

AFTER THE BP OIL DISASTER

It's time to protect and treat this planet like the gift that it is.

I have been to the Gulf Coast several times since the BP oil disaster started. I've spoken with affected residents, and I've taken boat tours to see the tragic images of oil-soaked birds and wetlands up close. Each time I go, everything seems to hit me even harder than the previous visit.

The same held true this past week, when I visited the region with a group of national and local faith leaders. We joined together to reflect, restore, and renew—and we took another boat tour off the coast of Louisiana.

The sorrow among the boat's passengers was palpable. Often, words weren't necessary or even possible as we gazed out at pelicans struggling to fly out of the muck-covered water, or at the dolphins surfacing through thick patches of oil.

Together we spoke with affected members of the fishing industry, learning about their lost livelihoods—and with residents as they talked about the water as if it were a member of their family. We heard how they've relied on this water their entire lives, how they were taught to swim there as children and now can't do the same with their kids. About how it will never be the same.

I heard the religious leaders speak of our culpability for this disaster. Our country's oil addiction has forced us into these situations—it has forced us to plunder the planet for our energy needs.

These were faith leaders of organizations from all backgrounds, including the Louisiana Interchurch Conference, the Islamic Society of North America, Interfaith Power and Light, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Catholic Charities and more.

They spoke of the moral dimension of our costly dependence on oil, and called for restoration of the Gulf communities and ecosystems. We talked about stewardship—and agreed that no matter our faith backgrounds, caring for our planet is a common course of action behind which we can all unite.

These faith leaders and I wished that more Americans viewed the situation the same way.

We haven't even stopped the massive flow of oil from BP's gushing well yet, let alone begun to respond to the damage it has wrought—and yet the oil industry and many others want to keep drilling off our coasts. They claim it's the only way to boost the local economy and keep people employed.

Together we ask, how many more times must a disaster like this happen before we change our ways? How bad should our health, our economy, and our environment be before we decide once and for all that our fossil fuel addiction must stop? And where are those Americans who view themselves as stewards for the only planet we've got?

This disaster should be a wakeup call. We can't return to business as usual and face another disaster like this. It's time to say, "Enough is enough." We must stand up to the oil industry, increase our transportation choices, reduce the need to drive, and embrace the clean energy solutions that will create good, lasting jobs while keeping our fresh air, drinking water, and oceans intact. It's time to protect and treat this planet like the gift that it is.

We agreed: It's time to envision a future based on clean energy, to help us all renew and protect creation. We need President Barack Obama's leadership to deliver a plan to end our dependence on oil over the next 20 years. Every day that we fail to act is a day that we continue to place American security, economy, and climate in jeopardy.

We can do better. We can end our oil addiction, and we need Obama to build the path to oil independence.

Source : http://otherwords.org/after_the_bp_oil_disaster/