



Thinking local

Monday, March 12, 2007

In the long run the most important local issue to be dealt with at upcoming town meetings will be the New Hampshire Climate Change Resolution.

Thanks to the organizational efforts of the Portsmouth-based Carbon Coalition, voters in every town in the region, except Surry and Troy, will have an opportunity to endorse the "establishment of a national program requiring reductions of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the U.S. economy" and the "creation of a major national research initiative to foster rapid development of sustainable energy technologies, thereby stimulating new jobs and investment." The resolution also encourages the people of New Hampshire "to work for emission reductions within their communities," and it calls on selectmen in each town to "consider the appointment of a voluntary energy committee to recommend local steps to save money and reduce emissions."

A futile effort to deal with a massive challenge?

Only if it were in isolation. But this resolution will be on ballots in 180 out of 234 New Hampshire communities, and it has been endorsed by mayors of New Hampshire cities, including Keene. And the results of the voting will be sent to the state's U.S. House and Senate delegations, an encouragement to members who are already working to tame climate change and a pointed incentive for those who are not. The vote tallies will also be sent to the presidential candidates who are looking for Granite State support in the 2008 primaries.

And, yes, global warming is a local issue — just as local as a new fire truck or an addition to the town library. It is, in fact, local in every spot on the planet. Around here it will increasingly affect recreational opportunities, the scenic landscape, hunting and fishing, agriculture, the tourist economy and everyone's health and safety.

Climate change can be mitigated locally as well, when individuals and communities take steps to reduce the heat-trapping emissions that are produced by the burning of fossil fuel: when they replace incandescent bulbs with low-energy fluorescents, when they drive fuel-efficient cars, and when they purchase energy-saving appliances, to mention three illustrations. The threat of global warming is also giving rise to exciting new technologies that could be produced in this high-tech state by companies that create jobs and pay taxes.

So let's not think of the New Hampshire Climate Change Resolution as simply a well-meaning gesture on the part of environmental worrywarts. Think of it instead as part of a commitment to our communities, to New Hampshire and to points far beyond.

From Acworth and Chesterfield and Peterborough and Sullivan, to Washington, D.C., to international forums in capitals abroad, this gracious statement of principle can be part of a worldwide endeavor of unprecedented scope. For the sake of current and, especially, future generations, it had better be.