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Lieberman 'cools it' with Hillcrest students

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If Hillcrest students could vote in the U.S. Senate, the world would be a cooler place, according to U. S. Senator Joseph Lieberman.

Lieberman is a co-sponsor of a climate change bill that failed to pass the Senate this session despite having 54 senators supporting it.

He was in town Monday to watch a group of students present their award-winning Cool It Climate Challenge project. For the project, the students researched the global warming issue and came up with a series of recommendations.

"What you have learned and done in taking responsibility for global warming gives me hope for the future," Lieberman said.

In working on their project, the students met with school officials, reviewed energy

use at Hillcrest and tried to come up with ways to reduce waste, save money and cut down on the school's carbon footprint.

A carbon footprint is the amount of carbon in its various forms that something emits. Carbon traps heat in the atmosphere, and combustion from engines, furnaces and power plants emit it, as do all living animals.

Among the suggestions was installing automatic motion-sensing light switches in the building to reduce energy use when rooms are empty.

The school could also take steps to encourage walking or carpooling to school or riding the bus, rather than having individual parents pick up and drop off their students. Parents often sit in their cars with the engine running and wait for school to let out, and an idling vehicle gets zero miles per gallon.

Replacing the school's incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent models, which use

less electricity, also would cut down on energy use. The school's cafeteria currently uses disposable cardboard lunch trays, which students recommend replacing with reusable ones.

Lieberman called the students' work impressive and said education was one of the ways to combat global warming.

"The biggest question is how do we get people to emit less carbon into the air," he said while answering questions after the presentation. "Education is one way, but, unfortunately, people don't change fast enough."

If people aren't willing to make the necessary changes, Lieberman said the government has to take action.

Though some recommend a tax on carbon emissions, Lieberman said it was not clear if that would actually have the desired result. A better solution, he said, is to enact a cap-in-

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Zack Kaesmann explains how throwing away cardboard lunch trays damages the environment while Jake Cohen holds up an example of the offending material Monday during a presentation of the school's Cool It Challenge Plan to U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman. (Photo by Donald Eng)

Lieberman —

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trade, where emissions essentially become a commodity like oil or gold.

“Businesses would be allowed a certain amount of carbon pollution, which would gradually decrease,” he said. “If a business could decrease its pollution below the limit, it could sell the excess.”

Such a plan also would spur investment in new technology such as electric cars. Though that leaves the problem of generating electricity, Lieberman said clean coal, solar, wind and nuclear generating technology all would be feasible.

Fuel prices

In response to student questions, Lieberman defended his climate bill against allegations that it would result in higher gas prices.

“The reality is at most the bill would add two cents a gallon to the price of gas, but it also would result in us using less oil, not a bad investment,” he said.

He acknowledged that Congress rushed headlong into supporting ethanol, which has damaged the environment and harmed the economy by driving up the price of corn.

“That was a case of Congress overreaching and creating a problem,” he said. “Even though it’s generally better to power a car with something other than gasoline, we aren’t going to solve the problem with one solution.”

Though ethanol is a viable substitute, it has two major problems, Lieberman said. First, it requires too much corn, so encouraging its use drove up grocery bills at the exact same time gas prices were rising. Producing ethanol also requires large amounts of energy, making it an inefficient fuel that does little to reduce pollution, he said.

Still, all these details won’t discourage Lieberman from working toward reducing carbon emissions.

“In the long run, this is the most important thing I’ve had the opportunity to do,” he said. “We only have a short time on the Earth, and while we’re here, we have a responsibility to make God’s creation better.”



The Hillcrest Middle School band greets U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman with a rendition of “The Stars & Stripes Forever” during the senator’s visit to the school Monday.
(Photo by Donald Eng)