

'Atomic Scientists' Publisher Bullish on Saving Humanity

By Abby Luby

Nuclear weapons and climate change are usually topics of gloom and doom but Dr. Kennette Benedict sees glimmers of hope.

Benedict is the executive director and publisher of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, the publication with its doomsday clock on the cover just minutes before midnight. Last week she laid out some sobering facts.

"Between our country and Russia today there are 24,000 nuclear weapons," Benedict said at a May 20 League of Women Voters of New Castle event at Crabtree's Kettle House in Chappaqua. "Two thousand nuclear tipped missiles can be launched in just minutes, 50 of the nuclear missiles can fly to Russia in 30 minutes within 10 minutes of the President's command. Two hundred fifty million would be killed."

Today's nuclear warheads are four to eight times the strength of those dropped on Hiroshima in World War II.

Just two years ago, the second hand on the Bulletin's doomsday clock moved from seven minutes to five minutes before midnight. The decision to change the clock was made by the Bulletin's Board of Sponsors, which includes 18 Nobel Laureates and focused on the potential catastrophies of launch readiness of nuclear weapons and the destruction of human habitats from climate change.

Nuclear proliferation was further fueled by the United States' refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a global pact that monitors nuclear testing.

"We've held out and not signed it," Benedict said. "That sent a message to the rest of the world that it's okay to own nuclear weapons. We need to sign off on the CTBT."

Efforts to cut back nuclear arsenals in the U.S. and Russia have had some success. "Since the mid 1980s, the U. S. and Russia have gone from 70,000 nuclear warheads to 24,000," Benedict said. "But how do we insure that nuclear disarmament is irreversible?"



ABBY LUBY PHOTO

Dr. Kennette Benedict, executive director and publisher of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, talking at a New Castle League of Women Voters forum in Chappaqua last week.

Benedict applauded the recent move by President Obama to collaborate with Russia on arms control and nuclear disarmament.

A few weeks ago, Obama said the U.S. would pursue a ratification of the CTBT.

"Obama is a new voice working towards a

bilateral treaty. His administration has taken steps that we have suggested. But we always need to be cautious. We have seen positive movements in the past only to see those efforts stalled and even reversed."

Climate change is more difficult to reverse than nuclear proliferation but Benedict remained hopeful.

"We are seeing some movement with the development of fuel cells, wind and solar energy sources," she said.

For some, nuclear power is an answer to climate change but the subject is complicated because of the challenge of safe operations and the disposing of radioactive waste. But Benedict said it's a problem that can be solved.

"Einstein talked how a new destructive force (nuclear weapons) had changed everything except our way of thinking. Can we develop new patterns, habits and ways of positive thinking for human life to survive?"

For Benedict the answer was yes.

"These trends are happening more than any time in our history and lead me to believe that there may be new ways to approaching the nuclear weapons problem and climate change."

Deadline for New Castle Survey Looming

By Martin Wilbur

New Castle officials want town residents who haven't yet responded to an online survey about emissions to complete the questionnaire that will be used as the basis of a plan to reduce the town's carbon footprint.

Each household has until this Sunday, May 31 to complete the survey, which can be found on the town's Web site, that will be used this summer to devise a strategy to reduce emissions. If there aren't enough respondents by the end of the weekend there is a chance that the deadline could

be extended, said Gerard Moerschell, New Castle's deputy commissioner of public works.

The town is using computer modeling to estimate its carbon footprint but would like to hear from as many residents as possible to paint a more accurate picture of its emissions. Last year, New Castle set its goal to reduce emissions 20 percent by 2015.

"We don't want to come up with a model that is not based in reality," Moerschell said of the reason to try and collect the most accurate data possible.

A sample survey poses close to 20 questions

regarding transportation and driving habits, types and levels of energy consumption by each household and whether residents use green energy.

The goal is to have 600 households answer the survey, which would represent roughly 10 percent of the town's households, Moerschell said. As of last week about 250 surveys had completed the survey.

To fill out the survey log on to www.mynewcastle.org and click on the green post-it on the upper left portion of the screen. Only one survey per household may be submitted.

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