

Testing the climate in N.H. towns

Petition calls for solutions to worldwide changes

By Susan Morse

smorse@seacoastonline.com

Town Meeting voters in an least 50 New Hampshire communities will be asked to approve a petition to support a resolution calling for action in global climate change when they go to the polls in two months.

On the Seacoast, petitions have been placed on the ballots in Exeter, Hampton, Hampton Falls, North Hampton, Rye and Seabrook, communities that have a Senate Bill 2 form of ballot voting in town government. In larger cities that conduct business without SB2, such as Portsmouth, no petitions

have been brought.

Results of the votes will be sent to the state congressional delegation, to President George W. Bush, and to declared candidates for those offices. In addition, selectmen in towns that adopt the resolution are being asked to appoint voluntary energy committees to recommend local steps to save energy.

The petition is being distributed by the Carbon Coalition, N.H. Citizens for a Sensible Energy Policy, 100 Market St., in Portsmouth.

Joe Keefe, the former Democratic Party chair-

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man, is co-chairman of the coalition, along with former Republican state representative Ted Leach of Hancock.

The initiative is bipartisan, said Keefe, chief executive officer of PAX World in Portsmouth. Yet Keefe expects the resolution to have an impact on presidential

hopefuls when they campaign in the New Hampshire presidential primary.

In 1983, Keefe said, a similar grassroots resolution on acid rain prompted national action.

"In 1984 in the presidential primary, the presidential candidates took note," said Keefe. "What happened was the issue played itself out

in New Hampshire. A short time later a Clean Air Act was amended to include provisions on acid rain. It was authorized by then-president George Herbert Walker Bush."

The New Hampshire Climate Change Resolution, which is what the petition is called, would establish a national program requiring reductions

in greenhouse gas emissions and the creation of a research initiative to develop sustainable energy technologies.

"I'm hopeful and optimistic a great majority will pass the resolution," Keefe said.

"We think climate change and global warming are more catastrophic than acid rain. We can see it in warm win-

ters that have become problematic for the ski industry, the maple sugar season, our state flower blooming weeks and weeks earlier. The natural environment is so important to who we are. I would like to see New Hampshire become a national leader in fostering solutions to climate change."

The Carbon Coalition sees

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the upcoming presidential primary as particularly important, as it's the first since 1952 in which there is no sitting president or vice president running for the office, according to the coalition's Web site, carboncoalition.org.

"Certainly, the current Republic administration in Washington has not been receptive to climate change," said Keefe, "but there are many Republicans (who are)." Particularly Sen. John McCain, said Keefe, who, with then Democrat Sen. Joe Lieberman, submitted a climate change bill in 2003. The bill failed, but showed bipartisan support.

"Here in New Hampshire, Republicans are very strong supporters of environmental legislation," Keefe said. "I think it's a nonpartisan issue. As a Democrat biased, we have a new Legislature, we'll see if they take a more active stance. I believe the only solutions to climate change are bipartisan positions."

There are solutions to climate change, said Roger Stephenson, who works for Clean Air, Cool Planet, one of the founding organizations of the Carbon Coalition in 2003.

Claremont officials worked with PSNH to replace 16,000 street lamps with ones more energy efficient, saving taxpayers a \$1 million over 10 years, said Stephenson.

Individuals can replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, or opt for a hybrid vehicle to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Timberland Corp. offered employees \$3,000 towards the price of hybrid car, said Stephenson.

"Tourism is the second most important revenue producer in the state," he said. "That plays a big factor in how people look at this. We've been doing this word of mouth. One of our speakers spoke at Portsmouth Rotary last month. We're seeing a lot of support in the Seacoast."

In Seabrook, George D. Harvey gathered the more than the 25 signatures necessary to place the petition on the March ballot, but encountered resistance, he said.

"It was difficult, actually for me it was a new experience doing that kind of thing," he said. "People who were receptive were already aware."

Harvey got involved after seeing former Vice President Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth" on global warming at St. John's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth. Someone from the Carbon Coalition asked him if he would be interested in circulating the petition, Harvey said.

Harvey is scheduling an upcoming public meeting on the resolution, which is expected to be held at the Seabrook Library. He hasn't spoken to selectmen, he said.

"I think with the proper education, a couple of forums ... that it probably would get a fair chance of being supported," Harvey said.

If the resolution passes, said Keefe: "I think it gives the green light to the New Hampshire Legislature, sends a signal to our congregational delegation, that New Hampshire citizens want action at the national and regional level."