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By Ralph Child: Adaptation to climate change: What's the plan?

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Amidst all of the controversies over the causes of global warming and how can it be combated, some things seem certain.

First, the world-wide climate is changing. At least most people agree so and see so in their own experience. Over an indefinite time frame, ocean rise, increased storm intensities, geographical shifts in water abundance and scarcity, and profound impacts on habitats are underway.

Second, efforts to combat global warming will not prevent climate change. Developing clean energy technologies and related job growth, and measures to increase efficiency, attract great support and subsidies. But no-one projects that any economically and politically feasible program actually will stop global warming and climate change.

Third, people and cultures and economies and eco-systems will adapt to climate change as it occurs. There is no alternative. What's in question is where and how much and when adaptation will occur and with what distribution of costs and injury.

To date, the inevitability of adaptation has been obscured by the attention to efforts to prevent global warming. Scary projections of flooded coastal cities have been used more to support campaigns to reduce CO2 emissions than to do serious planning for ocean rise.

Yet there actually has been quite a lot of thinking about the need to plan for adaptation. President Obama's support for cap and trade got the attention; but he also issued an Executive Order establishing a Climate Change Adaptation Task Force that is coordinating significant federal efforts to gather data and plan for adaptation. The Mass. Global Warming Solutions Act chartered the heavily promoted Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2020; but also chartered the less publicized Mass. Climate Change Adaption Report. The insurance industry, public authorities responsible for infrastructure, and others have started to put serious consideration into what adaptation will require over time.

These efforts do not yet amount to a broad plan, but are laying the foundation. The EBC-NE is sponsoring a morning program in Boston on Nov. 30 where federal and Mass. officials will describe their efforts to address adaptation to climate change and a panel of experts will participate in a roundtable discussion. For more information and to register, visit www.ebcne.org

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