



Vermont Council on Rural Development

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By Harrison Bushnell, as seen in the Bennington Banner:

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My first food was a testament to Vermont's economy. As a baby, the story goes, my parents held me as we admired the steaming arch at our neighbors' house. They took a small spoon and let me taste my first few drops of Vermont ambrosia: maple syrup. The only problem was, the syrup was so good I wouldn't let go of the spoon.

I have grown up surrounded by reminders of Vermont's economy. From the sweet scent of boiling sap, to the rumbling of chainsaws in nearby woods, to the tour buses that line Montpelier's Main Street in fall just as the leaves turn, I've watched our natural resource-based economy in action. The landscape is integral to our economy and to the happiness of the vast majority of Vermonters.

Climate change threatens the landscape I grew up with, know, and love. Climate change threatens that which I hold dear.

But climate change also offers an opportunity, a chance for Vermont to take a small but very real leadership role. It poses an opportunity for our state to show the nation and the world what a climate economy can look like.

The truth is that money drives behavior. That does not mean that we are doomed to succumb to the economic barriers in combating climate change. We must efficiently and effectively change the way Vermonters are able to interact with the economy. Like all consumers, Vermonters are unlikely to buy electric vehicles in mass until they are more affordable than other models. The average Vermonter will not choose solar and biomass until these options are as affordable as other energy sources.

Now is the time to get creative. We have the opportunity to make solar, wind, weatherization, electric vehicles, and other alternatives not only more affordable, but more accessible. We can use the settlement money from the Volkswagen emissions lawsuit and other funding mechanisms to focus on increasing the number of charging stations, creating new purchase

incentives, and improving consumer awareness. Only when we tackle each aspect of an industry within the climate economy will we succeed.

We can also focus on driving biomass adoption, and enhancing our electrical grid to be more flexible and efficient. Incentivizing modern wood heat and expanding smart grid technologies are examples of Vermont-focused initiatives that will put us at the forefront of the fight against climate change, allow us to act as a leader in these sectors, and save our landscape while saving Vermonters money.

Most importantly, these initiatives should attract green businesses and support the development of green jobs across Vermont.

And so it's our job as citizens, and our lawmakers' and business people's jobs as state leaders, to try to shape the Vermont economy around affordable, renewable, and lasting options. Let this moment mark Vermont's choice to support our economy while protecting our natural resources, including our sweet maple syrup, for future generations.

Harrison Bushnell is a senior at U-32 High School. He lives in Middlesex, Vermont.

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Links:

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