

Why Maryland Can't Wait to Fight Global Warming

by Senator Paul Pinsky and Delegate Kumar Barve

534 words

During this year's General Assembly session, Maryland has an unusual opportunity to take real action on global warming. The Global Warming Solutions Act would cut our greenhouse gas pollution 25% by 2020 and 90% by 2050.

For too long, we've debated this very real threat. Why now? And why Maryland? First, we can't afford to wait. The damage to Maryland's economy and to our environment -- particularly the Chesapeake Bay -- if we do nothing is far too great a cost to bear. With 3,100 miles of shoreline, Maryland is the fourth most vulnerable state in the nation to the effects of global warming. Rising sea levels, stronger and more frequent storms, and severe weather patterns that threaten our agricultural sustainability, tourism, and urban centers could spell disaster for Maryland's economy. Conversely, the Global Warming Solutions Act would mean significant investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green buildings, creating new "green collar" jobs for Marylanders and saving taxpayers money in the long run, while reversing an environmentally destructive trend.

To date, the White House has failed to join international accords to address climate change. Why should we expect nations like China and India to join these efforts if the historically worst polluter does not? We can no longer wait for the federal government to act. Even if voters elect a pro-environment president in November who wants to take action on global warming, there is still a long battle ahead in Congress. If Maryland joins other states that have adopted solutions to global warming, it can only hasten Congress, and the White House, to approve national policy.

Some of the most progressive policies in our nation -- including civil rights, labor, and environmental laws -- were first enacted at the state level, years or even decades before the federal government followed suit. Surely, this is the power and the responsibility of state governance. Joining with other states, Maryland acted to improve energy efficiency on appliances and regulate car emissions before the federal government did something. Once again, we won't be going it alone: Maryland will follow where California, New Jersey, and Hawaii go before us.

The most important reason we must act now is for all Marylanders. People are concerned about ice caps melting, polar bears dying, and Hurricane Katrina but they are also increasingly troubled at the very real signs of global warming they see every day -- shorelines being rapidly lost and wildlife affected by changing habitat and migration. Memories of Hurricane Isabel -- the Inner Harbor underwater, the days without power, the unsafe drinking water -- remain fresh.

In a show of public concern, last week more than 400 people rallied in support of the Global Warming Solutions Act on a snowy day in Annapolis. The diverse crowd -- young and old -- included students, doctors and nurses, business owners, and people of faith

along with environmentalists and our fellow lawmakers. Maryland has an enormous responsibility -- some would say a moral responsibility -- to take action on global warming and make Maryland a national leader on one of the most critical issues of our time. The impacts of global warming to our fragile state won't wait, and neither should we.

State Senator Paul G. Pinsky represents Prince George's County and serves as Chairman of the Environment Subcommittee. Delegate Kumar Barve is the Majority Leader in the House of Delegates. They are the lead sponsors in their respective legislative chambers of the Global Warming Solutions Act.

Contacts

Senator Pinsky: 240-463-4599 or 301-779-0441

Paul.Pinsky@senate.state.md.us

Delegate Barve: 410-841-3464

kumar.barve@house.state.md.us