

COMMENTARY

How utility customers can fight climate change

**By members of the
Community Power Coalition
of New Hampshire**
For the Valley News

The image of women pushing wheelbarrows atop a coal mine dump near Johannesburg, South Africa (“World on ‘thin ice,’” Page B3, March 21) carries a powerful message. This photo is linked to reporting about the latest findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released on March 20.

The bad news is that we will reach an average global warming increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2035, if not sooner. Clearly, we are experiencing the impacts of climate change, and the worst impacts, especially for the most vulnerable, are coming much faster than originally thought.

Humanity still has a chance to prevent the worst of climate change’s future harms. If we cut greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and eliminate the other half by the early 2050s, the report states, there is a 50/50 chance of remaining at this critical threshold of 1.5 degrees C. The United Nations chief has called for an end to new fossil fuel exploration and for rich countries to quit coal, oil, and gas by 2040.

So how do we, as individuals, help slow and mitigate the impact of global warming? Some

are eating less meat; adding insulation, heat pumps, solar panels and electric storage batteries to homes; and buying electric vehicles. These are all good things, but is there an additional simple and inexpensive step we can all take right now to have an immediate effect?

The New Hampshire Department of Energy currently requires electric utilities to acquire a minimum of 23.4% of their energy from renewable generating sources and will require 25.5% by 2025. (In comparison, Connecticut will require 44% and Maine, 80% by 2030.) So most New Hampshire consumers currently use electricity that is only 23.4% renewable, and that low percentage is not about to rise significantly anytime soon.

The good news is that Community Power is here. Most residents and businesses in the Upper Valley towns of Enfield, Hanover, Lebanon, and Plainfield who receive their electric supply from Liberty, Eversource, or Unitil will soon be automatically enrolled into a Community Power Plan where they will get to *choose* the percentage of renewable electricity they consume. Not just 23.4%, the amount required by law, but 33%, 50% and even 100% renewable energy choices will be available. Moreover, they will be able to do so at a lower cost. (Their utilities will continue to bill for transmission and distribution and will maintain the

power lines and respond to emergencies. They will also continue sending electric bills that will include the energy supply portion of the bill.)

There will be four options. For Granite Basic (23.4% renewable), consumers will pay 15.8 cents per kilowatt hour (kWh). Granite Plus (33% renewable) will cost 16.2 cents. Clean 50 (50% renewable) will cost 16.9 cents, and Clean 100 (100% renewable) will cost 19.1 cents per kWh. ALL of these rates are lower than the rates currently charged by Eversource (20.2 cents per kWh) or Liberty (22.0 cents per kWh) for the power supply portion of their service. (The income-based Electric Assistance Program will continue unchanged.)

Community Power customers will have the opportunity to lower or remove 100% of the greenhouse gas emissions from their electric supply by choosing the highest level of renewable power they can afford.

And this isn’t the end of the story. This opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our power supply comes thanks to several years of effort by some of our neighbors to create the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH), a nonprofit electric power agency with a growing membership of 30 municipalities statewide.

Serving so many customers, CPCNH will be able to negotiate lower costs and build a fi-

nancial cushion to stabilize rates. In addition, over time, its member communities, collectively and/or individually, will be able to create innovative projects, such as building large solar arrays, to shape our renewable energy supply and make it more local.

Community Power customers can do something to mitigate climate change *now* by going to the Community Power website at CommunityPowerNH.gov and opting up to the highest level of renewable energy they can afford. We urge them to do it soon to lower their personal carbon footprint and send a powerful message to our governor, legislators, state energy planners, and utilities that our communities value clean energy and they need to do more.

We also encourage other New Hampshire towns to join CPCNH so that their residents and businesses can amplify efforts to create a more renewable and fossil-fuel-free power supply. Please hurry! According to the IPCC report, there is no time to waste.

Upper Valley members of the Community Power Coalition include Jo-Ellen Courtney and Kim Quirk, of Enfield; Yolanda Baumgartner and Judi Colla, of Hanover; Greg Ames and Jonathan Chaffee, of Lebanon; and Steve Ladd and Evan Oxenham, of Plainfield.