

As we gather our thoughts this weekend in preparation to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day across our county and nation, we can benefit from his wisdom and courage to take the unavoidable responsibility of environmental justice in our own hands. Dr. King taught us to examine ourselves, our deep motives and aspirations, to measure them against the demands of justice for all things. He also taught us that great courage is necessary and possible to face extraordinary challenges.

The environmental crisis has been building for 50 years and is now developing such momentum that entire nations will soon disappear and hundreds of millions of people suffer and die. Politicians and scientists agree that if we do not substantially reduce the rate of environmental pollution we are headed very soon for run a way climate change and the breakdown of civilization as we know it. The earth will live on in a new chapter of its billions of year history without humans. Our prevailing version of economic success just doesn't have a future on planet earth.

One of the greatest difficulties in gaining the consensus and degree of commitment to change our economic thinking is that the threat seems to be remote and abstract. Upon examination, we know that the threat is not external but is deeply imbedded in our personal and national aspirations.

We are the problem. Green house gases which cause rising death and destruction rates are invisible but very real and deadly. The ghg storm that is gathering is produced by choices made by us.

Since we are the problem, we are the solution. We can return the favor of living within the limits of earthly existence. We know what to do and possess the resources to do it. It is, as always, the matter of will.

Instead of setting on fire the only eco-system we have, we can take major steps to reduce the 43% of green house gases produced by burning oil at an average cost of \$15 per barrel. Today's price of oil is \$80 and it is killing us. When we should be following the world consensus to get off oil, we are confronted locally with the prospect of gas drilling in our communities on a scale unprecedented in the industrial history of our region. The fight back against this travesty is led and supported by citizens, not government. Local, state and federal government and economic development agencies spend far greater resources promoting fossil fuels than their alternative.

Alternatives are available. Here again, citizens and companies are ahead of government in developing them. In 2008, for the first time, renewable electricity won more investment than fossil-fueled electricity generation. Government is beginning to listen and providing funds, but such funds are paltry compared with what is required. Funding for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects received tens times more applications in 2009 than 2008. Early 2010 programs, swelled by federal America Re-investment and Recovery Act stimulus funding, are flooded by applications that overwhelm processing capability even as they cause many applications to fail because of their complex and arcane requirements. The level of funding is far below application demand.

But there is ferment within the general population and within government to try to break free from commitments that cannot deliver the change in living conditions that is required for our economic success and survival. Locally this means a consensus that we

don't need nor can we live with gas drilling. Local talent and commitment is needed to provide the more affordable, safer, cleaner, job generating benefits of energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy generation.

As we give honor to one our great national leaders and martyrs, let's throw away the large quart size glass of petroleum that supports our daily food intake, and bathe instead in the shower of solar energy that could power all of human civilization for a year with just about one hour of sun shine. It is delivered every day at no cost. It's beautiful. Let's embrace it with local projects to make environmental and human justice the rule among us and for the generations to come.