

Tackling the issue of climate change

John Kerry, Gina McCarthy, and Dylan Fernandes hold forum as Kerry announces World War Zero.

BY AMANDA H. CRONIN

This is the most important election of our lifetimes and our kids' lifetimes, because the next president is going to decide our response to climate change."

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry shouted those words to a packed West Tisbury school auditorium at "The Climate Is Changing, Are We?" event on Monday night.

Kerry was joined by former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Gina McCarthy and state Rep. Dylan Fernandes, D-Falmouth, to offer their battle cries for unity in dealing with climate change. Fernandes moderated the conversation, and the trio talked about reframing the issue as one concerning national security, public health, and the economy. All three were vocal about their dismay at the Trump administration's political inaction.

Kerry lost no time in announcing the launch of World War Zero, a new organization formed by himself, McCarthy, former U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, and others dedicated to combating climate change. When pushed on specifics, Kerry said that the formal announcement of the organization's mission will come in September. However, he emphasized several times the importance of mobilizing against climate change with "wartime footing," because "it's going to take nothing

less than that to orchestrate the size of the transformation with respect to the vehicles, industry, power, agriculture, building — residential and commercial," Kerry said. U.S. military personnel are preparing bases across the country for protection against environmental degradation as a result of climate change, and therefore are now "coming to the table" to discuss proper environmental policy strategies.

Recalling his recent trip to Normandy on the 75th anniversary of D-Day, Kerry said, "We're in an equal moment of critical choosing."

McCarthy, professor of public health at Harvard, practically jumped out of her chair in her emotional plea for people to reframe the narrative around climate change as one about people, and not to "speak like scientists." She touched on air pollution and water supply fluctuation as the two largest consequences to public health: "Especially at a time when the federal government has checked out, it is time for local communities to step up and fight." She used wind power as an example, which "is cheaper, and creates jobs." She said the Vineyard Wind project doesn't deserve the pushback it is getting with recent regulatory obstacles. "It's exciting, it's great, and it has to happen now," she said.

Kerry commended the kids of Plastic Free MV on

their campaign to ban plastic bottles with a volume of less than 34 ounces. The students convinced voters in three up-Island towns to approve the ban, and have plans to bring the issue to town meetings in the up-Island towns.

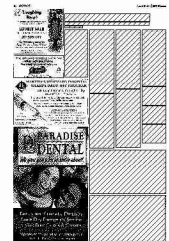
The audience responded to McCarthy and Kerry's statements with assertive and at times enthusiastic "mmhms."

A Dorchester native herself, McCarthy endeared herself to the crowd: "That's carbon, spelled C-A-H-B-O-N."

The most thunderous applause came after McCarthy's fiery call and response chant. "Repeat after me: Climate change is real. Climate change is manmade. And therefore women should rule the world."

As the representative of "more coastline than any other district in the state," Fernandes has prioritized environmental policy reform as one of the cornerstones of his term.

Before taking questions from the audience, Fernandes led the audience in an interactive exercise. He asked those in the audience who are signed on to the Cape Light Compact to raise their hands, and about 30 percent of the crowd was represented. He then asked of those hands raised, how many people had installed a pump to convert their electricity to heat. Many people lowered their hands. The next question was concerning how many people own electric cars; about 10



percent of the crowd raised their hands. The final question was "Who hasn't flown in an airplane for the last three years?" Only two people raised their hands out of an audience of about 200.

Fernandes also mentioned

the Cape Light Compact over the phone before the event as one of the best things Cape and Islands residents can do to decrease their carbon footprint. Cape Light is an organization that offers renewable energy services for homes

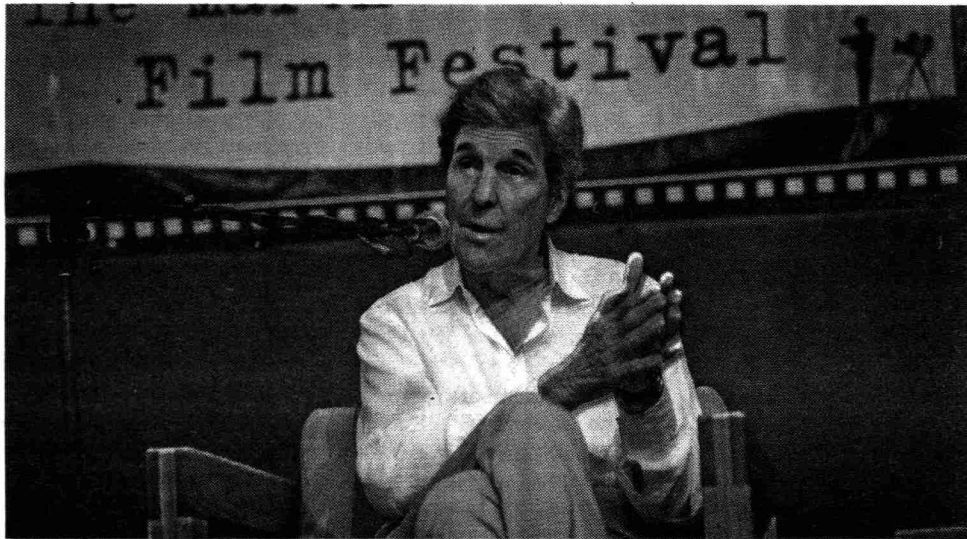
and businesses.

In the end, the call to action was to vote for candidates with climate change at the forefront of their agendas at the municipal, state, and federal levels, including the 2020 presidential election. **MVT**



PHOTOS: GABRIELLE MANNINO

The crowd fills the West Tisbury School auditorium and listens intently to Kerry, McCarthy, and Fernandes.



Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry speaks about climate change at the West Tisbury School on Monday afternoon.