

State action needed on climate change

By State Representative Greg Vitali, D-Delaware

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On Feb. 2, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report predicting global temperature rises of up to 11.5 degrees Fahrenheit and sea level rises of up to 23 inches by the end of the century. This report also said global warming had resulted in stronger hurricanes such as Katrina. The IPCC report represents the most authoritative science in the world on the subject of global warming.

President Bush, a longtime climate change doubter, recently called global warming a "serious issue" and on Feb. 1, Gov. Ed Rendell, while unveiling his "Energy Independence Strategy," made a rare public statement on climate change, calling it the "largest environmental problem we face in Pennsylvania."

The case has been made by our scientists and acknowledged by our elected officials. It is now time for the Pennsylvania General Assembly to begin passing legislation needed to address this issue.

A good start would be the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act (H.B. 110), which I introduced on Jan. 31, or a nearly identical bill introduced by state Sen. Ted Erickson (S.B. 265). Both bills would do 3 things. First, they would require the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to conduct an annual inventory of greenhouse gas emitted in Pennsylvania. This inventory would allow Pennsylvania to establish a baseline and track future GHG emissions. Second, the bills would require DEP to prepare a GHG action plan. This action plan would set target GHG reduction goals and recommend the policy options needed to reach those goals. Finally, the bills would require DEP to establish a voluntary GHG registry. This registry would encourage businesses to reduce their GHG before being required by law to do so by providing an official location to record their reductions.

Gov. Rendell's recently unveiled Energy Independence Strategy contains many important proposals which would be expected to be included in Pennsylvania's GHG action plan. The governor's plan would create an \$850 million fund to, among other things, encourage smart meters on thermostats, provide rebates to replace inefficient refrigerators and air conditioner, and to help pay for solar panels on residential homes. Rendell's proposal would also require the use of biofuels in gasoline and diesel sold in Pennsylvania. The governor is also expected to present a comprehensive climate change proposal soon.

A number of pieces of legislation will be needed to implement the governor's Energy Independence Strategy and climate change proposal. Legislation will also be needed to implement recommendations contained in Pennsylvania's GHG

action plan. Although more and more Pennsylvania legislators are talking the talk of climate change, the passage of this legislation will be no easy task. Legislators need to hear from their constituents.

Climate change is not only the most important environmental problem facing Pennsylvania, but it is also the most important environmental problem facing the planet. Citizens who appreciate this fact need to contact their state representative and state senator and let them know how they feel.