

Caroline town rep back from climate summit

By Tim Ashmore
Journal Staff

CAROLINE — Town of Caroline councilman Dominic Frongillo returned Sunday from a two-week stay in Bali, Indonesia with an expanded network of leaders dedicated to addressing global climate change.

He also came back with a slight disappointment that his own country worked to block certain goals from the Bali Roadmap — an international layout addressing climate change over the next two years.

Frongillo, 24, was in Bali with SustainUS, a national not-for-profit group, for the United Nations' summit that worked on policies to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. Frongillo was one of 21 young people with SustainUS and one of 200 from youth delegations from around the world at the conference.

The result of the conference is not a treaty, but rather a plan that will help countries negotiate with one another to get to the next step in the process, which could be an international treaty. The plan calls for developed countries to reduce emissions at least 25 percent.

The SustainUS group went as a U.S. delegation representing U.S. young people and to show concern regarding climate change and to represent opposition to official U.S. policy.

Frongillo said the U.S. delegation was “staunchly opposed” to binding emissions-reduction targets for industrial countries. He said the U.S. delegation also fought adaptation funds to cope with climate change and clean technology transfer, among other measures.

“It was surreal almost, how much they were blocking things,” he said.

Frongillo said the goal of young people at the conference was, in large part, to act as a window to the conference for the rest of the world. The SustainUS group and international youths worked together, and in one instance paired with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to hold a press conference on how youths will be most affected by climate change.

The message that global warming needs to be assessed now to mitigate problems brought on by climate change is one that may come strongest from youthful voices that have to

live in the world created by decisions made now, and Frongillo said voices from youth delegations were able to demonstrate that message.

He said in one instance reports from a young woman brought the delegate from South Africa to tears.

“We heard from Claire from Kiribati about the impact on her small island nation,” Frongillo wrote in an e-mail. “More poor people from around the world might not know the term ‘climate change,’ but they know something is happening. They see the seasons are shifting. The rainy seasons come later, the summers are getting hotter. When it does rain, it rains harder. Storms are stronger. Water is growing scarcer. Crop yields are smaller.”

Frongillo said he was impressed by the youth delegation's ability to work together, through language barriers, for a common goal. He added that international policy on climate change isn't where it should be, and said the best hope for action is through grassroots efforts in the United States and abroad. “We basically need to build a movement that is impossible to ignore and will do what the science says is necessary to affect our future,” he said.

More than 50 people donated money to help send Frongillo to the conference.

“I think there's a lot of interest (locally) in what's going on,” he said. “Over 50 people donated to my going, which just blows me away. There's a lot of interest to build on at this critical point.”