lost. You are here and I am here because in fact hope is a living thing that propels us forward.

Desmond Tutu taught us that “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

I see the rays of hope in the dark everywhere I turn. It’s taking place in increments big and small each day all around us when we look to see it. And perhaps it will take this chaos to compel a majority into motion, to truly change a way of life we have become not just accustomed to but addicted to. To discover, create and invent new ways of living that bring us closer one another and closer to our Mother Earth.

Each day my work at Prairie Rivers Network brings me in touch with people across Illinois, the Midwest and the nation who are finding ways to propel meaningful change to

Our state’s new Future Energy Jobs Act puts Illinois ahead of nearly every other state, giving us the tools to transition our local economies to a clean energy future, diversifying economic opportunities while we reduce our greenhouse gas output. The more we use renewables like

solar, the more demand we create, the cheaper and more accessible the technology becomes, opening the door for jobs.

But Illinois also has another vast weapon to fight climate change and it lies right beneath our feet. We have the ability to restore the carbon we have released from the soil into the atmosphere through farming by regenerating the health of our precious soils. New diverse crops like the perennial wheat Kernza and nut trees like chestnuts and hazelnuts not only capture and store carbon, they shade the soil, hold water and nutrients where they are needed and feed the microbes we all need to survive, while providing abundant, nutrient dense food. They provide shelter for wildlife, which are now threatened to potential extinction and ensure clean water flows across our land and through our rivers. Regenerative farming practices mean we don't have to use chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides and herbicides that are killing bees and wildlife. Growing deeply rooted plants that provide a continuous cover above the soil will protect our soils from the twin threats of flood and drought, and make them more productive.

Our abundant rich soils are in fact our secret weapon to fight climate change, with the potential to store 50-75% of current global carbon emissions.

A commitment to increasing carbon stored in farmland by just .4 percent per year across the globe could halt annual increases in carbon dioxide emissions. Countries including France are making this commitment already. I'm proud to say that Prairie Rivers Network is working with farmers across Illinois to shift to these practices.

But shifts to green energy and regenerative farming won't happen without us. Here in Illinois, we are and must continue to be climate leaders. We must work together to ensure that these kinds of changes

can happen and can be successful and are available statewide and affordable for everyone.

As voters, we must continue to call attention to policies at all levels that threaten to propel us toward the most dire climate consequences and demand policies that allow the green economy to flourish.

As consumers we can demand access to diverse locally grown foods that are raised with regenerative practices—not just without chemicals and pesticides but in ways that regenerate the soil and store carbon. If you farm or garden, learn to incorporate living roots in the soil year round. Plant trees and native perennials—as many as you can, wherever you can. In this community and across the state, we can demand green energy opportunities and work to increase energy efficiency and conservation at work and at home so that we are shifting quickly from coal while at the same time using less energy overall.

Today we come together to raise our collective voice, but tomorrow and each day after we must act together and with intention. We can't wait. The Earth can't wait. We must use our voices each day not just to make clear that we expect our governments to act on climate. We must be climate savvy consumers and thoughtful conservers of our energy, land and water resources. We must commit to come together, learn from each other and hold each other to account. And we must commit ourselves to raise the next generation to use its ingenuity to protect and restore the Earth, to leave her in a better state than we have.

The path is ours. We have the tools in our hands today. While the power of our leadership may extend beyond the current horizon of our sight, we have the power and illumination of hope to guide the way. Please join the journey. The Earth can't wait.

