

NEW HAMPSHIRE

## Resolution on warming goes to voters On ballot in 180 towns

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By John Laidler, Globe Correspondent | February 18, 2007

New Hampshire residents concerned about global warming are tapping the power of grass-roots democracy and the state's unique role in presidential politics to focus national attention on the environmental issue.

Over the next several months, at least 180 communities in the state will be voting on a call for the federal government to address climate change. Participants in the campaign, organized by the nonpartisan Carbon Coalition, intend to present results of the voting not only to President Bush and Congress, but to the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates taking part in New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary next year.

"If there is significant support for the climate change resolution across the New Hampshire communities, we hope and trust it will become a front-burner issue in the 2008 presidential campaign," said Joseph Keefe, a former chairman of the New Hampshire Democratic Party who, with former Republican state representative Edward "Ted" Leach of Hancock, cochairs the Portsmouth-based Carbon Coalition.

Barry Rock, a professor of natural resources in the forestry program at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, was the lead author of a 2001 federally funded study that documented a 1-degree Fahrenheit rise in temperatures in New England from 1895 to 1999.

A more recent study, in 2005, by the Climate Change Research Center at UNH, found a 2-degree increase from 1899 to 2005, according to Rock. Perhaps more striking, the latter study found there had been a 4.4-degree temperature increase during the winter months from 1970 to 2005.

"That was a surprise," Rock said. "We didn't anticipate there would have been that much warming during the winter months."

Among the 180 towns taking up the resolution are Atkinson, East Kingston, Exeter, Greenland, Hampstead, Hampton, Hampton Falls, Kensington, Kingston, Newcastle, Newfields, Newington, Newmarket, North Hampton, Plaistow, Rye, Seabrook, South Hampton, and Stratham.

In New Hampshire, some towns vote on articles at traditional town meetings. Others debate and consider amendments to articles, then vote on them at town elections. Most of this year's traditional town meetings will be held next month. March 13 is the date of most annual town elections.

At least three cities also have taken up the resolution. Derry and Londonderry's councils have passed

it, while Durham is set to vote in its March 13 election.

Caroline Robinson of Stratham is among many volunteers who have gathered signatures on petitions to place the resolutions before their towns.

"I've been an environmentalist all my adult life, and I completely believe that we need to adapt our human habits to the situation that exists with the greenhouse effect," she said, referring to the process in which greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, trap the warmth of the sun, causing the Earth's temperatures to rise.

Robinson estimated 95 percent of the townspeople asked to sign the petition in Stratham were "thrilled" to do so. A few declined, mostly those who felt "the town couldn't have any positive effect on the situation." It is a sentiment she does not share.

"Given that New Hampshire is such an important primary state, candidates will take this seriously and make it part of their campaign," Robinson said.

The Carbon Coalition began in New Hampshire four years ago to build grass-roots support for national policies to address global warming by reducing carbon pollution.

The coalition, a diverse mix of environmental and business groups, scientists, and citizens, believed the state's early primary "would give us a national stage to highlight the importance of this issue," said Keefe, a Manchester resident who runs a socially conscious mutual-fund company in Portsmouth.

Coalition members note that the 2008 election will be the first since 1952 in which a sitting president or vice president is not running, making it a particularly opportune year to sound its message to candidates.

They said a town meeting resolution is the perfect vehicle to generate that message because it comes directly from residents. As evidence, they recalled how a similar resolution adopted across the state in 1983 to seek solutions to acid rain helped elevate that issue in the 1984 presidential race.

Leach, who was then publisher of the Monadnock Ledger, recalled that as presidential aspirants "would come into our office, we would say, 'What's your position on acid rain?' Then we'd say, 'Here's how 600,000 people in New Hampshire feel about this.' "

New Hampshire has a direct stake in spurring action on global warming, advocates note, noting the impact that warming temperatures already are having on the state.

"It's a critical local issue," Keefe said. "We are seeing it in . . . the lack of snow and its impact on our tourism and the ski industry," and the maple syrup industry.

George Harvey of Seabrook collected the signatures to place the resolution before his town. To help educate the public about global warming, he organized a forum scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday at the town library.

"We are all human beings in this world community," he said, "and if the world is being compromised or challenged, we have a vested interest in personally or collectively trying to address it in the interest of all of us." ■

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