

Crowd grills McMorris Rodgers in Pullman

By CHELSEA EMBREE of the Tribune | Posted: Wednesday, May 4, 2016 12:00 am

PULLMAN - Her audience was small, but those in it were vocal about issues ranging from climate change to corporate funding of elections.

About 20 regional community members attended a town hall meeting Tuesday with U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., at the Pioneer Center here. The event was part of an all-day visit to Pullman that included meetings at Washington State University, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories and the Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport.

Virginia Lohr, a member of the Palouse region's Citizens' Climate Lobby, said climate change is happening faster than scientists predicted and is threatening national security.

"It's clear that regulations that we have are not doing what needs to be done," Lohr said. "The state of Washington's done a lot but ... we can't do it without the whole country and without the whole world. We need our representatives at a level higher than the state to be involved."

McMorris Rodgers said she is "still learning" and thinks it's important to be "good stewards" of natural resources like clean air and water.

"I think we need to make sure that we're moving forward in an effective way," she said. "I think it's important to recognize that we have brought down carbon emissions, without the federal government mandates, to pre-1992 levels."

The congresswoman said she's been a "champion" for hydropower, and technological advances make it possible to double the returns from the clean energy source without harming fish runs.

Caleb Pletcher, a WSU student, questioned how McMorris Rodgers could call herself a "champion" when she supported plans to defund parts of the Environmental Protection Agency.

McMorris Rodgers responded that the EPA needs to be held accountable, and the focus should be on results and outcomes rather than funding levels.



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McMorris Rodgers

"The EPA is not even holding themselves to the same standards and requirements that they expect (of) everyone else in this country," McMorris Rodgers said.

Pletcher also alleged McMorris Rodgers has accepted campaign funding from Super PACs and from financial services firm J.P. Morgan Chase. The congresswoman responded that clarification was necessary, adding that she did receive funding from political action committees formed of individuals, and individuals from J.P. Morgan Chase donated to her campaign.

But Simon Smith, who identified himself as a "local citizen," argued the distinction was a technicality.

"There is a difference between individuals that are contributing to my election ... versus corporate dollars going into a Super PAC where it's never disclosed," McMorris Rodgers said. "... You know every single person that gives to my re-election."

Smith alleged the congresswoman's donors have more access to her than a regular community member would, a sentiment that Pletcher echoed.

"I'm here now," McMorris Rodgers replied. "I publish my schedule. You can see where I'm going; you can join me if you like."

McMorris Rodgers said Tuesday that one of her top goals is to implement a process by which Congress has more oversight of government programs, starting with getting those programs before congress more frequently.

"There are hundreds of programs and agencies that haven't been reauthorized but continue to get funded as if everything is fine - without the accountability, without the oversight, without having to come before Congress and answer the questions," she said. "I'm seeking support for this legislation that would ensure that wouldn't just continue. In fact, if something isn't reauthorized, then it's a 10 percent cut every year."

Some programs would be eliminated as part of her plan, she said.

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