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District becomes a leader in climate policy

VIEWPOINT

WILLIAM J. SNAPE III

It would be ironic if the District of Columbia, which does not possess a real vote in Congress, became the national leader in combating global warming and associated climate change. Thanks to Ward 3 D.C. Council member Mary Cheh and her colleagues, our fine city could indeed become a model for breaking our country's addiction to deadly fossil fuels that threaten our public health and jeopardize our children's future.

In March, the council unanimously passed a resolution calling upon President Barack Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency administrator to take action under the U.S. Clean Air Act to reduce overall greenhouse pollutants, particularly carbon, to a level supported by the best available science. As with other harmful air pollutants such as smog, lead and particulate matter, the Environmental Protection Agency has both the authority and responsibility to set what's called a National Ambient Air Quality Standard for industrial carbon dioxide, methane and other heat-trapping pollutants. D.C. is now part of a group of 57 cities — including Los Angeles, Seattle, Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Miami — that have called for an effective national greenhouse cap.

Just this month, it was announced that for the first time in human history, and the first time in several million years, the level of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere now exceeds 400 parts per million. Leading scientists, such as NASA climatologist James Hansen, have calculated we need to get that number down to under 350 parts per million. How do we get to that level? For starters, by enforcing existing federal law, including the highly successful Clean Air Act, to its fullest. The federal government has identified several hundred large industrial sources that, if cleaned up, would significantly reduce our country's carbon foot-

print. In addition, properly regulating oil, gas and coal extraction would limit not only carbon dioxide but also methane, a greenhouse pollutant more than 20 times as powerful as carbon. Billions of dollars of annual federal subsidies that now go to the likes of BP, ExxonMobil, Shell and Chevron should be wisely invested in voluntary individual tax credits for solar and wind, which have already benefited the District and possess far more room for growth. The Clean Air Act even has international provisions that ensure reciprocity with foreign nations and fairness to our own.

These energy decisions we make are not academic or distant. Hurricane Sandy was a grim harbinger of what is to come if we do not collectively clean up our act. Our city experienced the most intense heat wave on record last year, with more hot weather just around the corner. The Potomac River has risen approximately 1 foot since 1933, and could rise up to 4 feet more over the next century, threatening the Jefferson Memorial, local businesses and vulnerable homeowners. Bird-watchers are acutely aware that radical changes in wildlife migration have occurred over the past decade. Consistent with this "canary in the coal mine" principle, sewer overflows, the rise of infectious disease, and severe respiratory problems have all been explicitly linked to current climate change.

Change can be scary, but it's happening whether we like it or not. The question is whether we will collectively drive the train of change or be run over by it. Major polluters complain that enforcement is expensive but fail to mention that the overall benefits of clean air are roughly 25 times the costs. We can make D.C. a truly great place with wise transportation policies, green zoning ordinances and compliance with existing pollution statutes. The D.C. Council has taken the first step. The next steps are all of ours. We can do it.

William J. Snape III, a Palisades resident, is senior counsel at the Center for Biological Diversity and practitioner in residence at American University's Washington College of Law.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

D.C. should become state, not territory

Nelson Rimensnyder supported pursuing territorial status for D.C. because "the direct road to statehood seems blocked for the foreseeable future by opposition from both national political parties" [Letters to the Editor, April 10]. Making D.C. a territory is not a good idea.

First, Congress has fully as much power make "all needful Rules and Regulations" for a territory as it has to "exercise exclusive Legislation" over the capital. There is no requirement in the Constitution for Congress to give a territory any better local government, more local autonomy or better tax treatment than the capital.

He continues that "by precedent, under our federal system of government, territories, not cities, become states," but this is wrong both as constitutional law and as precedent. The Constitution provides only that "New States may be admitted to this Union." The only prohibitions are against the formation of a new state within another state, or the junction of other states, without their consent. As for precedent, neither Texas nor Maine was a territory when admitted, since Texas was an independent republic

and Maine was part of Massachusetts.

Finally, it is absurd to assert that "both" political parties block statehood. Both parties? Let's look at the record. The 2012 National Republican Party flatly stated: "We oppose statehood for the District of Columbia." Astonishingly, the very same platform supported admission of Puerto Rico as "a fully sovereign state."

In stark contrast, the 2012 Democratic Platform said: "Every citizen of the United States is entitled to equal citizenship rights, including the 638,000 residents of the nation's capital who pay federal taxes without representation. The American citizens who live in Washington, D.C., like the citizens of the 50 states, should have full and equal congressional rights and the right to have the laws and budget of their local government respected without congressional interference." This fully supports statehood, which is the only sure source of equal citizenship and congressional voting rights and of independence from congressional colonial oversight.

Mr. Rimensnyder's own Republican Party is the sole party blocking statehood, in direct contradiction of the 1776 Declaration that governments "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," and in outright denial of Republican President Abraham Lincoln's eloquent statement 150

years ago that ours is a "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

Vince Treacy
Spring Valley

Delivery trucks jam Wisconsin Avenue

The quickest fix for some of the congestion on Wisconsin Avenue in Glover Park is simple: Prohibit delivery trucks from blocking the curb lane during the evening rush hour. Every afternoon after 4 p.m., the curb lane is intermittently blocked by various delivery trucks, causing traffic in the right lane to merge into the one open lane.

Unfortunately, we live in a city where for years city officials have said they would rather have people use public transit or bicycles or walk than drive. That dream is unlikely to be realized given that our Metro system was designed as a commuter system rather than for intra-city transit, with the result being that large sections of the city are not served by Metro.

Given the city's bias against automobiles, we are unlikely to see the city take any serious action to improve congestion such as enforcing rush-hour parking rules or — imagine this — putting traffic personnel in major downtown intersections to prevent "blocking the box."

Hays Browning
Cathedral Heights