

By Bill McKibben

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All right, listen up. Very few people can ever say that they are in the single most important place they could possibly be doing the single most important thing they could possibly be doing. That's you, here, now.

You are the movement that we need if we are going to win in the few years that we have. You have the skills now. You are making the connections. And there is no one else. It is you.

That is a great honor and that is a terrible burden. There is no one else.

The science is the easy part in this, grim, but easy. 2010 was the warmest year on record. And it was warm. We were on the phone one day with our 350 crew in Pakistan and one of them said, "It's hot out here today," and I was surprised to hear him say it because it's usually hot in Pakistan during the summer. He said, no it's really hot. We just set the new, all time Asia temperature record, 129 degrees. That kind of heat melts the arctic. That kind of heat causes drought so deep across Russia that the Kremlin stops all grain exports. That kind of heat causes the flooding that still has 4 million people across Pakistan homeless tonight.

It's tough, it's grim, but the good news at least is that it's clear, the science. We have a number: 350 parts per million. 350, the most important number on earth. As the NASA team put it in January 2008, "any value in the atmosphere greater than 350 parts per million is not compatible with the planet on which civilization developed and which life on earth is adapted." Getting back to 350 parts per million will be very very tough, the toughest thing human beings have ever done, but there is no use complaining about it, it's just physics and chemistry. That's what we have to do.

But if the scientific method has worked splendidly to outline our dilemma, that's how badly the political method has worked to solve it. Think about our own country, historically the biggest source of carbon emissions. Last summer, the Senate refused to even take a vote on the tepid, moderate, tame climate bill that was before it. Last week, the House voted 248 to 174 to pass a resolution saying global warming wasn't real. It was one of the most embarrassing votes that Congress has ever taken. They believe that because they can amend the tax laws they can amend the laws of nature too, but they can't. I'm awful glad a few of you went up to the visitors gallery to talk some sense to them last week.

Even the White House. Two weeks ago, the interior secretary, who spoke here two years ago, Ken Salazar, signed a piece of paper opening up 250 million tonnes of coal under federal land in Wyoming to mining. That's like opening 300 new coal fired power plants and running them for a year. That's a disgrace.

But you know what. We understand the physics and chemistry of political power. In this case, it's not carbon dioxide that rules the day: it's money.

Many of you are in the District of Columbia for the first time and it looks clean and it looks sparkling. No, this city is as polluted as Beijing. But instead of coal smoke it's polluted by money. Money warps our political life, it obscures our vision, but just like with physics in chemistry there is no use whining. We know now what we need to do and the first thing we need to do is build a movement.

We will never have as much money as the oil companies so we need a different currency to work in, we need bodies, we need creativity, we need spirit.

350.org has been like a beta-test for that movement. It began with youth here at Power Shift four years ago. It's now spread around the planet. In the last two years, there have been 15,000 demonstrations in 189 nations. CNN called it the most widespread political activity in the planet's history. But it needs to get bigger still. On the first Earth Day in 1970 there 20 million Americans in the street, one in ten Americans. That's the kind of size we need.

And so, on September 24 we need your help. September 24 is the next big day of action. We're calling it Moving Planet and in those 189 nations, people will be in motion. Much of it will be on bicycles, because the bicycle is one of the few tools that rich and poor both use. Who here knows how to ride a bike? All right, September 24, I cannot wait to see the pictures. We are not going to wait for the politicians to move, we're going to create the future that we need ourselves.

But that movement doesn't just need to be bigger, it needs to be sharper too, more aggressive.

You know what, at Copenhagen we got 117 nations to sign on to that 350 target. That was good, but they were the wrong 117 nations. They were the poorest and most vulnerable nations. The most addicted nations, led by our own, weren't yet willing to bite the bullet, so that's where we've got to go to work.

That work, to deal with that money pollution, that work starts Monday at ten o'clock in Lafayette Square, across from the White House and next to a place called the US Chamber of Commerce.

The Koch Brothers are high peaks of corruption, but the US Chamber of Commerce is the Everest of dirty money. It boasts on its web page that it is the biggest lobby in Washington. In fact, it spends more money lobbying than the next five lobbies combined. It spent more money on politics last year than the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee combined and 94% of that went to climate deniers.

We cannot stop their money, but we can strip them of their credibility. They claim to represent all American business, but they don't. 55% of their funding came from 16 companies. They don't have to say who those companies are, but it's easy to tell when you watch what they do. They spend their time lobbying to make sure the planet heats up as fast as it possibly can.

They sent a legal brief to the EPA last year, saying that they should take no action on climate change, because if the planet warmed, humans could alter their behavior and their physiology to deal with the problem. I don't even really know what that means, alter your physiology. Grow gills? I don't know. But I can tell you this. I am too old to change my physiology and you all are too good looking. But I will adapt my behavior. Every day now I will roll out of bed and go to work fighting them. Hell, I will go to bed at night and try to dream up new ways to fight.

We're going to adapt our behavior all right. We're going to adapt our behavior now to fight on every front. I'm sorry if that sounds aggressive, but there we are.

Twenty-two years ago, I wrote the first book about climate change and I've gotten to watch it all, and I know that simply persuasion will not do. We need to fight. Now, we need to fight non-violently and with civil disobedience. You will hear from my friend Tim DeChristopher in a moment and more to come, but if you're going to go that route, one thing you need to make sure that you manage to get across in your witness is that you are not the radicals in this fight.

The radicals are the people who are fundamentally altering the composition of the atmosphere. That is the most radical thing people have ever done.

We need to fight with art and with music, too. Not just the side with our brain that likes bar graphs and pie graphs, but with all our heart and all our soul. Tomorrow or tonight, you need to go down behind Hall B downstairs and help them build the art work for Monday morning.

We need to fight with unity. We need to have a coherent voice. That's why, last week we joined with our friends at 1Sky to build this bigger, stronger 350.org. We need to speak with one loud voice, because we are fighting for your future.

So far, we've raised the temperature of the planet one degree and that's done all that I've described, it's melted the arctic, it's changed the oceans. The climatologists tell us that unless we act with great speed and courage that one degree will be five degrees before this century is out. And if we do that, then the world that we leave behind will be a ruined world.

We fight not just for ourselves, we fight for the beauty of this place. For cool trout streams and deep spruce woods. For chilly fog rising off the Pacific and deep snow blanketing the mountains. We fight for all the creation that shares this planet with us. We don't know half the species on Earth we're wiping out.

And of course, we fight alongside our brothers and sisters around the world. You've seen the pictures as I talk: these are our comrades. Most of these people, as you see, come from places that have not caused this problem, and yet they're willing to be in deep solidarity with us. That's truly admirable and it puts a real moral burden on us. Never let anyone tell you, that environmentalism is something that rich, white people do. Most of the people that we work with around the world are poor and black and brown and Asian and young, because that's what most of the world is made up of, and they care about the future as anyone else.

We have to fight, finally, without any guarantee that we are going to win. We have waited late to get started and our adversaries are strong and we do not know how this is going to come out. If you were a betting person, you might bet we were going to lose because so far that's what happened, but that's not a bet you're allowed to make. The only thing that a morally awake person to do when the worst thing that's ever happened is happening is try to change those odds.

I have spent most of my last few years in rooms around the world with great people, many of whom will be refugees before this century is out, some of whom may be dead from climate change before this century is out. No guarantee that we will win, but from them a complete guarantee that we will fight with everything we have. It is always an honor for me to be in those rooms. It is the greatest honor for me to be with you tonight.

No guarantee that we will win, but we will fight side by side, as long as we've got. Thank you all so much.