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The Climate Solutions Caucus

To the Editor:

Thank you Amy Ash Nixon for the balanced reporting on the Climate Solutions Caucus meeting held Wednesday, November 20. I'd like to pick up on a point too often taken for granted by those of us who have been concerned about this issue for many years.

In the big picture, industrial civilization's greenhouse gas emissions are nudging climate systems away from the relative stability of the last 10,000 years. Instability is happening much faster than predicted just a few years ago. Feedback loops such as melting glaciers and thawing permafrost threaten to kick climate change into overdrive.

I gloss over the details, but if these observations are in question, we have a much longer discussion.

Here's the point we often miss. People are rightly worried about the costs of transitioning away from fossil fuels. But it's easy to forget the costs of NOT doing so.

Globally, what are the costs of drought, flood, heat, fire? Of large-scale mass migrations, and violent conflict over resources and land? The economic costs will be heavy, perhaps incalculable. The human costs could be catastrophic.

Locally, we're beginning to pay already, in more frequent and more intense storms, in the influx of new pests such as ticks, and in higher road budgets. Longer growing seasons might seem like a good thing, but what if our maple trees die off, or ski areas decline?

Foreseeing the inevitable costs of further delay, it is irresponsible not to take steps now: large steps, as large as we can manage.

Importantly, those steps are not only costs to be borne. They also offer opportunity. The climate crisis is global; Vermont's crisis is demographics and the viability of rural economies. Where they overlap is where the opportunities for economic development lie.

We should ramp up energy efficiency, especially the low-income Weatherization Assistance Program and grants and loans for moderate-income households. We should reduce our purchase of out-of-state fuels, and support local renewable generation and storage. We should facilitate electric-vehicle purchase and leasing. We should build out the vehicle charging network. We should make our roads, bridges, cell towers, and electric grid more resilient. We should support the local food system, and forestry industry.

We should position our economy to thrive in the larger economy ahead of us: low-carbon; richer in local and regional commodities; focused on services and amenities that allow people to be connected both locally and globally.

So, yes, there are costs, whatever we do. It strikes me as fundamentally cautious and conservative to mitigate those costs by moving as quickly and deliberately as possible in the direction we know we need to go.

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