
EDITORIAL

Common ground

Vermont's environment and economy are so deeply connected, one can never be far from the other.

There is a fundamental bond between the two, and yet the relationship is often described as a battle or a tug of war.

Candidates in Tuesday's statewide elections have acknowledged the importance of encouraging business and preserving the environment.

Tourism, for example, is one of the state's primary industries and relies heavily on the environment. The problem is that traditional thinking tends to put the environment and the economy at odds.

Many Vermonters intuitively understand the state's economic dependence on clean water and air and an attractive landscape. Yet little academic research has scrutinized the relationship.

In charting Vermont's economic future, state leaders should consult the University of Vermont's new Gund Institute, where the intellectual energy of eight scientists is being applied to the question.

The scientists' job is to prove Vermonters can make money in the state without harming the environment that business and the environment are mutually dependent.

The scientists, who moved to UVM in August from the University of Maryland, have been meeting with state officials and business leaders to discuss the theories behind a new field of study called ecological economics, a discipline that is just gaining respect within mainstream academics.

Gund Director Robert Costanza and his team are accustomed to resistance from traditional economists who argue that shareholders and consumers don't care about the environment, and that the bottom line should be the primary criterion in business decisions.

In Vermont, where the environment and economy are intertwined, the institute has found what one of the researchers called "a perfect place to bring this debate."

As they broaden the study of economics to include the environment, the Gund scientists will play an important role in the essential discussion of job growth and quality of life in Vermont.

As Donald DeHayes, dean of UVM's Sc
Resources said, "Even if it cannot change the market system, I think it can enlighten it.
The world is changing. These things matter."

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