

**Visit to the office of Senator Susan Collins
by members of the Social Action Committee
Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
524 Allen Avenue, Portland, ME**

To discuss issues related to climate change

April 9, 2014

Meeting with Peter Morin

Introductions

Purpose of our visit

Specific issue presentations

Discussion

The Context

On February 16 our church participated in a nationwide Preach-In on Climate Change. Members of our congregation signed postcards urging Senator Collins to support the new EPA regulations of carbon emissions. We are here to present these postcards and to urge the Senator to take immediate leadership action on pressing issues to address the climate change that is upon us.

Background

The vast majority of scientists are now convinced that humans are causing global warming and climate change by the emission of greenhouse gases, the major of which is CO₂. CO₂ levels are now at record highs, reaching 400 ppm this year, compared to a pre-industrial level in the 19th century of approximately 275 ppm. Ice core data show that these levels have not been seen in the last 800,000 years. Climate change is happening, we are causing it, and the impacts will not be benign. It is past time to act.

Our oceans are warming and acidifying, growing seasons are getting longer, arctic ice is disappearing, glaciers and ice sheets are shrinking, habitat change is forcing animals and plants to migrate, ocean levels are rising, extreme weather events are more common, and weather patterns are changing. With its dependence on the oceans, the forests, agriculture, and tourism, Maine will see major impacts on its economy from a changing climate. With human-induced climate change already happening, we believe there is no longer time for any debate. Instead it is necessary to ramp up our efforts to slow climate change and to move to a less dangerous economy than one based on fossil fuels. We have identified several key areas where we urge Senator Collins to provide leadership to take action immediately.

Specific Actions

1. Regulate and reduce carbon dioxide emissions

We must move quickly and firmly to reduce our use of fossil fuels, which are the main contributors to CO₂ buildup and climate change. Maine already participates in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative with other northeastern and mid-Atlantic states. Partly as a result of this regulation, our power plants have drastically reduced their carbon emissions. The same thing needs to happen across the country.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is developing limits on carbon emissions from new and existing power plants, which are responsible for 40 percent of U.S. carbon emissions.

- When the EPA rules for the regulation of CO₂ from power plants come before Congress for review and approval, we urge the Senator to support their adoption.
- We also urge the Senator to support federal mandates for a more efficient transportation fleet, cars, trucks, trains, and planes.

2. Reduce the danger of regional catastrophes from the transport of fossil fuels

We are very concerned about the danger posed by spills from oil pipelines and freight trains. We have seen numerous instances of catastrophic spills in recent years. More crude oil was spilled in U.S. rail incidents last year than was spilled in the nearly four decades since the federal government began collecting data on such spills. In Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, 47 people were killed in a crude oil accident and explosion. In Michigan, Arkansas, North Dakota, and other states, spills from pipelines or trains have damaged the environment. Fortunately, not yet in Maine, but we are concerned that the flow in the pipeline running from Montreal to South Portland will be reversed and used to transport heavy crude oil from Canada to Maine. This pipeline runs right through the Sebago Lake watershed and would have disastrous consequences if a spill were to occur. These heavy crudes, sometimes called “tar sands,” contain toxic volatiles that endanger human life when they evaporate. Moreover, these heavy crude oils sink in water and are very difficult to clean up. We do not want to take the chance of substantial damage to our watershed, our recreational area, our wildlife, and our drinking water supply. Maine depends on its natural beauty and healthy environment for its economy and its way of life.

Currently, the regulation of oil and gas pipelines is the purview of federal agencies that are not responsible to local, regional, and state constituencies. We do not like having no say in the safety of our own environment.

- We urge the Senator to introduce legislation that would provide avenues for local review of pipeline safety. We also urge the Senator to oppose the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline.

3. Reduce our use of fossil fuels while promoting clean, renewable energy

The federal government and the Senator have supported fossil fuel production in the past through tax breaks to the industry and now support for the Keystone XL pipeline. Because our environment needs us to reduce production and use of fossil fuels and increase renewable energy as much as possible, we are urging the Senator to increase her support of production of that renewable energy.

The Senator's work on behalf of the University of Maine to encourage the development of offshore wind energy is a great example. But more can be done. Maine is in a great position to use wind both on shore and off and the abundant sun, as well, not only to improve our carbon footprint but also to provide needed jobs for our residents. As we wind down our war involvement, the peace dividend could provide the needed financial resources for this important investment. People want to use solar power for their homes and businesses but need help with the initial layout of money. Isn't that kind of incentive the same as has been provided for fossil fuels in the past? Offshore wind is another great opportunity for research dollars and jobs both building and maintaining the needed equipment.

- We urge Senator Collins to continue to support federal tax credits to incentivize the entire renewable energy sector. It will mean good jobs for Maine.

4. Promote energy conservation

Energy conservation is the “low-hanging fruit” for slowing climate change and moving our economy off of fossil fuels. It is just common sense to invest in weatherization, improvements in heating plants, and better buildings. In Maine the Efficiency Maine Trust has been doing a good job in promoting energy conservation across the board for industry, commerce, and residents. We need more funding for this and similar efforts and greater leadership from the federal government.

- We urge Senator Collins to expand federal incentives to encourage energy conservation for residential, commercial, and industrial buildings.

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