

Environmental Action Report – 2012

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Dear Fellow Vermonter,

As citizens, parents, and grandparents we have a responsibility to leave a stronger nation and safer world to our kids, grandchildren, and all future generations. It is a moral injustice, if despite knowing better, our actions today leave them an unstable world tomorrow - instability which could have been prevented. That is why it is one of my deepest disappointments that Congress, despite an enormous amount of scientific information, has failed to take appropriate action to reverse global warming.

We must be clear: global warming is real and significantly caused by human activity. Global warming is already having a major impact today in the form of increasing temperatures, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and record floods and droughts. We know this from rigorous scientific research at the National Academy of Sciences, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the U.S. Global Change Research Program, and other institutions. We also know that this environmental destruction will only get worse if we do not take bold action now.

This is not just an environmental issue; it is an economic and a security issue. The insurance industry says global warming is increasing extreme weather damage and causing billions of dollars in property loss. The military is concerned that global warming will result in the dislocation of people and wars fought over limited resources, therefore destabilizing global security.

Despite clear and compelling evidence, too many of my colleagues deny the science and oppose solutions which will cut greenhouse gas emissions. The oil and coal industries' profits depend on more burning of fossil fuels, even if the resulting greenhouse gas pollution is devastating our planet. They are engaged in a decades-long campaign of lies and distortions about global warming. Sadly, their efforts have been effective in Congress. But increasingly the American people, unlike Congress, understand the impacts of global warming because we are seeing them with our own eyes and experiencing them firsthand.

Vermonters are aware that Lake Champlain no longer freezes over like it used to. People were shocked by the record-breaking heat wave that hit the state in March. And, of course, we were stunned by the devastation of Hurricane Irene - which caused a billion dollars of damage in our state. Across America, we see record drought and wildfires in Texas that destroyed thousands of homes, floods in North Dakota that displaced thousands of families, and Alaskan coastal villages forced to relocate at great expense due to melting ice shelves and flooding. Internationally, the story is the same whether it is deadly heat waves in Russia, floods that left significant portions of nuclear-armed Pakistan under-water for weeks, or severe drought in China, the devastation is enormous and millions of people have been impacted.

The good news is that in Vermont we are helping to lead the country in transforming our energy system to energy efficiency and sustainable energy. In Vermont, we also know that good environmental policy is good economic policy. We're proud that our state is number one in the nation in green jobs per capita.

If Vermont can be a model for America, and help make America a model for the world in reversing global warming, we will have played a monumental role in preserving for our children and grandchildren the legacy they deserve.

To keep updated on energy and environmental issues my office is working on, please visit my Website at www.sanders.senate.gov or call us toll free at 1 (800) 339-9834.



With the U.S. Capitol as the back drop, Senator Sanders speaks before a crowd of hundreds participating in an environmental rally.

Sincerely,

Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

MAKING PROGRESS ON SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

In Vermont, particularly as we move away from the aging and problem-ridden Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, it is important that we make progress on using more sustainable energy to produce electricity.

That includes more solar, which is now eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit. I am very proud that my office was able to work with the State Department of Education on a Solar in the Schools program, which provided federal funds for solar panels in 11 Vermont public schools. I have also worked with the Vermont National Guard to install a 1.45 megawatt solar energy project that provides 40 percent of their electricity, saving nearly \$250,000 a year. This is currently the second largest solar project in the state and is a model for National Guard bases around the country. My office has also secured funds to install solar hot water systems at affordable housing communities such as Windsor Village, St. Stanislaus in West Rutland, Highgate Housing in Barre, Salmon Run Apartments in Burlington, Westgate Apartments in Brattleboro, and Applegate Apartments in Bennington.

At a time when wind is increasingly competitive with conventional power sources, we are also making progress on using wind energy. It is projected that, within the next five years, wind will supply 8 percent of Vermont's power. Further, in terms of innovative energy projects, the Washington Electric Coop is producing eight megawatts of low-cost electricity



At a Citizens Awareness Rally in Brattleboro, Senator Sanders makes an impassioned speech that we must move away from the problem-ridden Vermont Yankee plant and toward more sustainable energy.

from the methane gas from an aging landfill in Coventry, providing electricity for two-thirds of their members. We are also taking positive steps in expanding "cow power" – electricity generated by methane gas from Vermont dairy farms.

In terms of heating, Vermonters are taking strong advantage of a local natural resource. We now have 47 public schools heating with biomass such as wood chips or pellets. Montpelier, with a federal grant, is working to heat much of its downtown with a biomass district heat system, and Middlebury College is using biomass to

cut their oil use in half.

Vermont is also making progress in moving to geothermal, which draws on warmer underground temperatures to heat homes and buildings in the winter. This cost-effective technology can provide heat and cooling for one-third the price of oil. Homeowners installing geothermal are eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit. Geothermal creates jobs for well drillers in Vermont and manufacturers in America. Many of our schools and buildings are using geothermal, including the Veterans Home in Bennington, Champlain College, the Border Patrol Office in Derby, St. Johnsbury Academy and many other facilities.

HISTORIC FUEL ECONOMY STANDARDS

When we talk about transforming our energy system, we cannot ignore the issue of transportation. In fact, automobile and truck use account for nearly half of Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions. We live in a rural state, and many of us drive long distances every day.

At a time when gas at the pump is nearly \$4 a gallon, and when our nation spends over \$300 billion a year importing foreign oil, it is



imperative that we move aggressively to energy efficiency in auto and truck use, and significantly expand public transportation and rail service.

That is why I strongly support President Obama's historic effort to move our cars and trucks to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025. This program will cut oil consumption by 12 billion barrels, cut 6 billion metric tons of carbon pollution, and save \$1.7 trillion.

CREATING A SMARTER ELECTRIC GRID AND A VERMONT/SANDIA RESEARCH PROGRAM

As part of the stimulus package, Vermont was the recipient of a major U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) grant, which invested nearly \$69 million to help Vermont become the first state with near universal smart electric meters to modernize our grid. This program will enable utilities to better respond to outages and will empower consumers to better manage their energy use and help us add more solar and wind to our grid.

One of the most exciting aspects of the smart grid development in Vermont is that it forms the basis of a unique partnership with Sandia National Laboratory. I visited the Sandia Lab in New Mexico in 2008, and was impressed by what I saw. With no DOE national labs located in



New England, I have worked to create a Vermont partnership with Sandia to conduct groundbreaking research in Vermont and create educational opportunities for our students. In conjunction with

our state government, utilities, academic institutions and business community, Vermont and Sandia have formed a Center for Energy Transformation and Innovation (CETI). We have already secured \$3 million in federal funds over the next three years to advance smart grid and renewable energy research in our state. My hope is

that this partnership will not only lead to scientific breakthroughs in sustainable energy, but will stimulate private investment and new job creation for Vermont.

LEADING THE NATION IN ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The cheapest form of energy is the energy we do not use, the energy we save through energy efficiency. Energy efficiency investments save us money and cut greenhouse gas emissions. As frugal Vermonters, we are proud to be leading the nation in energy efficiency. Over a decade ago we created Efficiency Vermont, and thanks to their work, as well as the work of our town energy committees and other efforts, our major utilities now sell less electricity to us than they did in 2005. This is a huge accomplishment. What we are doing is simply using common sense. For example, by helping to install energy-efficient light bulbs we cut consumption as much as 80 percent compared to conventional bulbs.

We also are a leader on weatherization. In Vermont we spend \$1 billion annually on heating, primarily for heating oil and other fossil fuels – 80 percent of which leaves our state. By contrast, when we invest in energy efficiency, 80 percent of that money stays in Vermont to create local jobs. Our weatherization efforts have helped 15,000 households over the last decade, saving families on average \$916 a year on their

energy and fuel bills. We are working on upgrading efficiency at our schools and public buildings too, and I am pleased the \$3.2 billion Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program I co-authored brought \$16.5 million to Vermont.

We can and should do more. One obstacle to making energy improvements is the upfront cost. The Empire State Building got a private contractor to pay for their recent \$13 million energy retrofit, and they are using the \$4.4 million in annual savings to pay back that cost over a three-year period. That is a pretty good deal! I want homeowners and businesses in Vermont to get the same deal. That is why I am aggressively working on programs like PACE and on-bill financing that provide loans to improve efficiency – and use the savings to pay back the loan over time on property tax or utility bills, respectively. Last year I passed federal legislation to support on-bill financing. We can do better. As a state, we need to explore opportunities in more energy efficient lighting, such as LEDs, as well as advanced appliances.

RESOURCES TO HELP FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES LEARN MORE ABOUT ENERGY

Vermont Department of Public Service

112 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05671-1801
(802) 828-2811
<http://publicservice.vermont.gov>

Weatherization

Vermont Department for Children and Families,
OEO
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671-1801
(802) 769-6409
http://dcf.vermont.gov/o eo/weatherization_offices



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