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May 24, 2009

A Failure of Leadership: Rapid and Massive Action Needed to Avert Climate Change

By Karyn Strickler

"The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."

~Albert Einstein

The super-powered greenhouse gas Methane is bubbling out of lakes in the Arctic, from melting permafrost, and we have entered the dreaded period where secondary effects of global warming could take the climate challenge completely out of our control. The time for genuine leadership and grassroots action, that will effectively reverse climate change, is fleeting.

Signals are everywhere that things are getting worse. "The most comprehensive modeling yet carried out on the likelihood of how much hotter the Earth's climate will get in this century shows that without rapid and massive action, the problem will be about twice as severe as previously estimated six years ago - and could be even worse than that," said David Chandler of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Despite the screaming headlines foretelling disaster, the lobbyist laden, industry inhibited Waxman/Markey bill will not reverse climate change. Even though there are some new players in the climate game, manufacturers, power companies, and the oil and gas industry still make up more than half of the 880 total business groups that are trying to influence climate change policy, according to Marianne Lavelle of the Center for Public Integrity.

Oil, coal, utilities and other industries, who do not want a solution to climate change because of an adverse impact on their bottom line, spent 80 million dollars in the first quarter of this year to destroy pending legislation, compared with

4.7 million dollars spent by all environmental groups combined.

A lack of adequate leadership is self-evident in the resulting, odiferous legislation. Daphne Wysham of the Institute for Policy Studies thinks the pending federal climate legislation stinks saying, "While industry lobbyists may have worked their magic tricks on members of Congress in the name of 'bold climate legislation,' Planet Earth is likely to remain unmoved by these sleights of hand. At 385 parts per million CO2 and rising, our atmosphere is on a steady course to climate catastrophe unless these charlatans and their henchmen in Congress get real."

We're not getting the requisite leader from the Obama Administration. In their joint article Jeffrey St. Claire and Joshua Frank of CounterPunch say that Obama is refusing to consider strict regulations and that, "Obama's approach to attacking...climate change has been whittled down to nothing more than weak market-driven economics that can too easily be manipulated politically. Polluters will be let off the hook as they can simply relocate or build new infrastructure in places where there are few or no carbon regulations."

Humanity is being slapped with the biggest ultimatum ever, to reverse climate change and get it right. Still, instead of creating it, politicians and green groups on the state and national levels decry "political reality," as a deterrent to a meaningful solution, as though they have never heard of leadership or grassroots organizing.

The fact that legislation is being debated on the state and federal levels is a positive development. And Maryland is to be congratulated for being among a handful of states to try to reduce their own greenhouse gas pollution.

Still, the legislation just passed by the Maryland General Assembly, to cut greenhouse gases 25% below 2006 levels by 2020, certainly should not be lauded as a model for the nation. Incremental steps are not appropriate with the daunting challenge posed by climate change, because it gives the false illusion that the job is done and follow-on action will not likely be sought until it's too late.

Any response to climate challenge will start with a political solution -- led by the people. It is imperative that Americans understand the issue, and the need for quick, bold action to reverse climate change. Leadership begins with knowing how to communicate on the issue.

The George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication (known as the 4C) says that millions of

people must be constructively engaged “to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, avert the worst potential consequences and prepare for the impacts that can no longer be avoided.”

The “[Six Americas](#)” study shows that a majority of Americans, 51%, are convinced that global warming is happening, and is a serious problem. But only 18% of those (The Alarmed) are already taking individual, consumer and political action, leaving 33% (The Concerned) to be effectively engaged, perhaps quickly. These groups think that global warming should be a high or very high national priority and neither sees cap and trade as the solution.

The Cautious (19%), The Disengaged (12%) and The Doubtful (11%), a combined 42% represent different stages of understanding and acceptance of the problem and none are actively involved. The Cautious want more action from corporations, government and citizens, but not much more.

One third of The Disengaged strongly support funding research into renewable energy sources and many desire more action to reduce global warming. Even three-quarters of The Doubtful feel that America should make efforts to address global warming.

Only a miniscule minority of 7% (The Dismissive) are very sure that global warming is not happening and are opponents of a national effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 4C report is complex and deserves close study. A majority to a large majority of people could be mobilized, with the right message, properly delivered. The report explains, “Throughout human history, individuals and societies have mobilized to meet and overcome new challenges, but never before has so much rested on the need to change so many so fast.”

Who will be the messenger?

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