People’s Climate March – September 21, 2014
New York City

Hundreds of Long Islanders will flood New York City Sunday for what’s being billed as the largest climate change march in history.

The event, dubbed “People’s Climate March,” could draw upwards of 100,000 people, according to organizers, including an impressive contingent of Long Islanders, ranging from environmentalists and political activists to Superstorm Sandy survivors and concerned college students and faculty.

The march was strategically planned to coincide with Tuesday’s United Nations Climate Summit. It is an effort to raise awareness about the dangers of climate change and to implore elected officials to address environmental concerns so future generations don’t have to.

On the eve of the march, Occupy Wall Street protesters said they’ll be storming Wall Street and holding a massive sit-in in front of institutions profiting from the “climate crisis” on September 22. “It’s not too late. If we keep going the impacts are really devastating,” said Robert Brinkmann, director of Sustainability Studies at Hofstra University. “We live in a changed world already. There’s no doubt we’re already seeing the impacts of climate change around the world.” Brinkmann said up to 200 people from Hofstra are attending, with about 50 leaving early Sunday morning from the Hempstead LIRR station.

Students will be carrying signs that they recently made—one reads, “Get the frack out,” referencing hydrofracking—and don Hofstra shirts as they march through the streets of New York City with hundreds of other groups, including interfaith groups, unions, trade groups, community organizations and advocacy groups.

There will also be Seawolves.

“If we don’t change the way we are living…we are in for trouble,” said Dr. Heidi Hutner, director of Sustainability Studies at Stony Brook University. “We can’t really put it off anymore.”

At least 60 members of the Stony Brook family will join the rally, Hutner said. But with the march gaining more publicity, she said she’s been receiving letters and emails from people who’ve expressed interest in tagging along.
Hutner credited students in her program for mobilizing the Stony Brook effort, saying they’re ready to “stand up and be counted.

Hutner isn’t a scientist, she said, but she uses research on climate change to teach students about the human cost of the issue, noting how impoverished countries, such as Africa, are the most adversely affected.

“What’s the social cost?” she asked, rhetorically. Climate change remains a politically-charged issue, despite what scientists say is an abundance of evidence pointing to temperatures rising in the atmosphere and ocean.

A report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2013 said “each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth’s surface than any preceding decade since 1850,” and that carbon dioxide concentrations have jumped 40 percent since pre-industrial times.

In May, researchers from NASA and the University of California, Irvine released a troubling study concluding that the loss of West Antarctic glaciers “appears unstoppable.”

Researchers said 40 years of observations indicates that glaciers in that region “have passed the point of no return.” Melting, they said, could raise global sea levels by four feet.

Also in May, a military advisory board consisting of retired generals and other military officials, including former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, said in a report titled “National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change” that climate change poses a “severe risks for our national security.”

“During our decades of experience in the U.S. military, we have addressed many national security challenges, from containment and deterrence of the Soviet nuclear threat during the Cold War to political extremism and transnational terrorism in recent years,” the panel wrote. “The national security risks of projected climate change are as serious as any challenges we have faced.”
“We are dismayed that discussions of climate change have become so polarizing and have receded from the arena of informed public discourse and debate,” they added. “Political posturing and budgetary woes cannot be allowed to inhibit discussion and debate over what so many believe to be a salient national security concern for our nation.”

Those participating in Sunday’s march hope their voices can change the often contentious debate around climate change.

“This march is bringing together a diverse group of people all with the same goal of coming together to address climate change and save the planet,” said Annie McClelland, Long Island Program Coordinator for Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

“It is a pivotal moment,” she added. “There’s a lot of things going on around the country to advance this campaign to end climate change. It helps build momentum, and we’re going to ride that momentum into next year.”

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