

Earthday2020 in New Bedford:
A Day for Earth's Climate
by Jonathan Lash

As our country gradually shut down, with schools and businesses closed, public venues dark, thousands sick and millions unemployed we have begun to grasp the scale of what will be necessary to combat this virus we fear but cannot see. We are forced to take extraordinary action because otherwise millions may die.

We hunker down, rely on neighbors, and hope that the pandemic will begin wane. But from the rapidly expanding effects of Global Warming there is no immunity, and we can expect no tapering off. The horror of the pandemic sweeping over the world should not make us forget the scale of the impending climate catastrophe.

Climate change, caused by the burning of fossil fuels, oil and gas drilling, the destruction of forests and other human activities is warming the Earth, acidifying the Oceans, and spawning super storms. January 2020 was the hottest January ever recorded globally. The decade of the 2010's was the hottest decade. Record wild fires in Australia and California were followed by record rains and floods.. Storms, droughts and floods have become more intense worldwide.

Here in New Bedford and along the South Coast the realities are all too clear. We have a long history based on the abundant natural resources that surround us. But our fisheries, farming and tourism are visibly threatened by the effects of global warming.

The effects of global warming do not fall equally on all people. The poorest people, both in the U.S. and globally, are always the most at risk. They live in places that are exposed and have fewer resources to protect themselves

We are seeing the same injustice with Covid-19, which also falls hardest on those most vulnerable: the elderly in nursing homes; in homes for the disabled ; among the homeless; and throughout our poorer communities. We are failing them, as we are failing to control pollution and make stabilizing our communities a priority for all of us.

In our failures the current generation is imposing a harsh future on coming generations and leaving them many fewer options. The effects we see today will be multiplied. The warming caused by today's emissions may take many centuries to reverse even after the world stops adding to the problem. Inequality continues to rise and safety nets of all kinds to disappear. If we continue to delay taking action, action will become more difficult, expensive and disruptive the longer we wait.

The Virus is still raging with no easy solution in sight, but we do know how to start helping our climate. We have the technologies today to shift from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy like solar and wind. New Bedford leads the country in per

capita use of solar power, with solar panels lining the roofs of businesses and homes, and New Bedford can become a regional hub for offshore wind ..

The technology is available, but we need policies and incentives to accelerate its use. That is where our country and our state are lagging. It is appalling that the federal government in Washington is rolling back rather than strengthening rules to reduce emissions from cars, power plants, and factories. It is a disgrace that the Massachusetts legislature has not enacted legislation to set a target for carbon neutrality, to build a zero-carbon transportation system, and to create green jobs.

A long list of leading companies, like Microsoft , Amazon, and BP, have committed to becoming carbon neutral. The states that lead the low-carbon revolution technologically will be the ones to profit first. Massachusetts has the advantage of having world class educational and research institutions, a concentration of technology leaders, and an economy that does not depend on the production of coal, oil, or gas. We should be leading the charge in the Northeast.

Wednesday April 22nd, 2020 is the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. On this day in 1970 millions of Americans demanded action on industrial pollution and environmental destruction, and launched the modern environmental movement in the U.S. Around the world more than a billion people planned to participate this year in Earth Day events focused on climate action. The EarthDay2020 organizing Committee had planned a major Earth Day 50th Anniversary event in New Bedford.

Events have been postponed or cancelled, but we can use this day to remember that there are two things that we hold most important:
The health of our People and the health of our Planet.

We are acting together to use science and education to conquer the Corona Virus pandemic and restore public health. We can also act together to avert a climate catastrophe that is as destructive as Covid-19, and more permanent. We are beginning to understand just how much we need to rely on each other to stay connected and supported as we face global threats of every kind.

Jonathan Lash is the former President of Hampshire College, where he oversaw installation of 19 acres of solar collectors, proving that a residential college in the U.S. could get all its electricity from solar while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars. He is also former President of the World Resource Council, a Climate Change think tank based in D.C. He lives part-time in Dartmouth.

