

CLIMATE TALK

Climate March - People, Passion and Prayers

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Passion, justice, peace, fear, anger, hope, guilt, resistance, love. These were all expressed by the people who attended the 2017 People's Climate March in Washington DC on April 29th. Over 200,000 people, including me, marched from our Capitol Building down Pennsylvania Avenue to and around our White House last month. It was President Trump's 100th day in office so we sat in silent protest for 100 seconds.

I attended the gathering to be part of a national voice that raises awareness of the Trump administration's denial of the science that clearly shows how we are accelerating the rate of global warming. I am very concerned that we will continue to pay more and more as we face increasing weather disasters, forest fires, and rising sea levels. I wanted to march with others who have the same concern – that we must continue actions to slow the economic and social distress brought on by a rapidly changing climate.

"Radical, hippy, environmentalists" might come to your mind to describe those who attended this march. That is what I assumed I would see, and admittedly, that stereotype was visible, but far from prominent. The diversity of people and interests brought me to better understand that my choices as a consumer have far-reaching consequences for not just my local area, but for all people of our country and world.

There were grandparents who displayed pictures of their grandkids, with words on their posters such as "I am doing this for them." As a grandparent, it was one of the reasons I was there.

There were advocates for renewable energy such as solar and wind. I learned that nearly one million Americans are working near- or full-time in the energy efficiency, solar, wind, and alternative vehicles sectors. This is almost five times the current employment in the fossil fuel electric industry, which includes coal, gas, and oil workers (statistics from a February 2017 U.S. Department of Energy Report). Renewable energy is a rising and strong economic driver in our country.

There were people of many faiths who demonstrated how humility, simplicity, love and stewardship are needed to deal with climate change. As a person of the Christian faith, it reminded me to respond to one another out of respect and love.

There were Native Americans who spoke of social and economic justice for all people. Climate change will affect us all, but as we face more disasters from more severe storms (think July 12th flood), see longer severe droughts and sea levels rise, the people who are economically challenged will be hardest hit.

Most inspiring to me were the youth. They showed passion and commitment. A group from Minnesota held a big banner that read, "We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For." On the bus ride to and from

Milwaukee to Washington D.C., we were joined by a dozen high school students from Racine, who felt they must speak out and take action for their future. In these young people there is hope.

Many of you are doing what you can to reduce your carbon footprint by using renewable energy, driving efficient vehicles, recycling, reusing, growing your own food and buying food locally. Me too. But I now understand that I need to do more.

We are so fortunate that our democracy allows us to speak out. I am grateful that I could, with 200,000 other people, walk around our White House and speak our minds, with police escorts helping to keep us safe. One of the reoccurring chants was, "This is what democracy looks like."

Realistically, will speaking out through marches change much? Perhaps not, but our collective voices spurs us to action.

I have written my Congressman and Senators about my concerns and suggestions for dealing with our changing climate. I am grateful that two responded, but the message I heard is that we must put "jobs before the environment".

I believe that our elected officials are smart enough to know that renewable energy will create jobs and improve economic and environmental conditions for our children and grandchildren. After all, 2.2 million American jobs contribute in some manner to energy efficient products and services. Nearly 1.5 million of these jobs are in the construction industry involved in making our homes and businesses more energy efficient, and almost 300,000 are manufacturing jobs, producing ENERGY STAR-certified products and efficient building materials in the United States.

My hope is that through our collective actions, the words "climate change" will not invoke anger, fear, lies and disrespect, as our federal administration and many others are trying to do, but will be synonymous with hope, prosperity, respect and positive action.

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