



Vermont Council on Rural Development

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## Opinion: Moving forward on climate change

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By Bill Laberge, owner of Grassroots Solar, and published in the Times Argus:  
<http://www.timesargus.com/article/20150301/OPINION06/703019960/1014> <sup>[1]</sup>

Despite the thermometer suggesting otherwise, the February sun is starting to give us the sense of change, slowly melting our hibernating souls. You can feel the warmth starting to thaw out the dormancy, although maybe that is just a reaction to the deprivation we have experienced these past few months.

Despite being mired in my hibernation, I did brave the weather on my way to a couple of great events that reminded me that while we are hunkering around our woodstoves or pellet stoves there is plenty of work going on around the state in regards to a warming planet.

Green Mountain College has a new program for a master of science in resilient and sustainable communities, and last week they hosted our local climate change activist, Bill McKibben. His talk, "Imagining World Communities," addressed ways in which humans are reassessing traditional approaches to providing food, energy, transportation and governance in response to rapid environmental and economic changes.

It was a pleasure to see an auditorium filled with young and old alike. McKibben spoke of the litany of activities his group 350.org has initiated since its inception, and those of us who are seasoned veterans of the marches and protests were delighted to see the next wave of marchers in the audience. McKibben said he gets tired of "bumming people out" with his message, but in this case his call to action was well received.

His delivery is not all gloom and doom. He did lay out a strategy of what we can do and how we can make it happen. His message made this solar installer happy. In keeping with the weather theme, he said we need a "fossil freeze and a solar thaw" and went on to explain how the Koch brothers and their fossil fuel friends cannot control the reserves of energy shining down on us for free every day (OK, maybe not every day). The power of the sun is free, and he said we need to work to harness it. I couldn't agree more.

I was also able to participate in the Summit on Creating Prosperity and Opportunity Confronting Climate Change. Four hundred fifty state officials, business people and individuals gathered to discuss the economic ramifications of climate change in Vermont and how we can react and

adapt and, through our resilience, prosper.

The lively discussion was steered by Paul Costello and the Vermont Council on Rural Development, who are good at gathering large groups of interested parties to chew on heavy topics and come out of lengthy discussions with concrete action plans.

I give them credit for keeping things moving and pulling out some action items., Obviously there is room at these events for larger companies to make a case for actions that will benefit their bottom line, but individuals are given the same platform and in a room of 30 voices can have the same vote as a larger entity. It is an opportunity to speak your mind and to engage.

The group split into 13 breakout sessions discussing a variety of topics ? including distributed energy, transportation, tourism and recycling ? with each group bringing back three action items.

The event culminated in the launch of the Vermont Climate Change Economy Council, a 24-member group that will sort through these action items, develop a strategy and prioritize the initiatives and investment opportunities that are most likely to lead to job growth and economic development in Vermont.

The results of the council?s work remains to be seen, but there were a few interesting takeaways from the summit.

One recurring theme, from the opening panel with Dr. Alan Betts, to keynote speaker Jigar Shah, and almost every group in between, was the demand for a carbon tax, more accurately described as a pollution tax.

Again and again, speakers brought up the point that private businesses, namely the oil and coal companies, are able to internalize their profits while externalizing their cost ? the waste they dump into the environment, which we all pay for in our increased health care costs and our environmental cleanups. In Vermont there are several bills in the works to hold polluters accountable.

The message was clear at both events I attended last week: We need to stop allowing companies to externalize their cost by dumping their pollution on us. I can?t say it thawed me out, but it made me feel a little warmer, knowing we have all these people working on it. Now I?ve got to get back to my pellet stove.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy/press/ta-030115>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.timesargus.com/article/20150301/OPINION06/703019960/1014>