



Kim: I'm Kim Coble, I was born May 7th, 1957. Well, I've been at my current job one month.

Kim: I am the executive director for the Maryland League of Conservation Voters and prior to that, I was with a non-profit in DC for two years as the chief operating officer for an organization called US-Sif. And it's the forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment, than prior to that, I was with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation for 25 years.

Eve: How did you get to this chapter in your life?

Kim: Maybe backing up, I learned early in my career that I am far more motivated by making a difference than I am by making a living.

So, I've spent my whole career in non-profit work, and I've always found it really meaningful and I had a wonderful career with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and ultimately left there as a vice president of the policy and outreach work, very fulfilling. But I was ready for a change and ready to try something different.

The other thing was I was very interested in the role of the market and making are a better place. So, when the opportunity presented itself to go to US SIF, which is a small non-profit national that promote sustainable investing, I was really curious about it and really interested. So, I went there and did that a lot, learned a lot. And then recently was presented with the opportunity to run the Maryland League of Conservation Voters, which again is about making the world a better place. Using the nexus of conservation and politics. And I was pretty motivated in this day and age to try to work in that space, and see, we... I get some really good environmental conservation-minded people elected in Maryland, at the county state and federal levels.

It is a very important time. And we have the National Election in 2020, and then the state of Maryland goes through elections in 2022 and I think that combination of elections coming into it at this time, and was so much at stake, it's just critical. I just felt this is where I need to be putting on my time and energy, and pretty motivated to try to make a difference there I was raised by a mother and a father that really taught me a love of the outdoors. And so we spent a lot of time outdoors, primarily in the Pacific Northwest, camping and mountain climbing, and skiing, and I found a reverence there a peacefulness that a restorative sense, when I'm outdoors and that's really, I still draw on that to this day. I love it, I enjoy it, and I do believe it's worth protecting.

I actually, I did my graduate work in toxicology, which is human health, and the impact on human health, from toxic chemicals. So I think for me, the overlap between humans and the environment, is where I really thrive the... And that what my parents taught me is we'd go camping and you always they're packing up in the tents and the sloping beds and the dogs and everything, and you had to go pick up a trash all around the camp site and you had to leave it cleaner than we found it. And that's how I tried to run my life.

Whether it's a relationship or a job or a moment I just try to leave it a little bit better after I've been there.

So my work is very important to me and it is an expression of what I believe in, it's just been a big motivator. I tried working at a for-profit and I lasted nine months, and I just couldn't operate in the structure of the end point being making money for the company because I just didn't motivate me so I quit and went back to...
Interview © 2019 Indiana University, IUPUI. Contact IUPUI for reproduction and reuse.



Yeah, so it's been a great, great run, I love it.

Eve: I think I have politicians on my mind today, so politicians, or anyone who...doesn't try to make the world a a better, better at leaner. I'm thinking of polluters and corporations. And how do you face that?

Kim: One thing I've learned is that the most effective tool is to be able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes. It was his name, almost 20 years ago, when there was the Pfiesteria outbreak, I don't know if you remember that. And I was working for the Bay Foundation at the time, in charge of that project, and there was a link between agricultural run-off. And this bacteria critter that was in the water and so there was just a huge divide.

The farmers became villains and the pollution of their fields, was causing this horrific reaction in the water and there was this immediacy to it so elected officials, and conservationist and everybody started responding in a way that was appropriate, but in the process I looked at these farmers who were not evil, bad people by any means, in fact, they've been living on the land, and in the land far longer than I had and so I spent a lot of time on the front porches and around a kitchen table, trying to understand their way of life and they're living and what motivates them and opening up dialogue opening up conversations that allowed us to disagree, but at least we were having conversations around it and that work is probably some of the work I'm most proud of.

See that even with elected officials that we may disagree on a bill or a legislative or regulatory proposals, I of course always want more and more and more, and sometimes the fastest way to get there is the incremental step . . . each and every year you make another step towards it versus taking huge leaps forward, and trying to understand where the resistance comes from.

I have never heard somebody say, "I wanna pollute."

I've never heard somebody say that I've never heard a company or a politician, or a farmer that I don't care about water quality as... So I took... We probably have the same value about clean water, and then the debate becomes how to get there, instead of the motivation.

So I do that, say, I want to pollute but if they say, "I want to make money, right, so that becomes a question of priorities, that then we try to figure out ways to either compromise on how much money or how the money is generated, or look for alternative ways for money to be generated which is... I was curious when I started doing work in the marketplace where investors are taking their money in, saying these are not just investors, these are people that it's you, it's me, it's extremely wealthy people, but I have these dollars and I want to make sure that they're reflecting my values and whether it be an environmental issue or social issue, a governance issue. I want these dollars invested to reflect how I believe life should be, and I don't believe in guns or I don't believe in fossil fuels or I do believe in companies that promote women and the money follows that the same kind of space, I have found is true with business people in companies, their goal is making a profit, but there's the triple bottom line concept and we just have to keep working to find that common ground, that's the triple bottom line time to a... You make money, you improve the world, or you can improve the environment and your workers and so it's not just money, there's other outcomes that you're aiming for.

I feel as if I'm making some lofty statements because there's exceptions and there are companies that I have



vehemently disagreed with and not been able to get through, but I try to start in a place of commonality and show you get... Sometimes you have to go to court, sometimes you have to yell and scream, but I don't usually ever start there.

Yeah, probably this isn't a story, but it's really powerful experience where, when I worked for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and we would have opportunities to take people out on to the water in boats or spend a couple of days at a retreat center or something and teach them and expose them to day or to the rivers and the streams.

I've seen it with Amish farmers from Pennsylvania who obviously live a very different life than a lot of people. I've seen it with business owners sent with watermen, farmers. And when you can connect somebody that resource, it becomes a whole different... A whole different view.

You might be in a kayak, and you're paddling through some underwater grasses that are floating and beautiful and crabs, are going through there and there's life, there's beauty, there's color, there's an inspiration that can only really be found there. I've watched that really turn people's lives. I've seen elected officials, go out and experience that and come back a changed person.

Literally, I've seen kids that have never even been on the water. Go out and experience it. And so I think that, coming full circle, what my parents come, but to be able to experience nature and life, natural life, there is really nothing more powerful. My personal story, not necessarily my professional is it that this is where I draw frankly, a lot of my faith from, it's a very spiritual experience for me.

I've done a lot of work with Bishop Son of Island Episcopal Diocese, here and he truly speaks about the connection between God and nature, and that's how I view it.

Eve: I certainly had experienced it, taking kids out into the woods and into the wilderness, but I have never taken almost so I... They were a politician to you, so I...How did... Do you remember how did it... You said literally changed as the course of a politicians' life I can you describe it?

Kim: Mr. Warner from Virginia. And he and his family were... We brought them out to a center on an island in the middle of the bay and they put them on the boat and had him harvest crabs and dig through underwater grasses and small and see and feel and he came back from that change his commitment to cleaning up the bay became a tangible commitment, not just a political one but something was meaningful for him. And I've watched him over the years really truly adhere to that, that's probably the most powerful though. There are many that experience it and are touched by that it really is, it's inspiring.

Eve: What do you think that younger environmental leaders, environmental activists will have to do and will be facing as the name work on their environmental careers?

Kim: I've struggled with this because you have spent my whole career where can you improve, the environment? And yet I'm leaving it in worse shape than when I started, and because of climate crisis, I put my head down at night hoping that there's little improvements along the way because of my work. But overall, I think that the next generation has struggles, and we'll have a much harder time doing the work that I've committed to over my life because of the immediacy of it. It is a crisis, it is real, it is affecting lives, it is affecting the economy, it's hurting underprivileged and underserved communities far more than wealthy ones it's worldwide. And yet, today, I was reading an article that large sections of the population



still don't really think it's, it's having an impact. They may say climate, climate change is real, but it's not that bad.

And I don't see it that way. The data and the reports that I read are frightening for me, so my message to young people is be vigilant. Don't take your foot off the gas pedal, if you have to stay at this. Because me, my colleagues all of us of this generation didn't do a good enough job, and that breaks my heart. It really does.

I just see somebody... Like Greta Thornburg, but there's also local is county executive, Jones. He had meeting on the Baltimore county Climate Action Plan, and it was filled with young people he brought together young people to help guide is Climate Action Plan. And I thought, that's awesome. Those are the voices you need to listen to. Not me, and really reputable scientists, but I applaud that and I just really hope the next generation will be inspired to take action and not feel worn out by... Do you think that your approach has been to try to find common ground with people? It sounds like not to look for that, some kind of humanity there that... You can both connect on when do you think that that is gonna be an important part for I guess, younger people as they keep their foot on the gas pedal will that work?

Yeah, it's a really good question. I don't know the answer to that I do. What is different about the climate crisis work is there is no time, it's an urgent time because we are at a time. Maybe... Maybe it rolls back to when people were working on the environment in the 60s before the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act and there was a huge shift in environmental protection in the '70s, because of what we were doing in the 60s. You look at that decade, and you have to multiply it by 100. but we did it, we responded. And I think it takes all tools, I think it's gonna take, it's gonna take, dialogue and working together, and common ground and it's gonna take court cases and regulations and legislation encourage, and leaders like we've never seen worldwide and I do sincerely believe this country needs to be a leader in this completely.

Eve: So there's a lot of work ahead, what is the day-to-day? Maybe you've only been there a month that you don't know but what is your day-to-day going to be over the next year for 2020? And then two years after that for 2022.

Kim: The Maryland League of Conservation Voters, works in three areas: one is to advance policies but that will prevent or address climate crisis and other environmental problems. So we are working on policies . . . So that includes education and support and education for citizens to vote this way as well, as to get candidates and formed of important conservation.

The third aspect is holding them accountable and that is critical because not just to say... Oh, you didn't vote the right way, but when they do vote the right way, to say thank you.

Last night I was at the internal county council meeting and they've been working on a bill to protect force in that county for months and months and months and months. Very, very complicated. Bill, I spoke to the county council. I said, "You have no idea what an honor it is to sit up here and to be able to say thank you. And they voted 7-0 for a bill that is the most aggressive to protect forests in that county. We would have liked more but it is a mighty good step in the right direction. And so, we thanked him. And, so accountability on both sides, not just criticism.

So those three slices, the policy getting good conservation selected and holding them accountable are the tools and the organization is unique. There isn't one in the state that does that the way we do it. So I'm kind



of excited to apply that and to use the combination of education and accountability to hopefully make the world a little bit better.

Eve: I mean, you said you didn't do enough, but I guess I'll just say you're still doing it, you're still working on it.

Kim: The yeah, it is trying to do your part.

Kim: Yeah, obviously it's very difficult to face this crisis and may not be somewhat ashamed and also somewhat devastated. On the flip side though, there are so many things that we can do as individuals, and that gets me excited is if everybody changed one thing every day and just it can be a small thing, but they add up. If you have a room of 300 people and everybody, there's one thing all of a sudden you're 10,000 actions or where the multiplier it is, what kind of little things are you talking about? Things as simple as turn the lights out, when you walk out of a room because when the lights are on, it's drawing electricity and electricity in this area, a lot of it comes from fossil fuels, the heating and cooling in your house. Just use other men to warm yourself or cool yourself. And I'm not sit around and be cold or sit around and sweat. I'm saying use other mechanisms, whether they be a sweater or opening the windows, or whatever it is, eating meat, just eat less if you're immediate whether it's one meal a day or one meal, a week or one day a week, or go vegetarian, but just eat less and that makes a difference. And one of my favorite things that I think people should dry is to go try to be off the grid for a night, we happen to have this little slice of heaven up in the Adirondack that's completely off the grid, so we go for a couple of weeks at a time. No electricity.

The quality of life is phenomenal, and our children experienced life without phones, and iPads, and everything while they're up there, have candles the later and read books out loud to each other play games once a month, just pick a night where you're not drawing on the electricity grid.

I'm willing to bet at the end of that experience, your quality of life improved for that night. There's many things you can do: drive less, drive a different car that's not so polluting, carpool.

Those things they matter. I'll do this myself, I think I... You know what, it doesn't matter if I just do this little thing, 'cause it's just me but you have to check yourself because every action does matter.

That is the state of our environment right now, every action matters. And so I think there's a lot of hope in that I forgot one of the most important actions vote and educate yourself, ask your candidates, what do you think about climate change, what are your actions that you're promoting to reduce it, stop it, change it, check the Maryland League of Conservation Voters' website for information on candidates and then be an educated conservation voter.

And when they vote the right way, thank them. I mean, that action alone his huge for obvious reasons, it's a it's huge. So yeah, I think there's a lot of hope in all of us owning this space and taking responsibility for... I encourage you to think of yourself as an activist even though maybe your action is you don't turn the light or you turn the lights off, as you walk out the room, at that. By doing that, you are an environmental activist you are acting to improve the environment and... Well, it may not feel that that's making a difference. What you have to do is multiply it by the people in your household in the people on your street, and the people in your town and the people in your state and then it starts to make a difference. And there's this wonderful saying about movements get started by one person at a time, and I do believe that those personal actions are in some ways, more activism than some of the policy work that we do because those can be esoteric. So



yes, I think being an environmental activist is far, far more centered on the actions you take than the groups you belong to, or where and how you raise your voice.

Eve: I think I was asking you about... Well, to me, it feels like the imbalance between the small individual actions that may block my family... My neighborhood can take versus the pipeline that just strongly to know the coal factories on all of that.

Kim: Yeah, I think they're all important, I think they're all important. And if maybe you are the kind of person whose job doesn't lend itself or you're living circumstances are such that you can't take a half day and go testify on a bill in Annapolis, that's okay.

Find the action you can do and are willing to do and are happy to do that. You just do something is really the key.

Probably yes, if we could get all the industries to change what they do, that would be a huge, huge impact but until then, the other side of the equations, got to step up.

There's these great examples all over the world about where the... You think of that scale and just a drop of rice on one side and all of the sudden it goes over, and if enough people sign up for wind energy instead of coal, then companies like BGE and Excellon are gonna say, Wait a minute, we gotta have more wind, 'cause this is what people are asking for.

Here's one people are saying I don't want as much meat, maybe Burger King put out the "Impossible Burger" on their menus that just happened this summer.

They have a plant-based burger on the menu at Burger King. Did you ever think that was gonna happen?

So crazy things. And the more that people buy the Impossible Burger, the more companies are gonna be putting them out there pretty soon all the other fast food places are gonna do it.

Eve: So this is your market forces combining . . .

Kim: Exactly, exactly, yes. I would never underestimate the power of an action out of you or me or anybody on being a good deed-doer working in that space.

Kim: Can be very hard, it can be dis-spiriting at times, and it is important to stop and look at progress or look at positive actions, and look at motivation. So, I'm really grateful to you and everybody involved in this project, and it be a part of it, it's quite an honor actually for anybody that's listening I...

I urge them to take time to stop and remind themselves why they're doing the work they're doing, what it's the environment or other do-good professions, and I would encourage the next generation to work hard--question, but I also encourage them to have the majority of their time doing work to be based on hope.

I think if the majority of your time is based on cynicism or frustration, it can . . . the toll is incredible. So find things to be hopeful about. And I hope I'm wrong, I really, really, really wanna be wrong. I hope that 50 years from now, and somebody is listening to this tape and we did get it right with climate change.



I really hope that I hope you are around to.

Kim: Yeah, you can't... You know, I mean, it's maybe moments here and there, but yeah, yeah, I eat.

I was in meeting recently, we were talking about some legislation for 2020, and right now and Maryland, the goal is to reduce our carbon emissions by 40% by 2030, and we need to accelerate that goal, and we need it needs to be 60% given the new data that's out ... 'cause the crisis is just coming so much faster than anybody anybody thought was gonna happen. And I was sort of this lone voice that I said, really? That's our goal, is to change or that's the purpose of the legislation, is to change a goal. It's irrelevant to me what the goal is and we have to put in actions. We have to put in the things that are gonna result and less carbon. A goal? And I understand the value in that, but speaking to the urgency of it, I just think we have to have action. It has to be really tangible actions.

That's where I think we are... So the piece of legislation is still getting crafted, so we'll see . . .

Eve: [Laughs] I'm glad you I was so glad you're doing what you're doing, that's a great, that's a great half of your career, the work you're getting now.

Kim: Yeah, as it feels like that, it's good.

Eve: Don't even think about retirement.

Kim: Oh, thank you, yeah. Remember that I was at a non-profit okay, that's very easy. Well, thank you, Eve, I enjoyed that.

Eve: And so, I'll sign us out. So again, this is Eve and I've been talking to Kim Coble, November 19, 2019. We are talking in my office in Charles Village, Baltimore, Maryland.