

A People for the Planet

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Everything is connected. Every action has implications far beyond the reach of what we witness. Just as the Daoist religion recognizes a powerful, mythical force flowing through and connecting every living being, so too must we acknowledge the importance of each individual within our society and the ways by which they are impacted by climate change and social injustice. Until we gather and apply solutions to address the intersectionality of the most impactful systemic issues we face, the resolution to climate change will cease to be a reality. As we feel the first tremors of the effects of man-made climate change in the form of extreme heat waves, tsunamis and hurricanes, and horrific fire seasons, it is becoming increasingly apparent that those who have historically experienced discrimination or are currently discriminated against are more at risk to suffer from the effects of climate change. It is crucial we work to dismantle these systems of oppression and inequality in order to ensure the safety of every member of our nation.

Systemic discrimination has created significant obstacles, especially concerning how one may withstand the severity of the effects of climate change. For many centuries, people have been barred access to the jobs, raises, homes, and education they deserve based on the color of their skin, religion, gender, or ethnic background. This directly impacts the access that they, their families, and their children have had and continue to have to necessary financial resources, putting future generations at a disadvantage in comparison to those who had not previously experienced oppression. This lack of resources makes it more difficult for them to access the

healthcare, shelter, and food that are essential not only to sustaining life but also to facing climate change.

These deep-rooted inequalities also influence the access to water and food, exposure to pollution, and access to safe shelter one may have. It is pertinent that we address these issues wholly, not only to ensure universal safety and equality for all of the members of our global community but also to move towards correcting the impacts of the damaging cycle of consumption and waste, and parallelly, discrimination and inequity that exists at the epicenter of the climate crisis. According to USA Today, while Native Americans make up less than 1% of the American population, they make up nearly 2% of the population of those impoverished in the United States. These statistics are reflected in other groups such people who are part of the Black community (with 12.5% of the population, and over 20% of the population impoverished), as well as Latinos (with 18.2% and over 26% respectively). Working to address the issues that most deeply impact the US as a whole will help the people disproportionately affected by poverty to recover and stand more equipped to confront the reality of climate change. It is through the disassembling of these discriminatory structures and the active support of those who have historically experienced oppression that we may move collectively move toward a healthier and more inclusive earth.

One of the most accessible courses of action that any individual can be a part of is campaigning to support legislation such as the Breathe Act, which calls for, “Allocating New Money to Build Healthy, Sustainable & Equitable Communities for All People,” (The BREATHE Act Federal Bill Proposal, Section 3). Supporting such legislation is as simple as contacting the elected officials who represent given districts and have been given the power they hold to carry out the will of those they represent. Reaching out by phone or email, or making

one's voice known through peaceful demonstration amplifies the interest of the community, clearly outlining a course of action for the official representatives that hold the power to make changes to best support the needs of their constituents. Participating in positive action such as this is a valuable piece of the puzzle, bringing us closer both to greater equality and to stronger communities that are more equipped to deal with the current effects of man-made climate change and to move in the direction of a greener, more sustainable future.

Another solution to tackling the unequal implications of climate change relates specifically to a vital vein within our Valley, consisting of immigrants, migrant workers, and youths. It has been found, “Where economic diversification is low, income opportunities and hence options for developing alternative livelihoods in response to climatic changes may be limited,” (Poverty and Climate Change, 22). Supporting diverse, accessible programs—for those who have immigrated to the United States, or who travel, following work—such as trade schools and transfer programs to uphold their academic status or further their education, will help to grant them access to a wider job market. This is especially important in the Yakima Valley, as a large portion of industry and therefore workforce is based in agriculture. With rising temperatures, water scarcity, and increasing pollution, damage to the agricultural industry looms. While it is imperative we work to address overwhelming issues within the agriculture industry by adopting more sustainable farming practices and soil regeneration programs, increasing the opportunities available to the people to whom the threat of climate change is most severe is just as important.

Climate change is real, and regardless of the immediate action we take against it now, the long-term effects will still impact people around the world for decades to come. However, working to support those who will be most impacted by climate change, advocating for positive

change within the community, and moving towards a future that is socially and economically sustainable will build the base for greater change to come. Often, people will say not everything can be fixed, that the odds are too great—too insurmountable. In reality, nothing is unachievable when we can come together and stand on an even field, striving towards a bright future for us all.

Works Cited

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