

Needed: Clarity and courage

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After a cool March, the daffodils and forsythia bloomed relatively late in Pittsford around April 17. But the maple trees bloomed early and leaf-out started April 28, as if they were unaware of the cool temperatures in March. A long period of unusually cool, cloudy, wet weather with slowly moving jet stream patterns followed in May and early June. Potatoes, broccoli, peas and lettuce are flourishing in the garden.

The most exciting aspect of giving talks on climate change this year is that a public awakening is underway. I have seen capacity audiences with a new intent enthusiasm. This took quite a shock, but now more people realize they must stand up and they must act. For the faint-hearted it helps that this is the final decade to drop our global emissions of fossil carbon, and still have an even chance of just squeaking below critical earth system thresholds.

The March for Science on Earth day exemplified this. Scientists never thought they had to stand up and be counted. They were a rather comfortable part of the establishment; perhaps too comfortable in their academic worlds. Now they realize that they bear some real responsibility for the truth, not just in science, but a social responsibility for the truth in society. They must protect the integrity of science against a corrupt political system; and make a lot more effort to reach out since we need a knowledgeable public. Otherwise the democratic enterprise collapses.

It has been a slow awakening. Too many scientists tolerated, for example, the substitution of profit for truth by the pharmaceutical industry. But now they watched in horror as the legal protections for clean air and clean water were denounced, simply because they interfere with the profits of those exploiting the Earth. It is deeply ironic that the Environmental Protection Agency itself is now threatened, as it was set up and strengthened by Republican presidents, who understood the need to protect and conserve our natural resources.

Now our phony conservative leaders would like to sweep it all away in their rush to the dark side. On June 1, they had a moment of triumph with the announcement that the US will withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate change agreement. In reality, their ignorance of the global issues we all face just confirms the irrelevance of our national leaders. It is another call for states and citizens to wake up and act.

The wider conflict going on both in our society and around the world needs explicit discussion, because it must be faced consciously. It is a broad struggle for the soul of humanity that has been ongoing but continually changing since the catastrophe of World War One a century ago. One aspect in recent decades is the consolidation of political, economic and financial power in the hands of elites. Underlying it are deeper, ego-based power struggles. These cannot be resolved without a change of mindset, because no amount of power and wealth will console and satisfy fearful egos.

What is happening is that many of the traditional patriarchal, libertarian, religious, racial, economic and financial frameworks are crumbling. Fear and desperation has been rising as groups fight for the survival

of their threatened mindsets. Finally we have in Washington a pathetic but desperate parody of the patriarchal system, which is willing to jettison everything rather than face themselves and their responsibilities to either the people or to the Earth. Their moral and intellectual collapse is illustrated by the fact that democracy, science and ethics were valued only as long as they served the interests of the powerful.

So it is not surprising that opposition is on the rise. Many are justifiably fearful of what they may lose. What is needed however is a conscious opposition that is rooted in a compassionate awareness that we must stand up for an inclusive view, where all people and all life on Earth matter, because we are all deeply connected.

Certainly, rooted awareness is a real threat to the fearful, egotistical plutocrats in power; but this should not be seen as yet another battle where the powerful could simply crush us. The moral and practical choices are so clear that if we stand up in our communities and align ourselves with the Earth, their foolishness will likely crumble. But first we must confront the threat to the soul of democracy from thirty years of corruption by dark money. Next year will be the test to see whether democracy still stands across America.

But summer is coming, so don't stop planting because we need to feed each other. Let us cultivate the strength and vision of our communities.