



Global Warming Resolution Coming to 180 Town Meetings

By [Donna Moxley](#) on Friday, February 23, 2007.

Voters across New Hampshire will be asked to think globally during local town meetings this year.

Dozens of towns have included on their agendas a non-binding resolution to raise awareness of global warming.

It's part of a plan by a coalition of environmental groups to influence the debate during the primary season.

And a Keene High School teacher has been using the initiative as a teaching tool.

The Keene Sentinel's Donna Moxley reports.

18-year-old Sarah Stan spent last summer on the beach in Costa Rica.

But she wasn't relaxing.

She was relocating endangered leatherback turtle eggs to safety.

That was just her summer project for an environmental science class at Keene High School.

When she came back to school in the fall, she was looking for something with a more local focus - but with a global goal still in mind..

She could have signed up for a culvert-measuring project to study fish mobility.

And there was the city and regional planning agency projects.

But what drew Sarah Stan's attention was a petition drive on climate change.

Sarah: "It worries me just cuz it's our generation that's gonna have to deal with it, and if our generation doesn't start taking action we're going to be in trouble in the next few years." (:15)

Stan and 8 or 10 other students in her class signed on and soon found themselves going from house to house collecting signatures.



The petition they were carrying urges the federal government to establish a program requiring reductions of greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the economy.

The petitions also call for a national research initiative to foster sustainable energy development.

Another Keene student, Gretchen Schillemat, worked to get the resolution on Nelson's Town Meeting agenda.

At 16, Schillemat admits her focus until now has been on the science, not the politics, of climate change.

But she strongly supports the message of the petition.

Gretchen: "Eventually like we need to take responsibility for the actions that we do and we need to be more (of) aware of what we're doing and how it affects the whole world." (:11)

Schillemat is hoping to speak in favor of the resolution before the town votes.

Tom Sintros is the environmental science teacher at Keene High who's providing this education.

He just finished training with former Vice President Al Gore as a presenter for Gore's international Climate Project.

So, the petition drive is close to his heart.

Sintros hopeful: "Somebody's gotta mold this debate, and it's got to be molded fast. I'm not an alarmist, I'm a really hopeful teacher. I do these things not because I want to be depressed ... but that you know if we just get together and start collaborating and have really open and honest conversations we can do something about it, and I really believe that. It's not just a false hope I'm trying to give students, I just, I know we can solve it." (:20)

But not everyone working on the getting the resolution to town meeting goes to Keene High School.

The environmental group, the Carbon Coalition has been overseeing the statewide petition effort.

Ted Leach, the former Republican state representative, is a member of the group.

He says he collected 339 signatures in his town of Hancock, talking to voters at a local store and the town dump.

Others repeated his success and now about 180 New Hampshire towns are scheduled to vote on the petition in March.

That's 2 to 3 times as many as the Coalition had hoped for.

Critics have called the petition drive a waste of time.

The resolutions, they point out, are non-binding, so they'll have no legal effect.

And they argue, what can one town do in asking the federal government to take action on global warming.

But Leach rejects that kind of reasoning.

LEACH: "That's part of our message, is to bring this global overview down to a New Hampshire perspective and then say here's what each of us can do, you know the little part each of us can play, and you just keep adding little bits and pieces along the way, so people start taking ownership of it by taking action in their own homes and all those things also add up and make a difference." (:30)

Leach says the Forest Society successfully used similar petitions in the 1980s to reduce acid rain,

Back then, when presidential candidates came through town, residents asked them about their plans to deal with acid rain.

And later the federal government passed legislation to address the problem.

Leach and the other petition organizers are hoping the same thing happens this coming primary....that candidates will be forced to answer questions about global warming.

Then, maybe, Congress will follow suit.

For NHPR news, I'm Donna Moxley