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Renewable Energy For a Green Future

The debate about global warming is over. An overwhelming majority of the world's scientists agree that the Earth's climate is warming at an unprecedented rate, creating the single most important environmental challenge we face over the next century. Global warming will not only damage the environment but also harm human health and the economy.

We need to generate more energy from clean renewable sources, develop more efficient transportation systems, invest in energy efficiency, and produce home grown fuels. These solutions will not only reduce global warming but make our country more energy independent and less reliant on fossil fuels from politically unstable regions.

A shift towards cleaner – and greener – energy also allows for tremendous economic growth opportunities in Maine. In a June 17th Press Herald article, Charles Lawton reflects on the importance of economic clusters – groups of interrelated businesses and industries – to Maine's economy. He points to the paper mills of the 19th and 20th century as examples of such clusters that provide jobs far beyond the mills themselves. His thesis argues then that randomly adding new jobs is inefficient; rather, we should identify a broader, progressive industry where Maine can be successful and focus job growth in that sector. I believe energy is the place to begin.

As Maine – and the rest of the nation – moves towards energy efficiency and change, we should lead the production efforts of wind turbines and solar panels. Such an effort will promote job growth in the related and linked industries as well, serving laborers at all levels.

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How we address this issue will determine the future we leave our children and grandchildren. In Maine, global warming will result in rising sea levels, worsening air quality, and increasing frequency and severity of storms, coastal erosion, droughts, heat-waves, vector-borne diseases, floods, and wildfires. These changes will negatively affect natural-resource based industries such as logging, maple syrup, winter sports, ocean fishing, and tourism.

As a native Mainer, I'm deeply concerned about these changes. Scientists tell us that over the last century, the average temperature in Lewiston, Maine, has increased 3.4°F, and precipitation has decreased by up to 20 percent in many parts of the state. In Rockland, the sea level is already rising by 3.9 inches per century, and it is likely to rise another 14 inches by 2100.

As the major contributor to global warming pollution, the United States has an obligation to the global community in resolving global warming.

Unfortunately, the Bush Administration and the United States Congress have done a poor job in tackling our country's dependence on fossil fuels and reversing the damage to our climate and our environment. Because of this lack of leadership, the U.S. lags far behind the developed world in implementing the solutions necessary to stop this trend before we reach a tipping point.

As Maine State Senate Majority Leader,

- I supported the nation's first state statute to implement a state climate action plan. This plan aims to reduce global warming related pollution in Maine to 1990 levels by 2010.
- I helped author a law that requires the state to increase our utilization of renewable energy by 10 percent over the next decade. This legislation will increase the use of wind and solar energy.
- I was one of a handful of state senators who received a 100 percent approval rating from the League of Conservation voters and was recently recognized by the League for my longstanding commitment to environmental issues.
- I also sponsored legislation that promoted the use of low-emission vehicles.

As a member of the United States Congress, I am committed to continuing my leadership on global warming. Currently, I support proposed federal legislation in the House of Representatives – the Safe Climate Act -- that would lower emissions of global warming pollution by 80 percent by 2050.

The solutions to reduce global warming pollution include:

- Developing clean, renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and tidal.
- Investing in energy efficiency to eliminate energy waste as well as building more energy-efficient buildings.
- Creating a more sustainable and efficient public transportation system that includes a network of trains and buses, while developing cars that are cleaner and get better mileage.
- Developing domestic fuel sources such as biodiesel and biomass from our forest resources.
- Investing in clean energy technologies that will provide new jobs and economic stability.

Global warming is a tremendous challenge to both our state and nation. But it is a challenge that, with political leadership, we can meet and solve. Fortunately, we have access to the technology and solutions to confront this problem. What we need is someone with the dedication and political leadership to see that these changes and technologies become a reality.

Many of the impacts we will face here in Maine from global warming are included in a recent study entitled "Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment", co-authored by Mainer Dr. Cameron Wake at the University of New Hampshire. This detailed study gives us several different scenarios of the changes to expect in the Northeast, coupled with potential actions we could take.