Advocates Urge Warner To Take Up Carbon Legislation

By CANDACE SIPOS
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HARRISONBURG — The Climate Action Alliance of the Valley wants U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., to promote legislation that would put a price on carbon.

Five members of the Harrisonburg-based group delivered a petition signed by 175 city and Rockingham County residents to the senator’s Washington, D.C., office on Dec. 6.

The petition promotes the Cap and Dividend Act of 2009, which would’ve required companies to purchase carbon permits. Under the bill, the money collected in the process would have been distributed to consumers to offset the higher cost of energy.

Under such a system, consumers who conserve fossil-based fuels such as gas and oil would stand to benefit, while those who use more would be penalized.

“If we don’t change our laws soon and decrease our carbon use, we will not be able to control the climate destabilization we have caused,” the petition reads. “We will have increasing deaths, wars and migration that affect even the very rich.”

The senator’s staff verified that the meeting took place but wouldn’t comment specifically on Warner’s position on a carbon tax.

According to Strickler, Warner’s staff member Thomas King told the group that the senator believes Congress should focus on climate change but through a fiscally sound perspective.

That echoes a sentiment explained on Warner’s website with these words: “The science surrounding climate change supports the need for dramatic changes in policy, and Senator Warner believes any comprehensive legislation to address this issue must be balanced with the need to keep our economy viable during this challenging time.”

While many remain highly skeptical that the federal government will ever institute a carbon tax, Cathy Strickler, founder of the local group, said she’s hopeful at least on the Warner front.

“I was encouraged that this weekend Senator Warner changed his stance on gun control,” she said Wednesday. “So, what I’m hoping is that he hears from enough people … that he will also make [a carbon tax] a priority.”

Strickler has been lobbying for a carbon tax since helping Hurricane Katrina victims following that 2005 natural disaster.

“The fact that we’ve put so much carbon into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution has changed the climate,” she said. “It’s something we can do something about. We need to focus on it and do more than just personal changes. We need to make changes in the way companies operate so they can’t pollute the atmosphere.”

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