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Group urges Obama to act on climate change

By Susan Essoyan

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-- ADVERTISEMENT -- The League of Women Voters is calling on President Barack Obama to think of his heritage in Hawaii and his legacy as he returns to Washington, D.C., today, and use his authority to set tough new standards to limit pollution from power plants.

"The president needs to move ahead forcefully right now to protect us against a warming planet," Elisabeth MacNamara, president of the League of Women Voters of the United States, said in a news conference call Friday. "He can set standards without a second-guessing Congress or a naysaying Supreme Court. In fact, the Supreme Court has already said that the administration can move forward under the Clean Air Act to cut this life-threatening pollution."

Along with the conference call, the league ran a full-page advertisement in today's Star-Advertiser asking the president to take action on climate change. Obama and his family leave Hawaii today after their Christmas vacation, which was interrupted when he flew back to the nation's capital for negotiations over a tax deal.

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"The Hawaii League of Women Voters is asking President Obama to remember his responsibility to the world, to our country and especially right now to his home state of Hawaii by taking action," said Beppie Sha-piro, president of the local organization, who also took part in the call. "If we fail to act, rising sea levels, superstorms and droughts will forever change these islands, our nation and the world."

A report issued last month by the Pacific Islands Regional Climate Assessment spotlighted indicators of climate change in Hawaii such as:

- » Higher average surface air temperatures, with the largest increases found at high altitudes.
- » Decreased groundwater discharge to streams over the past century.
- » More frequent and prolonged drought.
- » Habitat changes affecting native species.

"If we don't do something about climate change, the endangered species that we are going to be concerned about is us," MacNamara said. "Simply put, if President Obama doesn't do it, it won't get done. If the United States doesn't lead, the rest of the world cannot follow."

The report, "Climate Change and Pacific Islands: Indicators and Impacts," is part of the 2013 National Climate Assessment. Federal law requires a report to Congress and the president every four years on the status of climate change science and impacts.

Before being named the successor to U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, Lt. Gov. Brian Schatz highlighted the report when it was presented publicly last month.

"Climate change is real, and it's already having an impact on Hawaii and throughout the Pacific," Schatz said. "We islanders must make the necessary preparations for warmer, unstable weather. It will affect every aspect of our society and economy, including agriculture, real estate and tourism."

The issue was also at the top of Schatz's mind when he was introduced as the governor's pick for U.S. Senate, when he called climate change "the most urgent challenge of our generation."

There is little prospect of action in Congress on the issue, however, given the influence of fossil fuel interests, according to Lloyd Leonard, director of advocacy for the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization.

"While we would very much like Congress to move ahead, and every senator who has a concern should weigh in, realistically the only way this is going to happen is if President Obama uses the authority Congress has already given him to act under the Clean Air Act," Leonard said. "We're also asking members of Congress to work with him and do what must be done."

To see the Pacific Islands Regional Climate Assessment report, visit www.pacificrisa.org/project/pirca.

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