

Editorial Comment...

[9/30/20]

On the Issues

St. Johnsbury voters have a choice to make among good people running for Vermont House.

We all know Reps. Scott Beck and Scott Campbell. Businessman Frank Empsall is running to challenge to Campbell, and attorney Brice Simon is running as a Democrat.

Campbell spent part of his career in weatherization and is part of an unapologetic climate wing that demands action "at any cost." We don't begrudge Campbell for voting his conscience on issues of importance to him. He does what he says, which makes him a person of integrity.

Unfortunately what he says, and does, is vote for tax increases and regulatory expansion. So we just can't support him on the issues.... such as... **The Global Warming Solutions Act**

This bill established severe mandatory carbon dioxide emission reductions in an attempt to counter a global climate "emergency." The bill establishes an all-powerful Climate Council, with a two-to-one majority of legislative appointees not accountable to the Governor or voters. It would devise a regulatory action plan to force Vermonters to stop using heating oil, natural gas, gasoline, and diesel fuel to heat our homes and power our rigs.

The Council will empower unelected envirocrats to create and enforce rules to force a fossil-fuel-free Vermont. No legislator will ever vote on these rules. State agents will enforce them against businesses, schools, town governments, and ordinary people trying to live their lives in these difficult times. If you have a problem with the rules, hire a good lawyer and take on the State.

Speaking of lawyers, the bill also empowers all Vermonters to sue the state if they think the envirocrats aren't pushing hard enough to rid you of your gas guzzling ways.

Campbell was an enthusiastic cosponsor of this bill. He voted for it last February and again to make it law. Beck opposed and Empsall would have.

Transportation and Climate Initiatives

This is a 12-state agreement to jack up motor fuel taxes to drive people out of their gasoline and diesel powered cars and trucks. The proceeds will be used to pay people to buy electric cars that they can't otherwise afford. It's a high priority for the legislative Climate Solutions Caucus of which Campbell is an active member.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu says that his State wants no part of this, and it has been dubbed "the stealth carbon tax" by its critics.

The initiative is on hold because of the pandemic, but when it comes up again next year Campbell will promote it. Beck and Empsall will not.

continued next page

Response...

[10/3/20]

Response to Editorial

I must thank the editor of the Caledonian-Record for the respectful discussion of my positions on issues before the voters (editorial, Sept. 30), despite disagreeing with those positions. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my views.

Those views start from the premise that greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels are destabilizing the global climate system.

In the span of little more than one century, industrial civilization has increased carbon dioxide in the planet's atmosphere to levels not seen in at least 2 million years — about the time when humans first began roaming the earth. The geologic record shows that, compared to 2 million and more years ago, Earth has been relatively cool and getting cooler. It also shows that fluctuations in the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide have coincided with swings in global average temperatures. Changes of just a few degrees have had dramatic impacts, bringing on ice ages or the relatively warmer inter-glacial periods like the last 10,000 years.

It so happens human settlements began around 10,000 years ago, too. All civilization has taken place in the blink of an eye, on a geological time scale. This period of stable climate, which we take for granted as "normal," is more accurately understood as a delicate balance of complex interactions among jet-stream patterns, ocean currents, continental configuration, and even solar activity and the cycles of Earth's orbit.

Burning fossil fuels releases into today's atmosphere carbon dioxide that's been locked up for millions of years. The increasing concentration of carbon dioxide, far exceeding pre-industrial times, is warming the world and upsetting the balance of stable climate we've enjoyed for our entire history. This is physics, not ideology.

Among the consequences of destabilizing the climate system, one is not hard to predict. In coming years, expect chronic heat, drought, floods — and possibly more pandemics — to cause human migration on an unprecedented scale, heightening tensions and stoking conflict. The military calls climate change a "threat multiplier."

We are looking at a crisis that will define the next stage of human civilization.

What does that mean for Vermont? It means preparing — really preparing — for Vermont's changing climate. It means adapting and building resilience in our infrastructure (roads, bridges, broadband, electric grid), in our homes (weatherization, building code), and in our society (sustainability, rural and economic equity). And it means taking responsibility for reducing our own greenhouse gas

continued next page

Editorial Comment...

[9/30/20]

continued from previous page

Then there's the issue of doubling the tax rate on heating fuels. The new tax dollars would be spent on more home weatherization. That passed the House last March with Campbell's strong support, but failed in the Senate.

Contractor Regulation (H.534 & 719)

Another issue important to Campbell is "creating a state enforcement mechanism for building energy standards, and creating minimum competency requirements for building contractors." He was the lead sponsor of a bill (H.534) to set up this regulatory apparatus to come down hard on any builders who fail to build according to the environmentalist's idea of correct climate-friendly standards – at the risk of losing their licenses.

Campbell was also the lead sponsor of H. 719, a bill to prevent the occupancy or marketable title for sale of a single family residence not certified to be in compliance with the Campbell energy standards. Fortunately neither of these bills moved forward.

No Cost Too High

Our legislature already has too many climate-obsessed members obsessed with doing *something* to "stop climate change." These folks, including Campbell, believe there is no cost too high, Vermont can lead the world, and the time is now. Most of that is nonsense.

We're already a green state. If the world was inclined to follow our lead, they would have. If efficiency and weatherization were a panacea (as promised), then the multi-million dollar behemoth at Efficiency Vermont would already have turned the battle in our favor. Instead they just keep demanding bigger budgets every year in a picture of bureaucratic inefficiency.

The sacrifices the climate warriors want us to make are financial ones we can't afford. Worse is that none of them will yield a discernible impact on the world's environment.

We need more representatives who will help Vermonters get through the COVID pandemic; support our struggling small businesses, manufacturers, farmers and tourist industries; and safely get Vermonters back to school and work.

We think Beck and Empsall will most ably meet those requirements.

Response...

[10/3/20]

continued from previous page

emissions, however small they are on a global scale: the truth is Vermont lags behind the rest of the Northeast.

The Global Warming Solutions Act, though I dislike the misleading name, begins the serious preparations and energy transition that will take years, even decades, to accomplish. It sets up a Climate Council of State agency heads, citizen experts, and stakeholders. The Council, together with subcommittees representing an even wider group of stakeholders, will craft an Action Plan. The Administration, led by the Agency of Natural Resources, will propose rules to implement the Plan. Proposed rules will go through the normal rule-making process including review by Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules, with the additional requirement that they be reviewed by the proper legislative policy committees. Any fees or appropriations included in those rules must be voted on by the full Legislature like any other budget items. This is an expedited process, appropriate to the crisis, but it is not giving "unelected bureaucrats" total control. Council, Plan and rules cannot realistically go forward without the Governor and the Legislature. (A fuller discussion of the Act and opponents' objections is in my earlier commentary, Caledonian-Record, Sept. 11, or CampbellForVermont.com/articles.)

The other bills mentioned in the editorial were ones I introduced in an effort to raise energy performance standards throughout Vermont's construction industry, where my expertise is. If re-elected, I will continue the work I started last summer with stakeholders throughout the industry to find a path forward that makes meaningful progress while accounting for the challenges of changing existing practices.

There are many critical issues facing Vermont, the NEK and St. Johnsbury. While my former jobs have given me particular insight into energy issues, I see the energy transition in the context of economic development. We should seize the opportunities it offers: fostering new businesses, bringing good-paying jobs, building more and better housing, improving education including new course programs at VT State College campuses, among many others.

Responding to the climate crisis is not optional. We have only to decide whether to use it to grow our economy and rebuild our communities, or let it become another roadblock standing in the way of progress and prosperity.

Rep. Scott Campbell
St. Johnsbury