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Opinion

Report from Concord, December 2019

Now or never in dealing with pollution

Ken Wells
NH Representative

We in the United States have reached a “now or never” moment in dealing with the pollution caused by the generation of electricity, our transportation system, and heating our buildings. The answer is not to do without the benefits of modern living, but to do it all differently.

You may recall that at one point, the New England economy depended on whales for oil, ships powered by wind, and damming up every river and stream.



On January 9, Ken Wells spoke in Representatives Hall about the need for strong climate action.

We’ve moved beyond that. Throughout history, many of the most important moves have not been incremental, but bold, sudden shifts, especially in our choices for energy and transportation. How long was the transition between horses and automobiles? A decade or two? That’s not long, really. It is time for another such move.

A Call to Action

On both sides of the aisle, there is considerable reluctance among legislators to address the growing climate crisis, not just in New Hampshire, but in every state and among federal legislators as well. I find this puzzling: do the representatives really think we voters place a higher value on our money than on our children’s future? Or are so many legislators unable to understand what scientists have been warning us about for years? Without the strong urging of their constituents, most representatives are unwilling to take what they perceive as a political risk.

Today, the majority of voters in every New Hampshire county favor regulation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant, according to a recent Yale climate survey. (Search “Yale climate survey” to see the reports yourself.) But many Representatives don’t seem to understand what many of their constituents already know. They don’t see that the mood of the country has changed after years of record heat, floods, and violent storms. Now we’re seeing California and Australia scorched by unprecedent-

ed droughts and fires. Our own New Hampshire moose have been driven north by the tick infestations caused by milder winters, and the lobsters are retreating northward as New England’s ocean waters warm at three times the global rate.

I felt I needed to speak before my colleagues because many long-serving representatives seem afraid to “rock the boat” and do something they haven’t ever needed to pay attention to in the past. As voters, you have an important job to do, right now. Don’t wait until November. Call, write or e-mail your representatives at the state and United States level, and urge them to have the political will and courage to step up and take action on the climate crisis. Tell them to do what you know needs to be done, and why. Sign a petition calling for action. If you’d like to talk to me, my number is 735-5756. I keep tabs on what the people who elected me think.

One Busy Day in the House

I’ve often heard people ask, “What are they doing down there in Concord?” Here’s what one busy day looks like:

At 10 AM on January 9, the full House of Representatives filed into Representatives Hall and the session began. As befitting the nation’s largest representative state body (nearly 400 members) – one that has occupied the same spectacularly beautiful chamber for over 200 years – there are traditions that are observed and upheld. The formalities began with a prayer from Rev. Kate Atkinson of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. She officiates frequently, since her church is literally across the street from the State House. Then a representative who had been selected for the honor was asked to lead the House in the *Pledge of Allegiance*. After that, the *Seacoast Men of Harmony* sang a stirring barbershop version of *The Star Spangled Banner*. (As a singer, I have an appreciation for a *cappella* music!)

After the Speaker’s remembrance and moment of silence for those former representatives who are recently deceased (including Andover’s own Betty Bardsley), there was a recognition of guests. Usually there are groups of families and fourth grade visitors watching up in the gallery, and all the Reps give them a standing ovation. If you have never been inside Representatives Hall, you should come visit what Speaker Shurtleff calls “the people’s House”. Just walk in the big front door of the State House, bear to the right (past the gift shop) and walk up to the third floor. Follow the corridor all the way around the square floor plan, look at all the portraits of New Hampshire

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