

Public Comment on H.51, H.175, H.214
April 23, 2019

I am submitting this public comment to be added to the record of the special meeting to be held this evening, Tues. 04/23/19 at the Statehouse regarding the following bills which were introduced in the current legislative session: H.51, H 175, and H.214.

My name is Barbara Burnett. I am a resident of Vermont and live in Montpelier.

I know that none of the 3 bills that addressed climate change (H.51, H.175 and H.214) even made it out of committee. Since they missed the crossover deadline I assume that none of them will be put to a vote in the legislature in this session. While I can't say that I'm surprised, I am heart-broken that the state of Vermont has apparently let a crucial opportunity to begin the immense task of actually responding to the climate crisis slip through its fingers.

Is that because few legislators have yet to fully grasp the seriousness and the urgency of responding to climate change? Have even those who say that they are aware of the scientists' warnings actually taken their words into their hearts and felt the urgency in their very bones?

Folks, we are facing a CLIMATE EMERGENCY. It's basic physics—one of the natural laws that govern our universe. Physics doesn't care if you believe in climate change or not. Physics doesn't care about your budget woes. And most importantly physics DOES NOT NEGOTIATE. If you ignore the rules of the physical universe you will suffer the consequences of doing so. I plead with each of you not to be like the boy in the 50's who tied a towel around his neck and jumped off the roof of his suburban house pretending to be Superman. He was lucky. He learned the hard way by only breaking an arm or a leg that believing that he could fly didn't repeal the law of gravity.

According to the IPCC report released last fall we have, at most, 11 years left to dramatically reduce our carbon emissions worldwide. Emissions must peak by 2020 and then we must cut them 60% from 2015 levels by 2030—and reach net zero emissions by 2050 in order to keep the planet from warming more than 1.5 degrees C (2.5 degrees F).

Still, that estimate of 11 years may be way too conservative. Jamie Henn, co-founder and the program director for the international climate group 350.org, stated in [a tweet](#), the "scariest thing about the IPCC Report" is the fact that "it's the watered down, consensus version. The latest science is much, much, much more terrifying." Henn was responding to Penn State University climate scientist Michael Mann who was pushing back against those criticizing the IPCC report as too "alarmist" in its declarations and warnings. "If anything," Professor Mann [declared](#), "it is the opposite. Once again, with their latest report, they have been overly conservative (ie. erring on the side of understating/underestimating the problem.)"

Unfortunately, the most recent scientific studies—which are being released almost daily—document that our planet is heating up even more rapidly than was projected last fall. That means that we have even less time to act to avoid triggering potentially catastrophic, unstoppable climate change than we were told in October. One scientist on the IPCC panel says that we must making significant reductions in emissions by 2020--not by 2030. That's next year, folks!

We are destroying our ourselves and our home planet by continuing to burn fossil fuels. The climate is already rapidly changing in ways that could lead to the destruction of our technologically complex civilization as well as result in the extinction of many species—including possibly our own. We are already seeing the consequences of 1 degree C (1.8 degrees F) of atmospheric warming which in addition to the 93% of CO2 emissions that have been absorbed in the oceans: stronger, more rapidly developing tropical storms, continuous record-breaking floods interlaced with massive forest fires and droughts, record heat and cold temperatures and bizarre “unseasonable weather” due to a fractured, stagnant jet stream, increasing precipitation (since warm air holds more moisture than drier air) and more. Now due to droughts, tropical storms, and floods we are beginning to see crop failures worldwide.

Even worse, not all of our past carbon emissions have yet registered on the world thermometer. We have already emitted enough carbon to ensure a rise of another .5 degrees C (.7 degrees F). Any additional emissions will eventually send the temperature even higher--and consequently our chances of survival will plummet. Next up: famine, pandemics and the spread of tropical diseases, followed by waves of refugees worldwide as people flee sea level rise as the poles continue to melt.

I plead with everyone here to accept the hard truth. Climate change is real, it is happening and it will only continue to quickly worsen if we don't act now. I plead with each legislator who is here tonight. There is no time left for political posturing. Procrastinating and taking incremental steps won't save our or our children's skins--only bold, comprehensive, effective action beginning today has any chance of success.

To avoid climate catastrophe we must stop building new fossil fuel infrastructure and begin to radically reduce our fossil fuel use NOW—not after the next legislative session or after the 2020 election. We must completely re-prioritize our state budget. We must transfer tax revenues away from supporting fossil fuels, build a transportation system based on renewable energy, foster renewable energy for heating, lighting, etc., and support regenerative agriculture.

Even harder for most of us to comprehend is the fact that we will all have to live much more sustainably if we want to pass on the best aspects of our civilization to our children. We no longer have the option to keep burning fossil fuels. Our only choice is which alternative energy sources we will use to meet our needs (but not all of our wants).

If you truly love your children and grandchildren. If you truly love this lovely state and the planet that we all call home, I implore you to begin to take serious legislative action now on climate change. We cannot wait until next year; we don't have time.

I call for the the declaration of a climate emergency by the state of Vermont. Furthermore, I request that a special session of the legislature be convened to develop and act on legislation which is robust enough to address the seriousness of this emergency—not just the 3 items which never made it out of committee this session—but additional stronger proposals. I also request that in the process that every line item in the state's budget be carefully scrutinized. Every dollar in the budget could potentially be reallocated to meeting this emergency.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Burnett