

Cathy Becker

Our First Stand: Save Social Security and Health Care

Sunday, January 15, 2017

4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Plumbers and Pipefitters Union

1250 Kinnear Road, Columbus, Ohio 43212

This rally was organized by the group Ohio Revolution in response to calls from Sen. Bernie Sanders to hold rallies to support Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and Social Security under the threat by Republicans to do away with all of these programs.

Because of my involvement with the Bernie campaign in Ohio, I am on the board of Ohio Revolution. When the organizers of this rally first started talking about it, I told them I could probably get a speaker from the Sierra Club to talk about climate change and public health. This is an example of how we can get climate change into the conversation in places where you don't normally hear about it, and I wanted to take advantage of that. I actually didn't think the organizers would go for it, but they loved the idea.

Unfortunately, I was not able to get Sierra Club interested in it. The last time I asked them to send a speaker to one of the Ohio Revolution events, a rally against the TPP at the statehouse, 12 people showed up. I was anticipating maybe 20 or 30 for this rally, and would have considered that a success. The Sierra Club director told me her staff can't speak at every event where they get asked, so I asked if I could speak there representing them, and she said yes.

That was not the end of my obstacles however. When I mentioned the event at the January meeting of the Sierra Club Central Ohio Group executive committee, which I sit on, the chair got really upset that I had not cleared it through him first. I had no idea I was supposed to clear it through him, since I was working with the Ohio state level Sierra Club, not the local group. The meeting got very tense, and I left pretty upset, considering that he represents himself as Sierra Club all the time in meetings with external audiences and doesn't ask anyone permission for anything. A Sierra Club staffer who was there told the Ohio director what happened, and she sent a very sternly worded email to the local group chair. After that I didn't have a problem.

Next, another obstacle presented itself to our entire endeavor. A woman in the community had organized a Columbus Women's March to be a sister march to the one in Washington, but she called her march for the week before, which was the same date as our rally. Puja, the rally organizer met with her to see if they could join forces. The answer was no. She wanted Ohio Revolution to pony up \$12,000 she had already spent for police protection during the march. We have held several marches and rallies in downtown Columbus and have never spent that kind of money on police protection. Of course Ohio Revolution could not come up with that kind of money, but we did move our rally time to 4:30 so that people could go to the march, then come to the rally. But that wasn't good enough for the local women's march organizer. She then tried to organize her own health care rally at the same time as ours, with hers at the Sheraton hotel where the march ended, which cost her another several thousand dollars.

That made us mad, but we didn't go public with any of this information. Instead, Puja organized an incredible rally, with former Congresswoman Mary Jo Kilroy and two state representatives as headliners. Both the Bernie organization Our Revolution and the Ohio Democratic Party sent

emails about our rally to their entire mailing list, with RSVP links. We were not sure how many were going to come to the rally, but we knew it would be a lot. Between the 300 who said they were interested on Facebook and the responses to the email announcements, we estimated there would be 350 people at the rally, and we were happy with that.

As it turned out, 850 people showed up. Fortunately the venue was large and there was standing room once all the seats were taken. I again wrote my remarks about climate change and the day before, using information from the CDC, American Public Health Association, and Columbus Public Health. I was extremely nervous knowing it was a large crowd, and am very glad I didn't know the entire crowd size before speaking. I practiced my talk out loud to myself seven times in my car before going in. I had wanted to practice it standing up and walking around, and get good enough at it that I didn't have to look at my notes, but I ran out of time for that.

I was again fairly early on the roster, which was good because people still had an attention span when I spoke. They were incredibly receptive. They clapped when I said the Sierra Club works for good paying clean energy jobs, and oohed when I said Columbus ranks 8th in the country for the urban heat island effect. I was told by several people that I did a good job and had a strong voice projection, even though I knew my papers that I was reading from were shaking a little bit because I was nervous. The entire rally was livestreamed, but I haven't looked at my part yet.

Unknown to me, Andy Chow of Ohio Statehouse News Bureau was in the audience and taping my talk. He did an overall [piece on the entire rally](#), plus a short piece [just on my part](#). He talked about climate change and public health, and quoted some of my speech. That was pretty amazing. I sent a link to that story back to the Sierra Club director, who sent it around to all the state and national staff. This was a great example of getting climate change into the public conversation, as it went to all public radio stations across the state.

Lots of attention came out of this rally. A [short video](#) I took from the speakers podium got 15,700 views. The [full livestream](#) got 16,700 views. [NBC4](#) interviewed Puja for a story. Many many people posted photos from the rally including [this set](#) taken by my husband. And there was a great rally graphic that I am still using as my Facebook page cover pic.



CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Good afternoon! My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I'm a volunteer with the Ohio Sierra Club.

The Sierra Club is the nation's oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with over 2 million members and supporters in the United States, and almost 35,000 members in Ohio.

The Ohio Chapter of the Sierra Club

- advocates for energy efficiency, renewable energy and public transit.
- defends Ohio's forests, state parks, and nature preserves.
- advocates for building a green infrastructure, regulating factory farms, and protecting Lake Erie and other watersheds across the state.
- And promotes the transition to a 21st century economy through creating millions of good-paying, long-standing, green energy jobs!

So why – you might be asking yourself – is the Sierra Club at a rally about Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act?? All these things we do are great, but what do they have to do with health care?

The answer is this: Climate and environment are inextricably linked to public health. Here are five ways to connect the dots.

Temperature extremes

We all know that it's getting hotter. Last year was the hottest year on record, breaking the record of the year before that, which broke the record of the year before that.

More people are hospitalized and die during heat waves, both from heat stroke itself, and from underlying conditions like heart disease and asthma.

This is particularly pronounced in cities, where urban heat islands caused by asphalt and concrete make it even hotter.

Columbus ranks 8th in the nation for the urban heat island effect. It can be up to 24 degrees hotter inside Columbus city limits than the surrounding countryside, according to a report by Climate Central.

Let's take air quality

Climate change increases ozone and particulate matter, two of the main ingredients for smog. Smog raises hospital admissions and increases premature deaths for people with asthma.

Health officials expect that increased ozone and particulates will result in up to 4,300 more premature deaths each year by 2050, with increased costs estimated at \$6.5 billion per year.

Although Columbus air quality has been improving, we are still ranked the 37th most polluted city in the nation for ozone by the American Lung Association. The more we allow climate change to take place, the harder it will be to keep improving our air.

On allergies

Warmer temperatures increase the flowering time of plants, which puts more pollen into the air. That makes people's allergies worse.

When both pollen levels and pollution levels are up at the same time, some people will have severe allergic reactions. That results in more hospitalizations, more premature deaths, and higher costs.

How about water quality?

Heavy rain events are up 37 percent in the Midwest since 1991. More frequent heavy storms lead to increased runoff from farm fields, resulting in toxic algae blooms such as those we have seen in Lake Erie and across Ohio.

Heavy rain and flash floods are the second deadliest weather-related hazard in the United States, accounting for about 98 deaths per year, according to the CDC.

Flooded buildings can result in mold contamination, leading to serious indoor air quality problems that make people sick.

And as if that is not enough, climate change increases the amount of bacteria found in seafood that causes diarrhea, infections, and sometimes even death.

Finally, a public health hazard you may not have thought about – **insects and ticks**

Changes in temperature, precipitation, and humidity are influencing the number and location of fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes that carry disease. Columbus Public Health is especially concerned about West Nile virus and Lyme disease.

These are five ways that climate change and environmental pollution affect public health. And who is most vulnerable? Columbus Public Health lists three groups:

- The poor, the very young and very old
- Those with mental and physical handicaps
- Those with chronic health conditions

In other words, the exact same people who depend on Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act!

It's no coincidence that the people trying to unravel all regulations on climate and environment are the same people taking a hammer to the health care that we need more than ever because of their climate policies!

It's a perfect storm of environment, politics and public health – and we have to stop it. That's why the Sierra Club is here, and why we are happy all of you are here too.

Even though the odds seem stacked against us right now, we can't give up. They may have the money and the power, but we have three things they don't.

- We have the people – public opinion is on our side.
- We have the principles – of standing up for the vulnerable who can't stand up for themselves.
- And we have the planet. That is worth fighting for!

References

American Public Health Association - Climate change fact sheets -
<https://www.apha.org/publications-and-periodicals/fact-sheets>

CDC - Climate Effects on Health - see navigation to the left -
<https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/default.htm>

Columbus Public Health presentation -
<https://www.columbus.gov/workarea/downloadasset.aspx?id=71679> (will
download a pdf)