

Step Up the Fight

McKibben to speak on the climate movement

Environmentalist, educator and author Bill McKibben will be speaking on the UO campus Oct. 30 on "Building the Climate Movement." McKibben is the author of 11 books, including his most recent, *Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community*. He has also written for *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, *Outside* and *Grist Magazine*, among others.

McKibben is in the midst of organizing "Step It Up 2007 — National Day of Climate Action," which will take place Nov. 3, 2007. McKibben took some time out from his hectic schedule preparing for Step It Up 2007 to talk to *EW*.

You're credited with bringing the notion of climate change to a general audience through your first book, *The End of Nature*, in 1990, why do you think it took so long for climate change to become an issue?

I think because I wasn't a very good writer, I don't know (laughs). You know it took a long time because there are powerful vested interests on the other side who wanted to keep it

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from becoming an issue. And because there's a lot of inertia in human affairs, especially in America, where we're very wedded to the heavy consumption of fossil fuels. So really most people didn't exactly want to hear it. And it's taken 20 years and immense effort from all kinds of people, most noticeably Al Gore.

And it's taken the Earth demonstrating exactly what the hell is going on. Unfortunately the Earth is not going to start letting up with the demonstrations just because we start getting it. It's scary to have a week where you turn on the news and there's wildfire in Los Angeles, extended drought in Southeast, extended drought in the Southwest, there's record melt of arctic ice, on and on and on. You want to say enough already; we get the message! In fact, we've got to do something, serious and fast, if we have any hope of slowing down this kind of stuff.

As someone who has been very outspoken on environmental issues, what do you think about some of the recent cases in Oregon many are calling "the Green Scare" and the effects on activism?

From my point of view we need to be very activist. We need to push hard, and I've been arrested in non-violent civil disobedience and it wouldn't surprise me if I were arrested that way again. But that means being very out in the open, in front putting one's body on the line, being willing to face the consequences. For my money, property destruction is not a useful tactic at all. The problem that we're fighting, especially with global warming, is much too large to be materially affected by any one action and by now the record has shown it's become clear that it backfires on everybody that's trying to do other kinds of work.

Can you speak a little bit about the "Step It Up" campaign?

This was a thing that I started with six friends of mine, college students, last year. Sort of in an unlikely fashion, without any money or organization, we managed to pull off about 1,400 protests across all 50 states last April. And we're doing a second round of them this time, aiming for somewhat fewer and somewhat larger protests. We're trying very hard to get politicians more directly involved, to send a pretty straightforward message to these guys to stop saying the right things about climate change and actually do something.

Your writing is described as "sometimes having a spiritual bent." What role does religion or spirituality have in something like fighting climate change?

I'm Methodist, and not much of a theologian, although many years ago I wrote a book about climate change and the Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible. I'm a Sunday school teacher but that's not particularly a high theological post.

In just basic political terms at this point, faith communities have a very important role to play, that they are starting to play, in becoming political actors in this. Just as with the civil



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rights movement, it's going to take the active involvement of those communities to get done the political change that needs doing.

You may be speaking largely to an academic audience on the UO campus through the Humanities Center. What effects can the work of scholars in "the ivory tower" have on the environment?

This is *the* issue that will put the modern university to the test. Unlike other things, climate change is such a huge problem, that it requires response from every discipline represented at the university to try to make sense of it. We need, desperately, sociologists, economists, maybe above all we need political scientists, we need engineers. Everybody is represented there.

More to the point, we need them to actually talk to each other and work together on specific projects. It's starting to happen. It's very good to see it starting to happen and certainly it's a defining moment for higher education. This is the classic problem that needs every smart person we can get but needs them working together, not endlessly dividing every problem down into the narrowest of sub-disciplines.

McKibben will speak Tuesday, Oct. 30 at 7:30 pm in the EMU Ballroom on the UO campus as the Luther S. and Dorothy Cecilia Cressman Lecturer in the Humanities. The event is put on by the Oregon Humanities Center. For more information on the lecture, contact jheydon@uoregon.edu or call 346-3934.

For information on UO's Nov. 3 "Step It Up" rally, please email uosurvivalcenter@yahoo.com or call (503) 438-0738 to reach Jesse Hough and Tara Burke.

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