

Ours to Embrace



Between January 20th and 27th, 2021, the 47th President of the United States signed seven directives all bearing on climate change, science, environmental justice and economic issues. This wave of action imperatives charged all federal agencies to play their historic and constitutional role in helping the States, local and Tribal governments deal with these issues from a federal collective approach. "Collectively the seven directives are a strong reaffirmation of the constructive importance of government. Government is a necessary means of addressing certain sorts of problems and helping people. President Biden has moved more rapidly and forcefully on environmental issues than any recent U.S. president," so says Ken Payne, president of the Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island. The implications for Rhode Island set in motion decisions that could add jobs and boost the economy while saving the environment, addressing environmental justice and dealing with the climate crisis. But if Rhode Island leaders at all levels ignore the invitation and the directives, Rhode Island could be left behind. On April 12, 2021, the Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island sponsored **Ours to Embrace: Climate Federalism** *The implication for Rhode island of four Biden Executive Orders, a presidential memorandum and two Fact sheets of January 2021* The hour long symposium brought scholars, agency heads, advocates together to discuss what Rhode Island must do to take advantage of Biden's agenda. Many governmental entities take their direction from Federal authority. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, for example, performs functions on the basis of delegated authority from the Feds. And they receive funds and support for their work. "With Biden's directives and given the full weight of the Federal government, Rhode Island could benefit significantly from down-stream impacts. But its up to us. There is no longer an option of continuing business as usual. Doing business as usual puts us on a trajectory to severely worsening conditions," Ken Payne says. The symposium is directed towards legislators, government leaders, agency and department heads. But Biden's executive orders has implications for all levels of government and activists. Executive Order 14008 in Section 219, in particular elevates environmental justice to the White House level and gives power to

State's attorney generals for taking action. It specifies that the Attorney General shall...*ensure comprehensive attention to environmental justice* throughout the Department of Justice...and coordinate environmental justice activities among Department of Justice components *and United States Attorneys' Offices nationwide*. "This is not your typical environmental policy directive," so says Paul A. Roselli, secretary of the Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island and organizer for the April 12th event. "Our goal is to jump start this conversation. We should not underestimate how transformational Climate Federalism will look in 10 years. It's taken nearly 7 years of hard work in moving the RI legislature to enact the Act on Climate legislation. Biden's executive orders gives us a small window of opportunity. Waiting or doing nothing is no longer a viable option." Panelists included: **Ken Payne**, Co-convenor and President of the Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island; Former administrator of the RI Office of Energy Resources, former Senior Policy Advisor to the Rhode Island Senate and Director of the Rhode Island Senate Policy Office; **Sue AnderBois** - Climate & Energy program manager, The Rhode Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy; **Timmons Roberts**, Institute at Brown for Environment and Society; **Barry Rabe**, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; and **Curt Spalding**, Institute at Brown for Environment and Society, former USEPA New England Region 1 Administrator, and former Save The Bay's Executive Director. The symposium was recorded and the video recording is available [HERE](#). Documents that help support the findings of Ken Payne are located within this web site. The Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island is a Rhode Island grassroots all volunteer organization which assesses, informs, and activates efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in or attributable to Rhode Island.

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