On Saturday, January 18th, Northfield, MN will host its first community-wide discussion on the subject of climate change. Meteorologist and entrepreneur Paul Douglas will be the keynote speaker beginning at 9:30 a.m. at St. Olaf College with a talk entitled, “Climate Change: Natural Cycle or Troubling Trend?” Attendees are encouraged to bring ideas, questions and concerns to contribute to the important discussions at this event.

According to Meteorologist Paul Douglas, “Healthy skepticism is an attribute, a necessary coping skill in a time of scams, hackers and endless corporate hype. I was initially skeptical of climate change in the 1980s and early 90s, but by the end of the 90s I was seeing some inexplicable and unnerving changes showing up on the weather maps I was studying on a daily basis. Something had changed. Patterns were shifting, with an apparent increase in the frequency and intensity of weather extremes, a trend that accelerated during the first decade of the 21st century. Was I imagining these changes, or were they real? There was no satisfactory meteorological explanation, so I dug into peer-reviewed climate science, and discovered, over a period of years, that climate theory had, in fact, become a meteorological reality. I started talking about these trends publically, to considerable push-back and skepticism. Many people simply didn’t want to hear that our climate could be changing, that our actions (burning fossil fuels), might have consequences, with increasingly volatile and chaotic weather just one of many signals showing up across the planet.

As an entrepreneur I am beholden to data. If I see the business world as I wish it to be, and ignore the reality of facts on the ground, I will quickly go out of business. The data is the data, the facts are the facts. That’s how I’ve approached the science of climate change. Somewhere between utopian pipe-dreams that technology will save us, and the apocalyptic visions of imminent destruction, gloom and doom, is the truth.

I don’t pretend to have the answer key, but I strongly suspect there are solutions to this vexing challenge. On January 18th I’ll talk about my conversion from skeptic - to acknowledging the science. As a businessman I view climate change as a long-term threat, and an opportunity to reinvent not only America’s energy infrastructure, but jump-start innovation and reinvent our economy in the process. As a Christian I see a spiritual and moral imperative to speak out, and encourage others to take action. We have the technological prowess and risk-taking entrepreneurs capable of providing viable solutions for mitigation and adaptation. The only thing lacking is political will, especially in Congress. Climate scientists have spoken. Will we sit on our hands, kick the can down the road, or take pragmatic, common-sense steps to address the ultimate ecological risk-management challenge of our time?”

“Given the scientific consensus and the changes we can see with our own eyes, we understand the need to act on climate change,” said Ellen Anderson, Senior Advisor to the Governor on
Energy & Environment, Minnesota Department of Agriculture. “This challenge also creates a great opportunity for Minnesota to lead the way. Everyone needs to be a part of the solution, like Northfield is.”

Spokesperson for the Northfield event Alan Anderson said, “Fundamental science tells us we are on a path which will significantly and negatively change the climate for future generations. Concern for my two little granddaughters motivates me to learn as much as I can about the problem and possible solutions, and then to do my part to get those solutions implemented . . . for kids’ sake. If we understand the negative impacts of climate change, the next questions is: Are we willing to make any sacrifices now, for future generations’ sake? I hope everyone’s answer is YES!”

A series of breakout sessions covering a spectrum of topics will run the gamut on this multifaceted discussion, challenging each of us to make progress on the rippling effects that have top scientists, meteorologists, ecologist, and the like, all working to unearth and understand. Topics to be covered at the Northfield Area Climate Summit include: the science of climate change, business perspectives on climate and energy, the impact of climate change on Minnesota’s economy and natural resources, inter-faith perspectives on climate change, climate food and land, climate, floods and stormwater management.

The Summit will take place at St. Olaf College, Buntrock Commons from 8 a.m. -3:45 p.m. this Saturday. The event is free and open to Northfield residents and the surrounding vicinity but registration is required. Be a part of a more sustainable future. Homeowners to students to farmers to businesses and institutions can take practical steps toward making a stronger commitment in environmental stewardship for our area. In addition to the breakout sessions and discussions, a Community Idea and Action Fair will be held with nearly 30 informational exhibits on state and local projects, services and campaigns relating to climate change and sustainable energy practices.

The Northfield Area Climate Summit is organized by a grassroots committee of Northfield area residents including representatives of local civic groups, faith organizations, sustainability departments at both St Olaf and Carleton College, local teachers, high school students, civic leaders, college students and professors. For more information about the Northfield Area Climate Summit, go to http://northfieldclimatesummit.org/. For ongoing sustainability efforts go to the Greater Northfield Sustainabilities Collaborative at http://www.northfieldsustainability.org/.

###

Contact the Northfield Area Climate Summit’s PR contact Alan Anderson at northfieldclimatesummit@gmail.com or 507-301-4673.