

Mrs. Zhou Goes To Washington: Scientist, mother seeks real climate protection for her 5-year-old

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Arlington, MA - Last night Maggie Zhou, an Arlington mother with a 5 year-old daughter, boarded an all-night bus to Washington, DC to attend Monday's U.S. Senate hearing on climate change policy. Zhou is paying for the trip with her own money because "I felt I had to be in the same room with the people who are going to make a decision that will determine the kind of world my daughter will live in."

Two years ago Zhou, who is a geneticist by training began to get concerned about what she was hearing about global warming. Soon she found herself digging into scientific papers and questioning climate scientists. The more she learned, the more she became convinced that much more had to be done to protect the Earth's climate. She used the scientific understanding she acquired to open a dialogue with national environmental groups and some of the leaders of the climate protection movement.

Zhou's research led her to believe that public policy is lagging far behind the scientific evidence. Before boarding the overnight bus to Washington, she commented that "The science shows that we may have a critical window of only a few years to take action before planetary processes take the matter out of humanity's control and bring on catastrophic warming. Congress needs to get this right now if children like my own are to have a future."

Zhou has been volunteering for a Secure Green Future project which put public policy questions on the ballot in 11 Massachusetts House districts in 2008. The questions called for more urgent action to address climate change with green jobs programs. When they passed with an 81% yes vote, it convinced Zhou that the people were far out ahead of the politicians when it came to the need to green the economy.

Zhou feels that the recently passed energy bill (known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act - ACES) is far from a serious answer to the threat of climate catastrophe. "This bill does as much harm as good, and in many ways it ties our hands by doing so many favors for the fossil fuel lobby," Zhou observed. According to Zhou, "Political feasibility is clashing with scientific reality. I want to ask Congress to sponsor a nationally televised, thorough debate on climate policy by the most respected scientific and policy analysts, so everyone can understand what science tells us and what politics must deliver. This is important because the lives of our children are at stake. We can't let this critical legislation be shaped by behind-the-scenes lobbying. The debate needs to be widely viewed and heard, accessible online and on cable, and leave viewers with a clear understanding of the pros and cons of different approaches to climate protection. Once we get past the false claims and misunderstandings, the political reality will change."

Zhou notes that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office agrees with most economists and prominent scientists including NASA climatologist James Hansen, that revenue neutral carbon tax – coupled with equal dividends for all, or income/payroll bonuses – is far superior to the complicated and fraud-prone cap-and-trade scheme which Congress is pursuing. "But the fairest and most effective solutions are not even on the table" lamented Zhou.

According to Jill Stein, another SGF volunteer who is a physician and a mother of two, "Maggie is amazing in her ability to absorb the scientific complexities and find the right questions to ask. If we only had a hundred mothers like her joining the debate, Congress would move in a different direction."

Added Zhou, "In going to Washington I hope to meet some of the people with whom I've only talked to by email up to now. I want to tell them that Congress can't treat this as just another piece of legislation to be shaped by the usual lobbying. Putting a price on carbon seems like an abstract policy issue. But I think it may be the best hope for our children's future. In a town where money talks, I can only hope that someone in

Congress will listen to what I'm trying to say."

Secure Green Future is a project of the Massachusetts Coalition for Healthy Communities.

Further information on ACES and on climate science can be found at <http://www.securegreenfuture.org>

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