
Scott Campbell

Ethan Allen Institute Says There's A Climate Crisis

Rob Roper's commentary (Caledonian-Record, Jan. 19) reveals pathways for agreement between "progressives" and "conservatives" on the next crisis awaiting the world after COVID.

To be sure, Mr. Roper starts by suggesting my "candid" comments in response to an email are somehow at variance with my public discussion of the problem. I beg to differ, and can point to several of my own commentaries. And he says it is "illogical" for Vermont to limit its own contribution to greenhouse gases, because, as he notes that I have observed, our GHG emissions are too small to make a difference.

As to that, since when is it someone else's job to clean up your mess, Mr. Roper — or mine or the rest of Vermonters'? Admittedly we have acted as though loading the air with carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases is not a mess. But it obviously is.

Scientific research shows the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) is higher than it has been in at least two-and-a-half million years. While climatic cycles are complex, it is clear that global

average temperature tracks CO₂ concentration. Two-and-a-half million years ago, earth's climate was warmer by around 3 degrees Celsius; ocean levels were 60 feet or more higher; local climates obviously were vastly different than they are today.

More to the point, CO₂ levels have spiked in the blink of eye, on the geologic time scale, due to human activity burning fossil fuels and releasing carbon locked up for millions of years. We are upsetting the stability of the climate in ways we can see already (storms, fires), ways we can predict (droughts, floods, ocean acidification, sea level rise) and ways whose dynamics we don't fully understand (melting the permafrost? dissipating the Gulf Stream?).

If this isn't a crisis, I don't know what is.

Mr. Roper's discussion of the need to build resilience admits as much. I could not agree more about resilience, especially the need to mobilize private capital for the scale of investment that is required. (I am involved in dis-



cussions with a number of experts about strategies for addressing this very issue. The Biden Administration and new Congress may provide opportunities to make significant progress.)

But he doesn't follow his own logic to its conclusion. Resilience does require culverts and bridges, but it also requires electrifying transportation — which requires a network of EV chargers. Electrification requires more generation and a redesigned grid — which includes solar, wind and storage, and ultimately eliminates fossil-powered generation. Transitioning from a fossil-fuel based economy, like any change, will stress those whose economic stability is most precarious — which means government (not the private sector) must design mechanisms to promote equity.

These are wholesale changes to our economy, our transportation systems, and even our towns and villages. Who should undertake to chart our course through such changes? The Global Warming Solutions Act, passed as Mr. Roper notes over Governor Scott's

veto, creates a Climate Council of agency heads and expert citizens to tackle this challenge. I have detailed its makeup in previous commentaries, but I will reiterate that it is charged explicitly with addressing resilience, mitigation, adaptation and rural and economic equity, as well as hard limits to GHG emissions. Other States have passed their own GWSAs and set up climate councils as well. This is neither radical nor socialist.

I recognize Mr. Roper and others often have little confidence in government. But in our country, the government is us. I think it's time to rediscover that most of our public servants are exceedingly competent, and to recommit to making our government work better for the future of all of us — and our collective home. I look forward to finding common ground where possible, and finding compromise where not, so we can leave our grandchildren a habitable planet and more equitable society.

Rep. Scott Campbell serves as St. Johnsbury representative in the Vermont House.

Rob Roper

Candid Comments Reveal Illogic Behind Vermont's Climate Policy

Responding to an email inquiry from a concerned citizen about the real impact – and cost – of the Global Warming Solutions Act, passed last spring over the veto of Governor Phil Scott (R), Representative Scott Campbell (D-St. Johnsbury) admitted, “Let me start by repeating that no one, least of all me, believes Vermont can stop climate change — or even affect climate change. It’s tempting to focus on that narrow issue because of the specific metrics in the law, namely the required greenhouse gas reduction thresholds (leaving aside the unfortunate name of the Act),” and, “GWSA will not ‘mitigate’ climate change...” Thanks for the honesty!

But, Rep. Campbell goes on to defend the GWSA, despite its ineffectiveness at mitigating climate change, because, he says, the real purpose of the law is not to, “‘mitigate’ climate change, but it sets in motion preparing for it, building resilience, and mitigating the effects [emphasis original] of climate change on Vermont’s economy and communities.”

A couple of points here. First, of course, this is not how the GWSA was sold to the public, especially the youth who turned out in droves expecting this to be some sort of “bold” action to save the planet for their future. Is someone going to tell them that

what they fought for is an empty – if very expensive – gesture?

Second, and perhaps more interestingly, is Rep. Campbell’s contention that the real focus is adapting to an inevitably changing climate. Now, this is kind of funny because those of us who suggested in the past that we can’t do much if anything to alter the changing climate but should rather focus on adapting to it have been lambasted as cynical “climate deniers.” Glad to see we’ve been right all along, and this is indeed the real policy objective of our state government.

However, if this is the policy objective, Vermont doesn’t seem to be going about it in a particularly sensible way. If we need to prepare for more extreme weather events, pouring money into things like electric vehicle subsidies, insulating homes, and renewable energy generation isn’t helpful. Rep. Campbell’s admission confirms this: “GWSA will not ‘mitigate’ climate change,” therefore, it will not lessen the frequency or impact of future weather events and, therefore, is worthless as a means of establishing any sought after resiliency.

Resiliency from an infrastructure perspective means we need to be investing in stronger bridges, culverts, sea-walls and bulkheads. It means upgrading



our sewage treatment facilities, so they stop pouring untreated waste into our waterways when rain floods the system. It means protecting or moving our roads that

follow the paths of rivers, so they are not in danger of being washed out, and the same goes for housing placed in similar situations.

This requires steel, concrete, lumber and bulldozers, not EV charging stations.

Resiliency from an energy perspective means we need more reliable and more available (ie. less expensive) energy sources in order to deal with increasing climate-driven demand. Placing more reliance on weather based energy sources such as wind and solar, which are already unpredictable, while acknowledging that weather is likely to become more erratic in the future, is nonsensical. California, which experienced rolling blackouts during an extreme heatwave this past summer as a result of its own GWSA mandates, is a good example of how renewable energy makes us less resilient in the face of climate anomalies, not more so.

Resiliency from an economic perspective would require tax and regulatory policies that attract private capital investment and allow people to build wealth – something our recent legislatures

have been rather hostile toward. Slapping Vermonters, especially rural Vermonters, with regressive taxes and mandates that make it more expensive to drive, work, find affordable housing and then to heat and power those homes is a recipe not for economic resiliency, but economic stagnation and insecurity.

If resiliency is really an objective of the GWSA, not climate change mitigation, Rep. Campbell and the others who voted for it need to tell that to the newly formed Climate Council. This body, charged with coming up with a plan to meet the goals of the GWSA, has met twice since its inception, and so far the conversation has only been about greenhouse gas emissions and the need to reduce them – the admittedly ineffectual part of the law – and not on building the stuff we’ll need to withstand the next Irene. Though that may change in the future, I for one am not getting a vibe that it will. What I suspect we’ll get is a hugely expensive program that does nothing to stop climate change, undermines our ability to adapt to it, and diverts resources away from real solutions.

Rob Roper is president of the Ethan Allen Institute.