

Sunday Opinions

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Confronting climate issue across N.H.

By Edward R. (Ted) Leach

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Whether the sap is running in New Hampshire maples this January, or the lifts are running at New Hampshire resorts, the political rhetoric is certainly running as our state prepares for the quadrennial first-in-the-nation presidential primary.

The 2007 primary campaign promises to be like no other. For the first time since 1952, neither party is running a sitting president or vice president. This offers New Hampshire voters an historic opportunity. In 1952, primary politics were not broadcast nationwide, let alone worldwide, as they are today. So, as we approach this historic primary and its vast field of candidates, we should ask ourselves: how can we best send a message that will be heard, read, and seen around the globe? And what ought that message be?

In 1983, New Hampshire citizens, tired of seeing their maples, mountains and lakes poisoned by acid rain, came together in town meetings across the state to pass resolutions calling on the federal government to regulate emissions of sulfur and nitrogen. The result: presidential candidates then responded to New Hampshire's concerns during our 1984 primary, and a market-based solution to reduce sulfur emissions was included in the Clean Air Act and reauthorized by President George H.W. Bush.

This year, New Hampshire citizens are once again putting resolutions on town meeting warrants and ballots across the state to address another environmental crisis -- this one more monumental, and more dire, than the acid rain threat: carbon dioxide (CO₂) pollution that is causing significant climate change right here in New Hampshire. That's why it's an open question as to whether the sap is flowing -- or whether the lake is frozen, or the skiing is good, or snowmobiling is even possible.

Our climate is indeed changing, and at an alarming rate. And today we know that people, not natural influences, are the primary cause of global warming. That also means we are the ones who can and must do something about it.

That's why the resolutions being introduced at town meetings across New Hampshire -- or at "deliberative sessions" in some 52 so-called "SB2" towns -- will ask our citizens to send another clear message to the next president, and all elected officials: that we need to do something locally, regionally, and nationally, about global warming.

Fortunately, we already have many examples of practical solutions. The City of Claremont, working with Public Service of New Hampshire, changed its streetlights, dramatically reducing carbon pollution and saving the city and its citizens \$1 million over 10 years. The City of Keene combats global warming in many ways, saving significant tax dollars from lower energy bills and earning a national reputation in the process. The City of Portsmouth built a "green" library, ready

to save 30 to 50 percent in operating costs from energy conservation and reducing CO2 emissions as well.

All across New Hampshire, individual citizens and municipalities are acting to save money and help reduce the threat of global warming. The State of New Hampshire, through programs like the Building Energy Conservation Initiative, is saving millions in tax dollars and reducing tons of CO2 emissions every year. All are proof that reducing CO2 and other global warming emissions is possible and profitable.

In New Hampshire, we have the means, through our town-meeting style of government and our first-in-the-nation presidential primary, to tell the next president, and the national media, and indeed the world, that we believe action is needed and that progress is possible. This is the greatest moral and political issue of our time, and, right here in New Hampshire, it is going to be moved on to the political agenda.

Addressing climate change this way is not a political issue, except in the best, truest sense: that it is the will of the polis, of the people, without party affiliation. Properly expressed, the people's will can change the political climate in order to prevent too much change to New Hampshire's natural climate.

As the co-chairs of the non-partisan Carbon Coalition, we hope New Hampshire citizens will support these resolutions on climate change, and that once again, we will help bring a nation to action.