

Climate Change in Presidential Politics: Reflection from Carbon Coalition Field Organizers

How Carbon Coalition volunteer activists made climate change an issue for candidates



(AP Photo)

Two years ago, on January 12, 2006, the Carbon Coalition brought 45 people representing business, conservation, science, and energy interests, as well as federal and state policy-makers, together to map out a two-year public education and civic engagement effort on global warming leading up to the NH Presidential Primary.

In the years that followed, political experts and pundits continued to insist that global warming was not an important issue for politicians to address with their constituents. Carbon Coalition members – from conservation groups to chambers of commerce – continued to work hard to connect hundreds of citizens with the candidates in every corner of the Granite State to discuss, from different points of view, concerns over global warming impacts and support for responsible solutions.





On January 8, 2008, a few front-runners emerged from the Republican and Democratic presidential primaries. Each of the winners is a vocal advocate for climate action. All call for a nationwide cap on greenhouse gas emissions, all support increased federal funding for clean energy R&D, and all call for the implementation of a post-Kyoto international treaty on climate change.

Through the hard work and dedication of a statewide cadre of volunteers who stood up and asked candidates to be specific on the issues of global warming, the Carbon Coalition made sure global warming was an overriding issue within the context of public debate during the New Hampshire Presidential Primary cycle.

You didn't hear it from us:

"The recent Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for the latest in a series of reports has certainly had a big impact. Less well known, but possibly just as pivotal in this New England state, is a 2-year campaign by a group of scientists, civic leaders, and environmental activists called the Carbon Coalition."-- *Science Magazine*

"It may be Al Gore's ultimate political triumph: climate change as a key election issue. Everywhere they go throughout [New Hampshire], candidates from both parties field questions about global warming from voters who are looking for more than just platitudes. They want to hear about cap-and-trade, carbon tax, hybrid cars, and woe to the candidate who tries to side-step the issue. Last spring, 180 out of 234 townships in the state passed a resolution asking the federal government to address climate change. That could result in some raised temperatures for Republicans who are still getting used to the idea that global warming might be real." -- *Time Magazine*

Even Dave Barry, the syndicated Miami Herald humor columnist, in his coverage of the New Hampshire primary, noted that if you wanted to find a candidate event, look for the snowman and the people holding "Stop Global Warming" signs.

Perhaps the best outcome of the Coalition's work – which went on in South Carolina as Carbon Coalition organizers helped local activists bring climate to the fore in that southern state – is that climate continues to be an issue in the election, regardless of where the candidates are campaigning.