

CARROLL COUNTY INDEPENDENT

February 22, 2007

Everybody's business

This year the majority of towns around New Hampshire will have on their warrants for annual meeting a resolution asking them to weigh in on the subject of global warming.

At first glance, many voters may have the same reaction Ossipee selectmen had when they considered whether to put the article on their warrant, namely is this the right place to talk about global warming? The Ossipee selectmen ultimately decided, no, by a vote of 2-1, with at least one selectman (Harry Merrow) stating at the time that although many people may see global warming as a problem, town meeting is not the proper place to address the issue.

Ted Leach, one of the crafters of the petition, and a founding member of New Hampshire's Carbon Coalition, disagrees. His answer to the comment that town meeting is meant for local issues is global warming is happening here; therefore it's a local issue.

When faced with the consideration that something that may ultimately have no effect will also eat up discussion time at an already long town meeting, it makes sense that people might not want to spend time debating and voting on the Carbon Coalition resolution. But those who have worked hard to get this resolution on the ballot of towns across the state do see a value. Having the majority of towns here pass the resolution could bring greater national attention to the issue, both in the initial vote and in bringing the topic to the attention to presidential hopefuls as they campaign here over the next two years. Leach notes that there is a precedent for the effectiveness of such action in the way people around the state addressed acid rain in similar resolutions in the 1980s. Because of increasing attention on that issue, national laws changed and acid rain has been reduced.

The resolution asks voters to support of actions by the president and the Congress "to address the issue of climate change which is increasingly harmful to the environment and economy of New Hampshire and to the future well being of the people of [petitions fill in the individual town name]," sending results of the vote to the state's Congressional delegation, the President of the United States, and any declared candidates for those offices. It also supports establishment of a national program requiring reductions of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the U.S. economy, and creation of a major national research initiative to foster rapid development of sustainable energy technologies.

As to the question of whether global warming is "real," it would seem pretty obvious that something is happening. Although some people disagree about the cause, statistical evidence is growing daily that our climate is getting warmer. Although February brought the typical cold of New England winter, the temperatures fell quite a bit later than usual here. January 2007 was the warmest January on record. The last five years were the warmest five years on record; the last 10 years the warmest decade.

What does that mean for New England? A warming climate could mean less snow and less cold weather here. Although that may sound good when we contemplate our fuel bills, it is less welcome news for those whose livelihoods depend on winter, including the ski and snowmobile industries which have been a staple of the economy in Carroll County for decades. Less obvious, but equally affected could be foliage season and maple sugar production, as the trees that produce brilliant fall colors and sweet sap are also dependent on the cold.

Finally, the idea that we do not affect our environment in big ways as well as small ones seems to make less and less sense. It has been obvious for decades that humans can affect their environment on massive regional scales that affect us individually and as a society. The environmental movements of the late 20th century arose in response to the pollution that was destroying rivers and lakes, creating smog that settled over numerous cities and still causes "bad air" days in New England. We addressed these issues and have cleaner water and cleaner air as a result.

Common sense says we can and do affect our environment. It has been demonstrated that green house gases trap heat in our atmosphere. It has been demonstrated that we are producing more and more of these gases, particularly carbon dioxide. If by some chance, part of the global warming phenomenon is caused by something other than human activity, that does not mean that human activities are not also playing a role. It would seem obvious that we can affect this issue by "cleaning up" our act, and equally obvious that we need to address this issue and that supporting the Carbon Coalition article will effectively help bring attention to it.