

# Keene Sentinel

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## **Climate change could be on ballots**

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Climate change may soon be coming to a town near you. Or a town meeting at least.

The Carbon Coalition, a non-partisan, statewide group advocating for a shift in national environmental policy, hopes to put a climate change article on the 2007 warrants in all New Hampshire towns.

The goal is for local talk and action to raise awareness about climate change during the 2008 presidential election campaigns, according to Edward R. Leach, co-chairman of the coalition and organizer of the town meeting campaign.

“It needs to get on to the political agenda of all these presidential wannabes,” he said.

The coalition introduced the warrant article in Leach’s hometown of Hancock Monday and plans to bring it to other towns in the coming weeks, he said.

The article reads: “To see if the town will go on record in support of effective 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 (the town).” It also encourages local and national programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as research and development of sustainable energy.

The group is also working on a plan to introduce the initiative in the state’s cities.

The initiative plays into efforts by the League of Conservation Voters, a national environmental advocacy group, to make climate change a centerpiece in the presidential election, said group President Gene Karpinski.

The Carbon Coalition is working on the warrant article issue with Clean Air-Cool Planet, the Society for the Protection of N.H. Forests, N.H. Audubon and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Town meetings are a focal point of the national climate change campaign, Karpinski said.

The current campaign is modeled after a 1983 effort to get acid rain on the national radar, according to the coalition’s Web site.

That year, also before a presidential election, 197 New Hampshire towns passed articles asking for national action on acid rain. The campaign brought attention to the issue, according to the coalition, and acid rain-causing sulfur emissions have been cut by one-third of what they were in the 1980s.

Leach said he saw the effect of that initiative firsthand when, as publisher of the weekly Peterborough-based newspaper the Monadnock Ledger, he gave information to a presidential candidate who had no position on acid rain. Next time that candidate came through the area, he had decided it was important to deal with acid rain pollution, Leach said.

Once the matter is raised in towns across New Hampshire, Karpinski said he hopes the candidates will compete for the best ideas on how to address climate change.

The coalition also plans to send people to all candidates' speeches and keep track of what they say with respect to climate change, according to Leach. It will compile that information and publish it on its Web site.

Hancock's three selectmen all support putting the matter on the town warrant, according to Chairman Lawrence Schwartz.

"We care about the planet," he said.

And since the article is mostly about sending a message to national leaders, it doesn't mean much of a change for the town government, Schwartz said.

Town officials already try to conserve energy, he said, by limiting the amount of driving they do and being careful about heating and lighting buildings.

And Leach said he hopes the warrant article will generate discussion at town meeting and help people get some of their questions about climate change answered. He's also hoping it spurs local conservation efforts. There is no mandatory local action in the proposed warrant.

And though climate change is something that may have global effects, Leach said it can be dealt with by small steps at the local level.

"It's a game of inches," he said. "Each town is pulling forward another inch."

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