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Shakopee climate change forum searches for common ground

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A public forum last Saturday in Shakopee looked into the climate issue and a few possible ways to address it.

NASA/public domain

SHAKOPEE — A public forum Saturday meant to find common ground among a range of perspectives on climate change didn't turn up much, though it wasn't fruitless.

Scientists around the world have found the rise in temperature and shorter winters are disrupting weather patterns and ocean currents and affecting agriculture, public health and biodiversity. Sea levels have risen about 3 inches since 1995, according to NASA satellite measurements.

But the issue is politically controversial in the U.S. Conservatives often oppose government action to curtail carbon emissions from the fossil fuels that power most of society; liberals tend to favor regulation and government support for renewable power sources.

Some Democrats in Congress are pushing to move the U.S. to completely renewable energy sources in a decade or so, but opponents say the idea is far too expensive and radical.

The Shakopee participants brought some nuance to these simplified categories. Emily Helgeson of Eagan said temperatures might be rising but questioned whether that was a problem.

“Can we even change that?” she asked, noting Earth has warmed in the past. People can adapt to it, she added, and she criticized government controls like proposed taxes on carbon emissions.

NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration report today’s pace of warming is faster than previous warming periods in Earth’s history and the atmosphere’s concentration of carbon dioxide is higher than in 3 million years, based on chemical clues preserved in ice sheets, sediment and rock.

Joe Niedermayr from Lakeville said arguments over the science of climate change are beside the point given the world’s many ecological problems with obvious causes. He said people and the capitalistic system consume more of the world’s resources than it can sustain.

“Altogether we need to change our attitude,” he said.

Mitch Rauk, an engineer from Minneapolis, fell in between, saying he agreed the country should make some changes but criticizing what he called hysteria around the climate issue. Renewable energy advocates should persuade rather than force change through laws, he said.

Bruce Morlan and Tim Reckmeyer came as local members of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, a national group pushing for a bill to tax carbon emissions, rebate the revenue to the public and prod people to innovate for less carbon-intensive ways to do business. The market-

based approach has conservative and liberal support, according to the group.

Morlan pointed to Ronald Reagan's support for the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement to phase out the use of chemicals that depleted the ozone in the 1980s, as proof that environmental objectives don't need to be anti-conservative.

But Koskovich and others said the free market will solve the problem, if it even exists, without meddling.

Saturday's group wasn't quite representative of Minnesota or the southwest Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Majorities of survey respondents in both areas in 2016 believed global warming was happening and supported several related policies, such as restricting carbon emissions, according to the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

The state also requires large utilities to get a portion of their power from renewable sources.

The forum was nonetheless valuable as practice for hearing and speaking respectfully on a tough topic, co-moderator Kim Martinson said.

"I believe this is citizenship," she told the group.

Dan Holtmeyer

Community editor

Dan Holtmeyer is the community editor for the Prior Lake and Savage papers. He grew up in Nebraska and worked as a journalist in Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas before coming to Minnesota in 2018.

About a dozen people gathered at the Shakopee Library for the event hosted by the Better Angels Eagan Alliance, a local group that brings together different sides on contentious topics.

The point isn't to change minds but simply to have a discussion together, alliance member and forum co-moderator Rick Olson of Prior Lake said. Saturday's forum looked into the climate issue overall and a few possible ways to address it.

Minds certainly didn't change. Though a small group, attendees' viewpoints ranged widely from rejecting the concept of human-caused climate change to supporting far-reaching steps to alleviate it.

About the only points of agreement were the ability of technological innovation to help solve humanity's problems and the need to protect the environment from pollution of at least some kinds.

"I'm a huge believer in being a steward of clean air, clean water," said Tom Koskovich, a Shakopee farmer who said blaming humanity for global warming is a hoax.

Nearly all climate researchers with peer-reviewed work agree human use of coal and other fossil fuels is causing the planet's average temperature to rise by pumping huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, according to studies in the science journal *Environmental Research Letters* and elsewhere.

Average temperatures have gone up 1 or 2 degrees around the world and in Minnesota since the late 1800s, according to NASA and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. It's a small change on a given day, but a couple more degrees consistently in the air covering an entire state or planet represents a large amount of extra heat.