

Climate change — look at the facts, conserve energy

Editor's Note: *RM took a departure this month from the usual question to the Montana delegation in Congress to talk to two leaders in the Montana House, one from each side of the aisle.*



Rep. Dennis Himmelberger (R), Billings, HD 47, was House Majority Leader in the 2007 session.

Representative Dennis Himmelberger

RM: *How can you deal with the extremes of the global warming debate?*

A: High emotions create concerns for me as a legislator because our responsibility is to do what we feel is in the long-term best interest of the state. Sometimes you get emotional input, sometimes an almost hysterical tone. That can make it difficult.

When you get an issue like this that's gaining momentum, it's challenging, but that's the nature of the beast in the political arena. You almost always have extremists on issues. You attempt to stay focused in looking at facts to make the best judgments you can.

In the energy field, there's a fair amount of science-based information. You separate

that from the emotions and hysteria and use the common sense the good Lord gave you to try and do what is in the best interest of the state and your constituents.

RM: *What's the best part of serving in the Legislature?*

A: People. The people that you meet, from constituents to fellow legislators to legislative staff and others, all caring enough to work at making Montana a better place to live, work and raise our families. Also it's very humbling and rewarding to be able to help people and to contribute in some small way to improving their lives. I've developed a deep respect for the legislature and the legislative process. Serving is an incredible education. You learn so much about so many

different topics

RM: *What's your take on term limits?*

A: Term limits is a huge problem that's weakening the people's branch of government and giving the executive and judicial branches more power.

It's confounding to me that in almost every aspect of life when we're looking to employ someone, experience is near the top of the list for anything from a tax preparer to a physician to a plumber. You're looking for a person who's been around awhile. Except when it comes to elected officials.

Decisions made in Helena affect all Montanans. Why would you not want to have those with the most experience making such decisions?



Rep. John Parker, (D), Great Falls, HD 23, was House Minority Leader during the 2007 session. He is planning a run for state attorney general.

Representative John Parker

RM: *What's ahead from legislators on global warming in the 2009 session?*

A: I like to emphasize that saving energy saves money. In other words, investment in energy-efficient technology can both reduce the impact of global climate change and help Montana families save their hard-earned dollars. This common-sense, pocket-book approach should be the guiding concept for climate change measures.

Conserving energy in state buildings provides not only the opportunity to reduce fossil fuel use, but also lets us save taxpayer money. I hope something like that will be passed next year.

RM: *What do you see happening in renewables?*

A: Montana is clearly making

great strides in the wind power arena. Building on this success—and making further gains in biofuels and geothermal capacity—will also give us a chance to reduce harmful emissions by augmenting the supply available from base-load generation plants.

RM: *Who should take the lead in climate change legislation — the states or the federal government?*

A: I think we need a healthy mix of state and federal solutions. Federal programs are necessary to stimulate research and development of energy-saving appliances and building materials—as well as cleaner technologies for burning coal and natural gas.

State legislation probably offers better insight into our

Montana needs.

RM: *What's your take on term limits?*

A: Montana voters overwhelmingly support retaining term limits for legislators and statewide elected officials. So legislators have to work skillfully to overcome the loss of institutional memory and expertise that naturally follows from term limits. I named a former Rep. Red Menahan to serve as Senior Advisor to the House Democrats during the past session. Red's vast knowledge of legislative procedure and budget matters were invaluable. Term limits also require us to listen closely to make sure we recognize good ideas, regardless of whether they are offered by Republicans or Democrats.