

# South Carolina's political leaders get on the climate change bandwagon

With the release of the latest scary report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, public opinion has reached a tipping point. From here on out, the questions about global warming will not start with, "Is it real?" Instead, people will be asking how bad things will get, and how fast, and whether mankind can do anything effective to slow the disaster we have put in motion.



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It's not just the report, of course, that's got people's attention. Increasingly, scientists are able to point to specific evidence of climate change that affects seemingly mundane matters like the migration of birds or the flow of maple sap in Vermont. Such examples reinforce the perception that global warming is happening right now and that things are moving faster than expected.

To the credit of South Carolina's political leaders, they didn't wait for the latest report before moving on this issue. In mid-February, Gov. Mark Sanford issued an executive order forming the Governor's Climate, Energy and Commerce Advisory Committee to address the impact of climate change on our state and develop recommendations to guide policy-making.

## Mayors, Sen. Graham call for action

Later that same month, at a meeting of the South Carolina Municipal Association, a press conference was held to announce a partnership between the 12 mayors of S.C. Mayors for Climate and Energy Leadership, the National Wildlife Federation and the S.C. Wildlife Federation to encourage more comprehensive climate change policies in our state capital and in Washington, D.C.

The participating mayors, representing

more than 480,000 South Carolinians, are: Bill Barnet, Spartanburg; Joseph P. Riley Jr., Charleston; Avery Wilkinson, Cayce; Bob Coble, Columbia; Frank Willis, Florence; Knox White, Greenville; Floyd Nicholson, Greenwood; Tom Peeples, Hilton Head; Doug Echols, Rock Hill; Carl Smith, Sullivan's Island; Joe McElveen, Sumter; and Bruce Morgan, Union.

Sen. Lindsay Graham participated in the mayors' announcement via conference call. The senator laid out the challenge of global climate change in his typical lawyerly style. Here are some excerpts from his remarks:

"I have come to believe that climate change is real, and man-made carbon dioxide emissions are a part of the problem. How much I don't know, but the way I look at it, if we can solve the carbon dioxide emissions problem that means we're less dependent on fossil fuels from the Middle East and more energy independent. The upside is far greater than the downside.

"The evangelical community, the National Wildlife Federation, Republicans and Democrats are speaking with one voice when it comes to climate change, so I think the political debate in Washington is about how you implement global climate change solutions. We've turned a corner up here in Washington and I think it will be difficult to get elected president if you deny that climate change is real and that man is contributing to it, particularly among younger voters, who are much more environmentally aware."

Graham went on to suggest that there are opportunities in South Carolina related to climate change policy. For one thing, we are in a position to take a leading role in the resurgence of nuclear power as an alternative to carbon-emitting coal plants. For another, we have a number of strong initiatives under way in alternative fuels and hydrogen fuel cell technology centered around work under way at the University of South Carolina, Clemson University and the Savannah River Site.

He also suggested that the state's farming communities might take land that is currently unproductive and begin growing plant materials used to produce ethanol as an

alternative to fossil fuels.

Turning to the broader picture, Graham cited estimates that the costs of moving to a non-fossil fuel economy are estimated to be about 1% of gross domestic product per year.

"That is nothing to sneeze at," he added, "but it is an achievable goal, and the cost of doing nothing and allowing the planet to keep heating up is devastating."

## Dead planet society

Awareness of the urgent need for action on climate change is spreading. In a recent article about Patagonia, one of this country's legendary "green" companies, *Fortune* magazine referred to former Sierra Club director David Brower's famous quote: "There is no business to be done on a dead planet."

Dealing with global warming could be compared to putting a man on the moon or the Manhattan Project, but a better comparison would be this nation's effort to win World War II. Once we set our mind to it, we pursued the goal of winning that last great global conflict with a single-minded force that could not be deterred. Almost all of our political and business leaders were on board for the war effort, as were most of our citizens.

That's what it's going to take for us to even have a chance of avoiding devastating changes to our planetary environment. And as with World War II, this must be an international effort; only this time, everyone has to be on the same side. As Graham pointed out, India and China must be as committed as the Western industrialized nations to curtailing carbon emissions or we will fail.

A recent *Newsweek* magazine article noted the overwhelmingly negative response to a Harvard oceanographer's published statement that mankind will avoid the worst case scenarios of global warming because "we can't be that stupid." The reaction from readers? "Just look around—we are that stupid."

Well, as that great philosopher Forrest Gump once said, "Stupid is as stupid does." Let's hope we get a lot smarter, very soon. ■