

THE PRINCETON PACKET

SOLUTIONS
By Huck Fairman

What should we do about the climate crisis?

Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, presented another important talk, this time summarizing not only where we are on climate change and energy, but really laying out what we, at all levels of society, should and urgently need to do about the climate crisis.

He began by warning that too many of our leaders – particularly the president, but also Governor Murphy – seem to be missing, or ignoring, the signs of our warming, changing natural world. Trump, he has concluded, is taking a calculated risk in doing so, to please his base and his rich donors. Tittel wasn't sure why Murphy, who acknowledges the crisis, isn't taking the necessary steps – at least not fast enough.

At the same time, the most recent edition of the quarterly "The Jersey Sierran" describes not only a draft of the New Jersey's Energy Master Plan, but a number of energy innovations, from offshore wind to be operational in 2024, to community solar and reducing transportation emissions. How quickly and effectively these steps can be activated is not clear, but they offer hope.

Many have noted that the president's denial and his turning back environmental protections are posing a real threat to the country and humanity. In New Jersey, among the plainly visible changes that Tittel listed, requiring no scientific knowledge to understand, are: a few

years ago the state hosted 25 ski areas; now, only one remains; over recent years, New Jersey's temperature has risen 3.6 degrees, and the state's coastal wetlands are disappearing.

Off the coast, the ocean temperatures have risen five years in a row. Species of fish that used to live in these waters have moved. The growing season is longer; new diseases are arriving in the state. Lake Hopatcong's higher temperatures have spawned a vast algae bloom that has closed the lake for swimming and water sports.

All these changes should warn us that we are on the verge of an ecological collapse – a situation that we have created ourselves. Tittel's good news is that ... we can solve these problems. We know what to do; we have the technology. Moreover, majorities of our population – 80% of Democrats; 60% of Republicans – acknowledge this man-made crisis and want something done.

What we need, Tittel has concluded, is the energy of the young, perhaps leading, but in any case all joining together to begin taking the many changes and steps necessary.

Additional good news is that clean energy is producing five times the number of jobs remaining in the traditional energy sectors. And solar is now cheaper than natural gas.

But despite these changing economic realities, 17 natural gas projects remain

in New Jersey – when we need to switch 100% to renewables: to electric vehicles and to wind and solar. The momentum and financial interests behind fossil fuels are not easily halted or diverted. New Jersey used to be among state leaders in turning to renewables. Now the state has fallen down the list, as other states have responded.

Another challenge Tittel pointed out is that, in this most densely populated state, the continued use of concrete and asphalt for all areas of development serves to retain the growing heat and reduce the number of carbon-absorbing, cooling trees. Alternative development approaches need to be devised and adopted.

To make these changes, Tittel urged that we need to do two things: (1.) work together throughout the state and communities to put them into practice, and (2.) stop natural gas projects – the PennEast pipeline being one. To do so will require a moratorium on all fossil fuel projects – something the governor could do, following his predecessors.

Tittel summarized the histories of prior New Jersey governors, a number of whom imposed moratoriums on development in order to save natural preserves. The implied question is: why isn't Murphy following in this tradition? He could block unnecessary pipelines and power plants. Why is he not stepping up? He has spoken of taking action, but

Tittel points out that he has not done so. He has not even reversed any of Governor Christie's rollbacks. New Jersey residents need to send him the message – and highlight the urgency.

Tittel also offered an example of corporate myopia and/or greed. PSE&G has asked the state to subsidize its nuclear power plants, saying that they are not viable otherwise. Tittel maintained that in fact they are profitable.

Following his talk, he asked the audience for questions. From the Sierra Club membership came a number of knowledgeable queries. Among them was why does the Sierra Club not more widely publicize its existence, its campaigns, and its general thrust to preserve our world? It could do this by running ads, TV spots and by making "The Jersey Sierran" more widely available. Tittel's explanation was that television and other media campaigns fall under the purview of the national Sierra Club, not the state chapters. And yet it seems to be something that the New Jersey SC could do to reach beyond its membership.

Tittel then ended by reminding the audience that facing our warming world, and our deluded President, we all need to join together, to reach out, write letters, and bring this existential crisis front and center, in order to get the action we need to survive.