

Community Commentary:

Republicans need to address climate change

By Councilor Ray Burton and Jim O'Brien

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By the time Secretary of State Bill Gardner sets the date for New Hampshire's first in the nation Presidential Primary, Granite State Republicans and Independents may have more than a half-dozen well-qualified candidates from which to choose. Over the course of the next 10 months, voters will be looking to get a better understanding of the candidates' character and their positions on a variety of policy issues.

Conventional wisdom is that traditional conservative issues such as immigration, terrorism, taxes and abortion will capture headlines and will differentiate candidates in the Republican primary. While this model may hold true, there is another issue that is quickly rising in the consciousness of primary voters that all candidates need to take notice of. This issue is global climate change.

Conservation and environmental protection has moved away from its image of being a movement of the political left and has once again entered mainstream consciousness. Major multi-national companies such as British Petroleum, Dupont, General Electric and Wal-Mart now advertise their environmental credentials in the hope of cleaning up their corporate image and attracting a new wave of global customers who want to consume while saving the planet. Religious organizations are promoting the virtue of environmental stewardship, strengthening the big tent appeal of conservation issues.

There is little doubt in the scientific and political community that climate change is the environmental challenge of our time. The effects of climate change are real, measurable, and requires strong presidential leadership to bring about real solutions.

Just last month, New Hampshire citizens made local and national headlines by voting on a resolution at town meetings across the state urging federal action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and establish a national research and development effort to promote renewable energy technology. The resolution has passed in over 150 towns, with additional communities voting in the weeks ahead. Once again, New Hampshire is leading the nation in demanding action from our political leaders.

It is a mistake to view climate change, or conservation issues in general, through a partisan lens. A recent poll of New Hampshire voters conducted by the Mellman Group found that over 70 percent of Republican primary voters see global warming as a serious threat. An overwhelming 82 percent of Republican primary voters favor taking action now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Democrats are near unanimous in their call for action to address the problem. Among primary voters in New Hampshire, the call for action on climate change is clearly not a partisan debate.

While the image of being a good steward of the environment is becoming essential for corporate identity, in politics, conservation issues are intrinsically linked to a candidate's character. A candidate for any office who is perceived as out of step on environmental issues will face an increasingly tough uphill battle convincing voters that they are in step with voters here in New Hampshire and across the nation.

In the weeks and months ahead, presidential hopefuls in both political parties will need to explain their views and solutions on energy and climate change. Voters will demand candidates have a concrete, sustainable and long term plan to limit carbon pollution, and address the long term challenges climate change presents. Candidates in both parties who fail to do so will find themselves struggling to compete in a crowded Presidential field.

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