

CLIMATE TALK

There Is No Safe Ice

Roger Aiken
Bayfield



I enjoyed Rick Olivio's article last month on the John Esposito book, 'Blood on the Ice.' The book has many cautionary tales about the risks and dangers of going onto the ice. The good old days were full of danger-filled adventures driven by the hunt for the big prize or maybe just dinner. Healthy respect for the power of nature was learned at great cost by those who went out unprepared or were just unlucky.

When we get to climate change -a cautionary quote from the Esposito book applies, "there is no safe ice." As individuals and a community we don't plan for the 99% certainty of climate change the way we put our money on bets like insurance, retirement savings and educating our children. If we did, then we would have a plan A, B and C – just as we would prepare for the risks on the big Lake before we set out. We would ask the questions: What positives and negatives wait in the future? What are the possible solutions? Can we adapt? Not my problem-I'll be lucky?

Out on the lake in winter you are surrounded by the striking beauty of ice, hills, streams and forests. Last month's CAFO ordinance vote of Bayfield County, along with civic resolutions around the Bay, reflects the fear of losing a piece of that beauty. The Lake unites us all despite our different political shades and stripes. The CAFO application is in some ways a climate-generated event. We have cheap clean water and a climate that doesn't run up the AC bill or kill baby pigs. Reicks will not be the last to show up at the doorstep of 10% of the worlds freshwater.

Change is finding us and one of the drivers is climate. The same science that we use to make our life simple and convenient is telling us in no uncertain terms that change is coming and we may not be able to control it if we don't act soon. People will tell you it isn't happening, including some of our Wisconsin politicians. Everybody has their opinion, but scientific consensus is what we have built our world on since Galileo put forward the theory that the Earth revolved around the Sun. The greenhouse effect is accepted as scientific fact except among a small group who are in leadership positions in the US. You can believe the ice is safe- all you want. But if you go out unprepared-nature may have a surprise you will not like.

Without a good winter and without good ice-our lifestyle is compromised. It's already documented-the lake is getting warmer. If you want a preview of what will happen here in the next 30 years - drive south 300 miles and look at the trees, the soils, rivers and the lakes. The climate of Iowa will fit no better into our idea of the future than do large animal factories. It's a problem as big as the Lake, but what's one person to do now?

Transportation and energy are two of the biggest climate change drivers. Two of the biggest solutions are forests and soils. Resources we have in abundance and sell to cheap. We can become more efficient by using resources wisely, supporting local economies and advancing our already growing sustainable agriculture communities. We can further grow our local economy with clean energy

alternatives, demand a more efficient electrical grid system and enable housing retrofits. These changes provide value to build on future technological innovations and attract talented people to our community.

The current lower cost of oil is a short term benefit that no one expects to last for long. We should use this opportunity to invest the savings in our communities. A tax on carbon has worked elsewhere in the world and could work here in the US or even in Wisconsin - if the proceeds roll back to the community.

Groups like the Citizens Climate Lobby(CCL) and Farms Not Factories present big and small solutions and deserve support. CCL's carbon fee and dividend proposal may not be the final answer, but economists agree that putting a price on carbon encourages utilities to switch to cleaner forms of generating electricity, like wind and solar instead of coal. It encourages people to buy more efficient products and producers to provide them. A regulatory system that tried to achieve all this would be ineffective. Buying local food and encouraging clean farming practices cuts food miles and enhances farming techniques that sequester carbon back to the soils. Our forestry practices could become truly sustainable if we were to consider how much carbon we are retaining in the forest's- including soils. Considering things in this way leads to the creation of value – which is the basis of all wealth.

Citizens Climate Lobby is 99% citizen volunteers of all political stripes. We are dedicated to building a political will to move Congress to change. Impossible as that seems at this time, it is our job as citizens to point the way for Congress. In the case of climate change, we all have a vested interest to put down our differences, cooperate with each other and address solutions to this issue.

It's foolish business to venture out on the ice unprepared - or continue to ignore climate change risks. The problem is big, but the solutions are many, and cheaper when you have a plan.

Roger Aiken is a retired federal employee with four decades of service and member of the Chequamegon chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby.