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Point: Local vote highlights worldwide problem

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Man's contribution to global warming may have worldwide consequences, but the origins of those contributions are, like politics, local at the core. Each of us, as we go about our lives, is contributing to the factors that have raised the concentrations of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Our automobiles; the way that we heat our homes; the types of recreation that we engage in; the way in which we light our homes and businesses are but a small example of the ways in which we consume energy.

In the industrial world, with few exceptions, energy translates into the burning of fossil fuels, i.e. coal, oil, gas and their derivatives. It is in that combustion process that carbon based by-products, such as carbon dioxide gas, are released into our atmosphere in volumes never before seen in the natural world.

We know that to be the case based, in part, on scientific investigation that has been going on for the past several decades in the Arctic, principally Greenland, and in the Antarctic. Ice cores drilled out of glacial ice, miles thick in places, have provided us with a window on the atmospheric conditions that existed at the time the ice layers were formed. By measuring the concentrations of carbon in those ancient atmospheres, we now know that carbon-based gas concentrations over the last 150 years have risen as much as 30 percent higher than in any previous warming period in the earth's history. During that same period, we have seen an accelerating rise in global temperatures.

The local resolution addressing global warming is meant to serve several purposes.

First, it calls attention to the issue at the local level, something that we as a population have not been doing very well up to this point.

Second, it calls upon our national government to take seriously the need to form, articulate and implement an energy policy that treads far more lightly on our world than what we have been doing throughout our national history.

Third, it calls upon our local town government to begin to look at ways in which we, as a community, can reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, reduce our negative impact on the earth and possibly save taxpayer dollars in the process.

Individually and collectively, directly and indirectly, we have all contributed to the problem. Individually and collectively, we can and must reverse those contributions or suffer the consequences.

George P. Jones III is chairman of the Salem Conservation Commission.