



The Ethan Allen Letter

IDEAS FOR VERMONT'S FUTURE

September 2019

The Climate Action Juggernaut *What Vermonters Are Up Against*

“Global Climate Action Week” (September 20-27) is coming. During that week Vermont’s “climate warriors” will try their hardest to disrupt as much as possible of the ordinary activities of Vermonters. They will carry out their planned and organized civil disobedience campaign, like shutting down downtown Montpelier on August 1 (photo at right). There will be a “Climate General Strike” whereby high school students will walk out of their classes, employees will walk off their jobs, and a barrage of protest marches will demand “bold action” to save Planet Earth from their imagined heat death.

When pollsters ask people to rank issues in order of importance, climate change consistently ranks near the bottom. So why does it seem like every Vermonter except you is screaming 24/7 for a radical climate change agenda, and why this, and not, say, better jobs, education, health care, and economic development?

The Global Climate Action Coalition consists of at least 25 advocacy organizations demanding “bold action” to defeat climate change. By our count, at least 42 registered lobbyists from these organizations patrol the halls of the State House to sell their “climate action” program – everything from carbon taxes to



Photo by Ellie French/VTDigger (used with permission)

Climate action protestors shut down a key Montpelier intersection for almost an hour Friday (August 1), demanding an education that will prepare them for a “collapsing climate and economy”. No arrests were made.

electric vehicle subsidies, to renewable energy mandates (and thus higher energy prices.)

Here are the ten leading members of this juggernaut lobbying coalition: Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC), Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV), VPIRG, Sierra Club Vermont, Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), 350 Vermont, Renewable Energy Vermont, Rights and Democracy, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility

(VBSR), Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC).

These folks, with multi-million dollar budgets among them, combined with much of the news media that cheers them on, are creating an echo chamber that does not reflect the majority of Vermonters’ opinions about “climate change.” But, this is what we – and you – are up against. Think about that when you’re sitting in your car hoping that the police will assist climate protestors off of our streets.

What Just Happened

How the rhetoric – but not the objective – changed in 2019

2019 marked some interesting changes in the push for a carbon tax in Vermont. The most dramatic was the near total dropping of the term “carbon tax” from the forefront of policy debate. Many elected officials made it through the 2018 election cycle promising to not support a carbon tax. There was no push for an overarching carbon tax bill in 2019 such as the VPIRG Plan in 2015-16 and the ESSEX Plan in 2017-18. (Although bills along these lines were put in, the nervous leadership declined to call them up for action.) Thanks to efforts of the Ethan Allen Institute and others, the carbon tax threat is well understood by the public – and has become politically toxic.

This is good news, but that news is tempered with the understanding that inaction was a tactical, not a strategic, change by the carbon tax warriors. Rather than going for the whole loaf, the carbon tax coalition is now about snatch-

ing one slice at a time, always under different monikers than “carbon tax.” (Example: “Decarbonization.”)

Earlier, the bills promised a 90% or even 100% “revenue neutrality”. That meant that all or almost all revenue raised through a carbon tax would be returned to (selected) taxpayers in the form of tax or rate cuts elsewhere, or rebate payments, or some other redistribution scheme. This not-credible promise was held out for four years in hopes it would persuade the public to go along with a “whole loaf” carbon tax law.

The people didn’t buy it, nor should they have. The taxers, after all, are also spenders. So, in 2019, the carbon taxers dropped “revenue neutral” and began spreading the message that to really have an impact on climate change we have to have – and fund – a multitude of government programs such as weatherization, building electric vehicle infrastructure,

etc. The climate policy industry calls these “non-pricing” approaches.

But where does the funding come from for “non-pricing” programs? In House testimony in February, the Regulatory Assistance Project argued for \$600 million in new program funding over the next ten years. “Carbon revenue is required,” said Richard Cowart, Director of the Regulatory Assistance Project. “In my opinion we should be using carbon revenues [new carbon taxes] to pay for a carbon reduction program.”

In other words, rather than use the revenue from a carbon tax to cut other taxes or provide rebates, government would just keep the money and spend it on what the climate warriors decide the planet (and the renewable industry) needs.

This idea was greeted excitedly by members of the House Appropriations and Energy and Technology Committees. Look for it rear its ugly head again in 2020.

When Carbon Taxes Aren’t Carbon Taxes, But They Are

The twisted logic we can come to expect.

Perhaps the most revealing Carbon Tax debate came during the attempt in the House to double the gross receipts tax on home heating oil from 2¢ per gallon to 4¢. The revenue generated would have been to increase funding to the state

Weatherization program. Opponents of the tax increase quickly – and correctly – labeled this a Carbon Tax. It was a tax on fossil fuel to punish its use and the revenue generated would be used to fund a program aimed at further reducing fossil fuel use.

Supporters of the tax offered the excuse articulated here by Rep. Scott Campbell (D-St. Johnsbury) in an op-ed following the roll call vote. “You will also hear some call this a ‘carbon tax.’ But it is not, because the tax is on the volume of fuel, not its carbon content. A carbon tax is intended to include in the price of fossil fuel the costs of the damage caused by it — that is, climate change. If that cost were truly included,

the price impact would be a matter of dollars not pennies.” (*VT Digger*, 4/2/19)

It’s worth noting that Campbell first ran for office supporting a Carbon Tax and lost. He ran again professing to have seen the light, promising not to support a Carbon Tax if elected. He won. Then voted to double the gross receipts tax on heating oil.

This is the new model the Carbon Tax advocates are adopting. “Pennies not dollars” (that is until the accumulated pennies add up to dollars). Keep the money to spend on programs; no more “revenue neutral” returns to the taxpayer. And lie about what is and isn’t a carbon tax.

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ETHAN ALLEN INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 543

Montpelier, VT 05601

Phone: 802-695-1448 Fax: 802-695-1436

E-mail: eai@ethanallen.org

Web page: <http://www.ethanallen.org>

What's Next?

A Look Ahead to the Policy Battles for 2020

Here is a look at the “slices” in that Carbon Tax loaf that will be under debate during the 2020 legislative session.

Global Warming Solutions Act is a bill (S.173) introduced by 12 Democratic Senators and a companion bill (H.462) by 12 House Democrats. This bill would put an end to all the inconveniences involved in enacting the climate action agenda piece by piece. It would simply require that by 2025 Vermonters reduce their CO₂ emissions from electricity, transportation and buildings to 25% below the 1990 benchmark. It directs the Secretary of Natural Resources to adopt and implement rules governing anything and everything that Vermonters do with gasoline, diesel, natural gas, heating oil and propane, to get under the state’s (arbitrary) GHG emissions limit. *No legislator would ever vote on these rules.* Once adopted by ANR, not only the Attorney General but “any person” would be authorized to bring a civil suit against a rule breaker, get an injunction, and be paid punitive damages as well as costs and attorney’s fees. This bill would truly be the foundation of a Green Police State.

Act 250 Climate Criterion: Despite the fact that the high cost of housing is a leading factor in Vermont’s unaffordability problem, many in the legislature are keen to add a “Carbon Neutral” requirement to receiving an Act 250 permit. This will be on center stage as the legislature considers a 50th-anniversary updating of the 1970 Land Use and Development Act. The gist is that a developer or a business will not be able to get an Act 250 permit if the project is not “carbon neutral”, either through its building practices or through the purchase of carbon offsets. Either option will be prohibitively expensive, and would likely defeat countless housing and commercial developments.

Electric Vehicle Subsidies: The goal of the Carbon Tax advocates is to increase Vermont’s electric vehicle fleet from 3,000 today to 60,000 by 2025. The only way to meet this objective is through massive subsidies for the vehicles themselves as well as the infrastructure necessary to support them. Act 59 of 2019 expanded the subsidies to higher income levels, for EVs costing up to \$40,000. In addition, the Coalition wants a huge increase in public spending for EV charging stations, where EV drivers can overcome the “range anxiety” and “charging trauma” that limit EV acceptance. Currently EV drivers pay nothing to maintain Vermont’s highways, and the chairman of the Public Utility Commission is urging that, in addition to other subsidies, EVs be exempted from the 6% purchase and use tax.

Transportation Climate Initiative: This is a multistate cap-and-trade plan designed to suppress motor fuel consumption by imposing government caps on fuel use and making drivers and businesses that need more fuel purchase funny money coupons. The TCI will thoughtfully award a supply of these coupons to the member states to bring in more revenue to spend on “green” subsidies. The Scott Administration is actively participating in the design phase of TCI, which is remarkable considering that the scheme is a scarcely disguised transportation fuel carbon tax that Gov. Scott opposed in his 2016 campaign.

Home Weatherization: The subsidized weatherization of low-income family homes has been a staple budget item for 30 years. The Coalition loves weatherization because it is delivered by community action groups that are part of the Coalition. They want to keep pushing the income eligibility levels up, and above all they want the work done

for free to the homeowner. If weatherization produces heating cost savings year after year, those savings could be used to finance the initial investment at very little or no taxpayer expense. However, that approach goes against the Coalition’s urge to deliver free stuff to prospective supporters of its overall program, and thus will not be considered.

Vehicle “Feebate” is a scheme where the State charges a “fee” (tax) on low-mpg gas/diesel vehicles (like SUVs, vans, and light duty trucks), and bestows the revenues on owners of high-mpg vehicles. A mandate study is due of this idea is due in December.

Commuter Rail Subsidies: The failed idea that just won’t die is back on the climate action agenda. In addition to the millions of dollars Vermont pays to subsidize Amtrak passenger service from New York City to St. Albans, and to Rutland (to be extended to Burlington), Gov. Dean’s failed \$28 million Champlain Flyer dream lives on. The leading candidate for this fiscal black hole is the Barre to Montpelier service promoted by renewable energy mogul (and Vermont’s most successful harvester of taxpayer funded subsidies) David Blittersdorf. It happens that Blittersdorf has picked up five elderly Budd cars, and would like nothing better than to have the State take them off his hands at a nice profit to operate on this low-density seven-mile service.

Carbon Tax is what all of these groups desperately want, because even if it had no effect on the planet’s climate, which it wouldn’t, by 2030 it would confiscate half a billion dollars a year from taxpayers to be spent on subsidies for every imaginable climate cause and special interest, like the ones outlined above.



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ETHAN ALLEN INSTITUTE
P.O. Box 543
Montpelier, VT 05601

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School Choice: An Antidote to Climate Indoctrination

Over the past few years, Vermont public schools have become increasingly, overtly political in the indoctrination of students to a political agenda. We have seen several examples of students walking out of class to protest climate change, gun control, and “social justice” issues, often if not always with the encouragement of the faculty and administrations.

Back in May, True North Reports published a story, “Vermont Youth Lobby using taxpayer assets to carry out student activism,” chronicling how Harwood Union assets were improperly used in connection with a climate march on Montpelier.

On August 1, the *Brattleboro Reformer* reported: “Kurt Daims of Brattleboro has been pushing for the issue of climate change to be discussed during

every Windham Southeast School District meeting. ‘That’s the way that recognizes the feeling of emergency I think many people in the public have,’ he told the school board last week, ‘so that they can be assured that like national security during a wartime, which the climate crisis approaches, it’s always on the agenda for them to address.’

A nonbinding resolution to include agenda items on climate change at every meeting had been proposed by Daims and approved at the annual school district last month. His motion was amended to also direct the board to make decisions with an eye toward economic, social and racial justice.

Last Wednesday, the Windham Southeast School District Board of Directors approved a motion to establish a policy that would create a climate

change council to advise on sustainability issues....”

Watch as Vermont public schools actively encourage their students to participate in the September Global Climate Strike and Week of Actions. This isn’t an educational mission, it is political indoctrination.

If schools want to have a political mission, that’s potentially fine. But only if the parents of children are okay with it, and, if they are not, have the option of sending their kids somewhere else. Somewhere that reflects their own values as opposed to those of these left-wing ideologues. Or maybe even a school that focuses on reading, writing, arithmetic, and teaching kids how to think, not what to think.

If ever there were a time to demand school choice for all children, now is that time.