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NEWS OF THE WEEK

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Grassroots Effort Pays Dividends on Presidential Campaign Trail

Eli Kintisch

PLAISTOW, NEW HAMPSHIRE--Activists in snowman and polar bear costumes are frolicking at candidate town meetings. Editorials on global warming are appearing in influential newspapers in New Hampshire and Iowa. Most major presidential candidates--from liberal Democratic senator Barack Obama to former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, a conservative Republican--have called for caps on the emissions of greenhouse gases.

The run-up to the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign--which kicks off with the Iowa caucuses on 3 January and the New Hampshire primary 5 days later--has been a coming-out party for climate change. "Climate change is bigger politically than it's ever been," says Navin Nayak of the League of Conservation Voters in Washington, D.C., which tracks the issue.

There are plenty of reasons why. A drumbeat of media stories on climate is an obvious one, and the recent Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for the latest in a series of reports has certainly had a big impact. Less well-known, but possibly just as pivotal in this New England state, is a 2-year campaign by a group of scientists, civic leaders, and environmental activists called the Carbon Coalition.

Their rallying cry is a 204-word resolution on climate change that they hammered out in late 2006 and managed to put before 82% of New Hampshire's 221 towns at a round of public meetings held in March across the state. A large majority--164--of those towns adopted the resolution, which calls for a "national program requiring [emissions] reductions," new energy research, and "local steps to save energy." Members of the coalition have used the document to pressure candidates at hundreds of the preprimary events, small and large, in a process that affords citizens repeated, face-to-face access to the contenders.

"I've been thrilled to be a part of it," says climate scientist Cameron Wake of the University of New Hampshire, Durham, a member of the group's governing board. Wake has delivered roughly 30 speeches around the state on the topic and written a report on the impacts of global warming on the state's \$400-million-per-year winter tourism industry. "But the volunteers at the Carbon Coalition deserve the majority of

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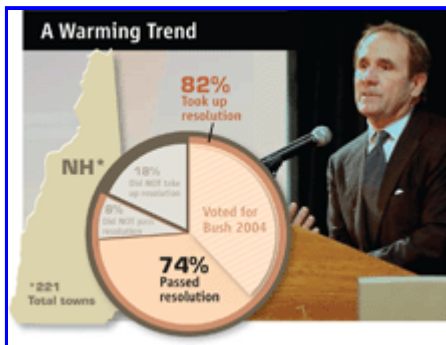


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the credit," he adds. And the coalition is happy to accept the accolades. "Every time [a skeptical candidate] turns around, there's someone with a Stop Global Warming sticker. It makes them think," says the group's co-chair, Ted Leach, a former Republican state legislator.



More than hot air. The University of New Hampshire's Berrien Moore speaks at an October conference sponsored by groups that pushed successfully for a climate change resolution passed by many towns across the state.

SOURCE: THE CARBON COALITION; (PHOTO) CLEAN AIR-COOL PLANET

In Iowa, there's been a smaller effort to publicize the issue by a coalition of green groups called the Iowa Global Warming Campaign. Its small staff works with volunteers to attend the dozens of candidate events that occur each week. "The goal is to get lowans to talk to candidates about climate change when they get here," says Joe Wilkinson of the Iowa Wildlife Federation in Des Moines.

Both the Iowa and the New Hampshire efforts lay heavy emphasis on how climate change might impact local ecosystems and businesses. "I used to get questions on the [legitimacy of the] science," says Wake of talks he's given around the state during the past 5 years. "Now it's, 'How will climate change affect me?' "

So Wake and a handful of climate scientists have worked hard to document both near-term and long-range effects. In Iowa, the National Wildlife Federation has distributed a report called *The Waterfowler's Guide to Global Warming* that cites federal studies of how warmer temperatures could alter migration routes and disrupt avian ecosystems. "Global warming already has ducks flying in later and leaving earlier," proclaims a radio ad in Iowa paid for by the foundation's political arm, National Wildlife Action. "When the presidential candidates come to town, make sure they spell out their plan to combat global warming."

In New Hampshire, Wake and other scientists have focused on possible effects to the ski and timber industries. In recent years, ski areas have had to make more and more of their snow, and warming threatens the winter landscape that attracts tourists, says Janice Crawford, director of the Mount Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce. The bipartisan success of the March coalition statement led Senator John McCain (R-AZ), a longtime advocate of carbon caps, to remind New Hampshire voters in a radio ad that he has "listened" to their concerns. And at an October candidates' debate sponsored by the Carbon Coalition, Huckabee announced support for a mandatory cap-and-trade system, calling greenhouse gas buildup "our responsibility."

Even candidates who have taken relatively aggressive approaches to slow climate change have faced pressure on the stump. In October, Friends of the Earth (FOE) Action ran advertisements in Iowa asking Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) to remove "giveaways to global warming polluters" from a climate bill before a committee on which she sits (*Science*, 14 December, p. 1708). Clinton subsequently offered an amendment that would have toughened the bill, by auctioning more of the emission certificates instead of making them free to industry. Although the amendments failed, "we were pleased," says a spokesperson for FOE Action, which has stopped running the ads.

Activists are also applying pressure to those whose positions are considered fluid. Once Huckabee emerged as a top-tier contender, note activists, he stopped

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mentioning mandatory caps when asked about climate or energy. That possible "backtracking" worries the Reverend Richard Cizik of the influential National Association of Evangelicals in Washington, D.C., who has teamed with climate researchers to combat warming (*Science*, 24 February 2006, p. [1082](#)). "I call and say to his campaign staff, 'Look, don't listen to his conservatives who are critical of your position; they'll come around,' " says Cizik. "They just have to be educated."

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