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Ballot question will help preserve New Hampshire for future generations

Kurt Olson

The question on New Hampshire ballots concerning climate change is not political propoganda as The Eagle-Tribune stated in its editorial of Feb. 23. Global climate change is a moral, human issue.

One might assert that something is propoganda if ideologues debate a policy; however, an issue transcends politics when scientists chosen by the U.N. to study climate change (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) conclude that it is more than 90 percent likely that humans are contributing to climate change. Their most recent report issued a dire warning: If action isn't taken to drastically reduce emissions, we will soon live in a "totally different planet."

Furthermore, it transcends politics when companies like Duke Energy reversed course and formed the Climate Action Partnership in January 2007 with 10 other companies to "fight global warming by limiting greenhouse gases, funding research into renewable energy and creating a market for carbon dioxide emissions." It transcends politics when Swiss Re, the second largest reinsurance company, says that "the economic costs of such disasters threatened to double to \$150 billion a year in 10 years, hitting insurers with \$30-40 billion in claims, or the equivalent of one World Trade Center attack annually."

And doesn't it transcend politics when James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said that mankind has 10 years (now only 8.5) to reduce greenhouse gases before global warming reaches a tipping point and becomes unstoppable? What Hansen means is that if actions aren't taken now, our children and grandchildren will inherit a vastly different planet, one in which rapid heating will change the face of the planet and wreak havoc for the global environment, the economy and politics.

Now, just how does it transcend politics in New Hampshire, and how has the Carbon Coalition managed to add this question onto ballots in about 180 of 237 communities across the state? Look first at the losses sustained by the ski industry when November and December brought not mountains of powder but balmy 70 degree days to the Granite State. Fewer skiers meant less income for ski areas, not to mention the harmful effects on those employed down the chain.

Look next at fall foliage: Scientific models suggest that temperatures will rise between 3.6 and 10.8 degrees over the next 100 years. Studies have shown that less significant warming experienced over the last several decades have caused species to move inexorably northward as their homes warm; warming of between 3.6 and 10.8 degrees will cause sugar maples, beech and birch trees to disappear from New Hampshire's forests. So much for the brilliant fall foliage that has attracted leaf peepers from around the globe. And so much for the seminal experience of grandchildren learning how to tap sugar maples and make maple syrup at the knees of their grandparents.

Let's next look at the effects on human and vegetation health when mosquitoes, ticks, budworms, gypsy moths and pine bark beetles move north to find more hospitable homes in the remaining New Hampshire wetlands and forests. Humans can expect to suffer more outbreaks of Lyme disease, eastern equine encephalitis and West Nile virus. Trees will become more vulnerable to insect pests, and commercial forestry is bound to be adversely affected.

I joined the Carbon Coalition as a volunteer and have become a member of its speaker's bureau because it is all about my 31/2 year old son and the kind of world he will inherit. Thus, it is certainly not foolishness. Rather, when I look into his trusting eyes, I see future generations questioning me about what I was doing when there was still time to act. Future generations have a right to ask the tough questions, and I value my own personal legacy enough to know that it won't be satisfactory to them to say that I was one of those Americans who would not "support the lifestyle changes to achieve that goal."

Saying that we can all take actions as individuals is a little lame given the urgency expressed by scientists. The time is long past for voluntary cuts by anyone; sacrifice is a word that must re-enter our lexicons whether we want to live free or die or just plain live. To avoid the catastrophe that is bearing down on us like a runaway locomotive, we must act collectively, and we must act now. So this is not a political issue, and it is surely not propaganda. Instead, it is a local matter which citizens of my town, Salisbury, N.H., and the citizens of the other 179 New Hampshire towns have a right to debate as part of our town election ballots.

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