

Time for Real Change

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Elections are coming up, and if we don't vote for real change this November, many environmental disasters lie ahead. The U.S. is sinking deeper into

a sticky web of lies from which truth, honesty and democracy may not escape. At the national level, this is clear but, even in New England, we are moving politely backwards, as conservative memes get reframed more elegantly but are unquestioned.

I have lived in Vermont as an independent climate scientist for forty years and have watched many Republican and Democratic governors come and go. I have sat on climate-change panels and written climate-change adaptation reports for the state. I have watched a few important steps in the right direction, such as the founding of Efficiency Vermont and some steady solar development. But I have heard many speeches making promises without follow through and seen Vermont slip away from its renewable energy targets and refuse to implement a fossil carbon tax to fund the needed transition.

People and politicians will not discuss the basic truth, that climate change is simply incompatible with 'business as usual.' Refusing to pay for the transition away from fossil fuels means disaster ahead both for humanity and much of life on Earth. This month's special report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says disaster is only two decades away. But rather than accept this and start serious planning, we shrink back into the familiar collective delusion: the gospel of economic growth based on a consumer society that is a major contributor to the threat we face.

So let us start here with this delusion. We want to have it all now, as we always have, without thought for the future consequences. Everything we want should be grandfathered in. Our children, equipped with fantastic technology and artificial intelligence, can solve all the problems and deal with any disasters that we are creating for them. The future is not our responsibility, because so much is unknown; while in the thrall of advertising, our current needs are so much clearer.

We revere the global market economy that has created great wealth for some. We admire the successful and pity the desperate poor, both around us and overseas. Someday, the market will lift all boats. Ironically, this has a grain of truth,



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rising sea-level and storm surges will flood the coasts, lift the boats and dash them on the shore.

Industrial growth led us to abandon our responsibility for the future of the Earth. Short-term profits matter more, as people are encouraged to be short-sighted and self-centered. We listen to the oil companies when they say it is unfair to tax fossil carbon, because we want cheap oil. We listen to the conservative fantasy of reducing taxes and deregulation and let the market take care of everything including climate change. All so the rich can get richer and poor poorer, while we all exploit the Earth.

The refrains go on and on. We have never had to pay for the long-term costs of our waste streams. Those scientists must be exaggerating – it can't be as bad

as they say. Anyway, it is the future where so much is unknown – they cannot prove it will happen and perhaps they are wrong. A sea of wishful thinking to protect the status quo of 'business as usual' and grease all the wheels that keep it going. The dreams we need to avoid taking collective responsibility that would drive real change.

Since elections are coming, ask politicians where they stand on key issues and don't accept platitudes.

Do they support the development of local markets where our communities have some control: local food, local power and local industries that can provide us with some security through the transition? Or do they just accept the immorality of 'business as usual' in the amoral global market? How deeply have they considered how our delusions will ruin the Earth and the lives of our children and grandchildren?

Yes, it will take real efforts by our communities and a bunch of creative thoughtful politicians, but time is not on our side, as the oceans warm and rise, and the Arctic melts.

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