

The Go-Back Club

Newsletter of the Simple-Living Brigade

September 2013

Seventeen members in six states, the District of Columbia and three countries.

This is OUR Paper!

Comments from the First Few Members of The GO-Back Club

W. & A. S., Pennsylvania: GO GO GO!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Love to see and join....

A.H., D.C.: Congratulations on your new career! Please sign me up for the Go-Back Club. I know a couple of publishers here in DC and will send their contact info later.

G.D., Vermont: Sign me up! Sounds like a great idea. Can't promise I'll read it all the time though, but happy to support you.

B.B., Maryland: I am very happy for you.

D.M., Pennsylvania I'll support you 100% ... How are you on camera??? I have two anchor/news people who will 'interview' you and you can have the column available on C99 News — 99 Coalition site — I think people are truly worded out — tired of reading so much — I think they want more video live action discussions — with follow up stories . . . Would you be interested in a taping of your column — then a re-direct to your paper???

D.R., Pennsylvania: Sounds like a GREAT IDEA, count me in!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

S.C., Canada: "The way forward is back," as T. S. Eliot once wrote! Very best of luck in your new venture! Please add me to your list. What is the snail-mailing address?

K.M., Florida: Congrats on your new endeavor — best of luck, too — you can do it!!

T.M., Virginia: The Go-Back Club sounds like a great idea. Does "go back" refer to when we used less energy to live a good life? You can count me "in". I admire your creativity, quite remarkable.

PS. "Go back" makes me think about our young lives on Osborn Avenue in Mamaroneck, NY. I remember playing on the stone wall behind our house, exploring behind the Miller's house down by the river and in winter sledding down the hill on the snow. No need for extra power sources there.

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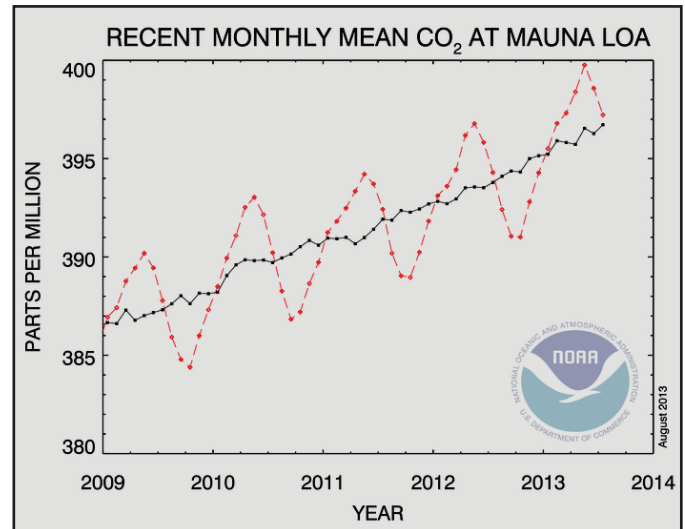


Photo courtesy NOAA

Atmospheric carbon dioxide reached 400 ppm in May, the highest point in millions of years.

Climate Milestone is a Moment of Symbolic Significance on Road of Idiocy

The only way forward is back: to retrace our steps and seek to return atmospheric concentrations to around 350 ppm

By George Monbiot

First published in *The Guardian* at www.guardian.co.uk and www.monbiot.com on May 10, 2013.

The data go back 800,000 years: that's the age of the oldest

fossil air bubbles extracted from Dome C, an ice-bound summit in the high Antarctic. And throughout that time there has been nothing like this. At no point in the preindustrial record have concentrations of carbon dioxide in the air risen above 300 parts per million (ppm). 400 ppm is a figure that belongs to a different era.

The difference between 399 ppm and 400 ppm is small, in terms of its impacts on the

Idiocy continued on page 2

What on Earth is The Go-Back Club?

It's *not* social networking. It's merely a list of people who long for and are willing to use their own lives to purposefully go back to using less energy, living more simply, etc. I'm calling this a Simple-Living Brigade. When new people sign up, I'm going to print their comments in this newsletter and print the new total membership numbers at the end of each column published in

regular newspapers, too. Just numbers.

For the comments, I'll only use initials and states as above. No further demands, no money, just a monthly online newsletter. If you want to share your tips with my readers in the columns or this newsletter, I'll be happy to publish them as long as I really like them. I'll be looking for creative and new ideas.

Thanks for reading this little blurb. You can reach me at gobackclub@pa.net or <http://www.gobackclub.com>.

Idiocy *continued from page 1*

world's living systems. But this is a moment of symbolic significance, a station on the Via Dolorosa (painful way) of environmental destruction. It is symbolic of our failure to put the long-term prospects of the natural world and the people it supports above immediate self-interest.

The only way forward now is back: to retrace our steps and seek to return atmospheric concentrations to around 350 ppm, as the 350.org campaign demands. That requires, above all, that we leave the majority of the fossil fuels which have already been identified in the ground. There is not a government or an energy company which has yet agreed to do so.

Recently, Shell announced that it will go ahead with its plans to drill deeper than any offshore oil operation has gone before: almost three kilometers (nearly two miles) below the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, Oxford University opened a new laboratory in its department of Earth sciences. The lab is funded by Shell. Oxford says that the partnership "is designed to support more effective development of natural resources to meet fast-growing global demand for energy." Which translates as finding and extracting even more fossil fuel.

The European Emissions Trading Scheme, which was supposed to have capped our consumption, is now, for practical purposes, dead. [Monbiot lives in England.]

International climate talks have stalled; governments

such as ours now seem quietly to be unpicking their domestic commitments.

Practical measures to prevent the growth of global emissions are, by comparison to the scale of the challenge, almost nonexistent.

The problem is simply stated: the power of the fossil fuel companies is too great. Among those who seek and obtain high office are people characterized by a complete absence of empathy or scruples, who will take money or instructions from any corporation or billionaire who offers them, and then defend those interests against the current and future prospects of humanity.

This new climate milestone reflects a profound failure of politics, in which democracy has quietly been supplanted by plutocracy [rule by the wealthy]. Without a widespread reform of campaign finance, lobbying and influence-peddling and the systematic corruption they promote, our chances of preventing climate breakdown are close to zero.

So here stands our political class at a way-station along the road of idiocy, apparently determined only to complete the journey.

Note from the Editor: *This is the article which inspired me to go forward with The Go-Back Club. Now I am creating a monthly newspaper column and sending it out to papers in six states hoping to increase our membership exponentially. Reprinted with permission from the author.*

Our paper *continued from page 1*

J.B., Maryland: I would like to become part of this movement. I have been working with CCAN (Chesapeake Climate Action Network) to stop fracking here in Maryland. Saving our environment for future generations is a battle that will take us to a new Earth. Keep up the hard work.

P.R., Korea: Yes, I am delighted to join the Club. And I will ask my friends to share the ideas. I am doing all right over here at Daegu. I am organizing my physical and mental system. Now I am in good shape so far. But I have a lot of things to do for resettlement. Thank you for asking me about my new life here at Daegu. I will be out of town for three days. When I

come back I will write you what I think and feel about the simple life. It is really hot over here. The temperature is almost 38 degrees in Celsius and over 100 in Fahrenheit. I do not have an air conditioner. What I have is an electric fan and natural air conditioner. I like the simple life as you know.

A.P., Pennsylvania: Please include me in this group. Good luck with your new venture!

C.B., Pennsylvania: I may live more simply than most folks already. I take five-minute "Navy" showers. I flush every three or four uses. I burn lights only in the room I'm in. I adaptively reuse before recycling. Yada yada.



Explanation from NOAA About Differing Press Reports On and Around the Day CO₂ Numbers Hit 400 ppm

There is every year an annual cycle of CO₂ reaching its maximum in May and a minimum in September. The 400 ppm level was indeed reached at the Mauna Loa Observatory for several days in May under so-called background or baseline conditions, a few weeks later than the original announcement for 8 or 9 May. Those are conditions in which air is measured that has not been influenced by local emissions or removals of CO₂ by the vegetation or people on the island of Hawaii.

Background conditions are representative of a very large area in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The monthly mean during background conditions stayed just under 400 ppm at Mauna Loa. It was reached in May/June of 2012 as a monthly mean widely in the Arctic, which this year maxed out at ~402 ppm. Next year there will be another 2 ppm or so everywhere in the world, and so on. Also Antarctica will reach 400 ppm in a few years.

The originally-posted numbers on 8 and 9 May were later revised downward by ~0.2 ppm or so, as part of our routine quality control procedures. That is no big deal, other than it was just that the press was looking over our shoulder.

Best regards,
Pieter Tans, NOAA
Email received August 14, 2013

Message from the Editor

I created this newsletter to share with the people who feel as I do, that we humans have gone too far and we need to step back and figure out ways to live more sensible, more simply and more joyfully.

I'm developing a newspaper column called The Go-Back Club hoping that regular newspapers will publish it and we'll pick up more members that way. I'll be mailing my first two columns

to about 250 editors in six states and the District of Columbia. The first one is an introduction, "Let's Start Today;" the second is "Humility Amidst Wealth." I'll put links to the papers which print the full articles in future newsletters.

For the Earth,

Iona Conner

gobackclub@pa.net; www.gobackclub.com
21431 Marlin Circle, Shade Gap, Pennsylvania USA 17255

Tracking Fracking

The first three articles were submitted by Allen Hengst, Washington, D.C.

Five-year Fracking Ban Issue Officially on Ballot in Broomfield

August 9, 2013 (excerpt)

The Broomfield City and County Clerk's Office has determined that enough signatures have been collected to get a five-year fracking ban on the November ballot. Anti-fracking citizen group Our Broomfield collected 3,410 signatures to get the ban on the ballot. The clerk's office said 2,889 signatures were accepted, which was above the 2,082 needed to get the ban on the ballot.

The ballot question asks voters to approve a five-year ban on all hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in Broomfield. ... The ban would prohibit using fracking to "extract oil, gas or other hydrocarbons within ... Broomfield..."

Read full article at http://www.broomfieldenterprise.com/broomfield-news/ci_23831775/five-year-fracking-ban-issue-offiically-ballot-broomfield?source=most_viewed.

Separating the Frack from the Fiction (excerpt)

The Pacific Institute, a nonprofit research and policy organization, reported in its 2012 study (Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Resources: Separating the Frack from the Fiction) that, "The U.S. EPA reports that fracturing shale gas wells requires between 2.3 million and 3.8 million gallons of water per well. An additional 40,000 to 1,000,000 gallons is required to drill the well." The authors also found that, "New data, however, suggest that the water requirements for fracturing shale gas wells might be both much larger and more variable than is reported by the U.S. EPA."

Read the complete article at <http://populationgrowth.org/yes-we-are-out-of-our-fracking-minds/>.

A Texan Tragedy: Ample Oil, No Water

By Suzanne Goldenberg in Barnhart, Texas
theguardian.com: August 11, 2013 (excerpt)

Beverly McGuire saw the warning signs before the town well went dry: sand in the toilet bowl, the sputter of air in the tap, a pump working overtime to no effect. But it still did not prepare her for the night last month when she turned on the tap and discovered the tiny town where she had

made her home for 35 years was out of water.

"The day that we ran out of water I turned on my faucet and nothing was there and at that moment I knew the whole of Barnhart was down the tubes," she said, blinking back tears. "I went: 'dear God help us...'"

Read full article at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/aug/11/texas-tragedy-ample-oil-no-water>.

New Study Finds High Levels of Arsenic in Groundwater Near Fracking Sites

By Theodor Meyer

ProPublica: August 8, 2013 (excerpt)

A recently-published study by researchers at the University of Texas at Arlington found elevated levels of arsenic and other heavy metals in groundwater near natural gas fracking sites in Texas' Barnett Shale..

Read complete article at <http://www.propublica.org/article/new-study-finds-high-levels-of-arsenic-in-groundwater-near-fracking-sites>.

EPA Official Links Fracking & Drinking Water Issues in Dimock PA

By Mark Drajem

Washington Post.com: July 29, 2013 (excerpt)

Drilling for natural gas caused "significant damage" to drinking-water aquifers in a Pennsylvania town at the center of a fight over the safety of hydraulic fracturing, according to a report prepared by a federal official.

The previously-unreleased document from an employee at the EPA's regional office found that drilling or fracking ... caused methane to leak into domestic water wells in Dimock, PA. The findings contradict Cabot Oil and Gas Corp., which drilled in the town and said the explosive methane gas was naturally occurring.

"Methane is released during the drilling and perhaps during the fracking process and other gas-well work," according to the undated slide show prepared by the EPA coordinator in Dimock, who is not identified, for other agency officials. The report, obtained by Bloomberg from critics of fracking, is based on a chemical analysis of methane in wells. The EPA said the findings in the presentation are preliminary and more study is needed. ...

Read full article at http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/epa-official-links-fracking-and-drinking-water-issues-in-dimock-pa/2013/07/29/7d8b34b2-f8a1-11e2-afc1-c850c6ee5af8_story.html.

Chesapeake Drops Energy Leases in Fracking-shy New York

By Edward McAllister

Reuters: August 6, 2013

NEW YORK — Chesapeake Energy has given up a two-year legal fight to retain thousands of acres of natural gas drilling leases in New York state, landowner and legal sources told Reuters.

Landowners in Broome and Tioga counties, who had leased acreage to Chesapeake over the past decade, had battled the pioneering oil driller in court to prevent it from extending the leases under their original terms, many of which were agreed to long before a boom in hydraulic fracturing swept the United States. ...

Read the full article at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/06/us-chesapeake-newyork-idUSBRE97517V20130806>.



The article below was submitted by Angel Smith, Clearville, Pennsylvania on August 10, 2013

This is Just Too Much Death

Here are tadpoles... We counted 219 dead ones... Cows do drink from this water hole, just wanted to share. This is a spring water hole right beside our property, the water from the spring runs down to our place and then through pasture, then to the creek. It makes me sick every morning to get up and know more and more things like this are [and will] happen. I just don't understand, if water is going to kill fish and livestock, how can they say it is okay to drink then just keep allowing these companies to just keep going? We all need air, clean water to survive. Read more about the Smiths at iLoveEarthNews.com, August/September 2011.

Pebble Mine Must be Stopped

Sign on to Letter and Boycott New Gold

“The Worst Possible
Nightmare for
Alaskan Wilderness”

Natural Resources Defense Council
Letter received August 2013 (*excerpt*)

“Foreign mining companies, including Anglo American and Rio Tinto, are planning to dig one of the world’s largest open-pit mines at the headwaters of Bristol Bay, Alaska.

“A new study confirms that this mega-mine will spell disaster for Bristol Bay: its world-renowned wild salmon runs, its abundant wildlife populations and its Native communities. ...

A 2,000-foot-deep, open-pit gold and copper mine stretching over two miles long. Colossal earthen dams up to 50 stories high — built in a known earthquake zone — which are supposed to hold back some ten *billion* tons of mining waste mixed with cyanide, sulfuric acid, arsenic and other toxic chemicals.

“That’s 3,000 pounds of waste for every man, woman and child on Earth!

“Global mining companies want to build this monstrosity right in the heart of Alaska’s Bristol Bay watershed: an unspoiled Eden of vast tundra, crystal clear streams and pristine lakes that span a stunning array of national parks and wildlife refuges.

“The world’s largest sockeye salmon streams run through this paradise, with tens of millions of salmon supporting not just an abundance of bears, whales, seals and eagles but also sustaining Native communities that have thrived here for thousands of years.”

You can sign on to the following letter at <https://secure.nrdconline.org/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=3069>.



Photo from the Natural Resources Defense Council Web site

A ghastly mining project would destroy this Heavenly place.

I applaud EPA for undertaking such a rigorous scientific study of the Bristol Bay watershed. Your agency has now completed two thorough assessments of the region and they have both come to the same conclusion: Massive mining projects like the Pebble Mine would be devastating to Bristol Bay.

The time for study is now over. It is time for action to protect Bristol Bay’s environment, wildlife and people. Your painstaking review has provided overwhelming evidence that large-scale mining in such an ecologically-sensitive area would pose grave and unacceptable risks to a natural treasure.

Bristol Bay’s wild salmon fishery provides 14,000 jobs and is valued at more than \$1.5 billion annually. It also supplies nearly half of the global supply of sockeye salmon.

Salmon sustain the culture, language and spirituality of Alaska Natives, who have relied on subsistence fishing for thousands of years.

The proposed Pebble Mine would risk this economic, cultural and ecological

powerhouse by gouging one of the world’s largest gold and copper mines out of the headwaters of Bristol Bay. It would generate billions of tons of contaminated waste, devastate up to 90 miles of streams, destroy

under Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act — for the sake of the Bristol Bay watershed, its world-class salmon fishery and its people.”

thousands of acres of wetlands and threaten the area’s legendary salmon runs — the linchpin of the Bristol Bay ecosystem, which supports wildlife such as bears, eagles, wolves and seals.

Your agency’s findings all demonstrate that building a mine of this scale in this location is an unacceptably destructive venture, and it must be stopped.

I urge you to do so by using EPA’s authority

Dancing in the Streets



Photo courtesy of Star-Gazette, Elmira N.Y.

Just a reminder to everyone to have some fun while you’re working hard on these tough issues.



Photo courtesy Tim/flickr

A flag flies on a clothesline outside an RV home in the American Southwest. An American expatriate, who lived in Paris, warns of an increasing disconnect between America's ideals and actions.

Opinion: Yes, we could change. So why don't we?

By **Mort Rosenblum**

The Daily Climate: July 31, 2013

PARIS — That hoary fable has it wrong. Frogs have the sense to hop out of heating pots. We Americans don't. Degree by degree over decades, we've been scalded senseless. It is time to snap out of our stupor.

Consider the ironies.

Back in 1967, I went to the Congo and then kept going, curious to find the strangest society on Earth. These days, I could just stay home.

Americans in the '70s loved the Waltons, a hardscrabble West Virginia fictional family who fed any stranger at the door. Today, six real Waltons are worth \$115 billion, more than the bottom third of the nation (now 41%). For one of their Walmart peons, that is seven million years of base pay.

No one thought about climate then. Water made headlines in 1972 but only with "gate" attached to it. Reporters revealed Richard Nixon burgled the Democrats' Watergate offices. Outraged citizens impeached him. Today, most of us just shrug when we learn how the White House snoops on us all.

WE NEED TO MOVE FAST, AS A COLLECTIVE. WE CAN EACH ACT LOCALLY BUT WE'VE GOT TO THINK ON A PLANETARY PLANE. WE NEED TO BANG AWAY AT FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND THEN WIDEN OUR CIRCLES.

Generals and Their Drones

Congress cripples essential services to save a few trillion dollars over 10 years. We squandered twice that on two unwinnable wars, despite the lessons of Vietnam, only to make yet more people hate us. Iraqi oil now goes to China.

When allies who need our leadership warn that we are stumbling toward the scrap-heap of ex-empires, we wave bigger flags. If sovereign states thwart us, our generals fondle their drones.

We vaunt our generosity but, per capita, our foreign aid is the stingiest among rich nations. As George Packer notes in the *New Yorker*, it is "an awkward exercise of high-minded self-interest, humanitarian goals uneasily balanced with strategic calculations."

At home, we take comfort in our bedrock strength, defended

over centuries: Our freedoms to choose. Yet we allow ourselves to be fleeced by partisan politics and a tiny fringe of big-money players.

Alternative Realities

Two pals visiting from Arizona offered a diagnosis. Workaday Americans, overwhelmed, focus on their own narrow bread-and-circus worlds. Kids, seeing bullshit all around them, thumb alternative realities on tiny screens. The way out, my friends conclude, is to build awareness and incrementally spur action.

That is like a flight crew's directions as a troubled airliner nears a mountain: Buckle up, lean forward, and kiss your ass goodbye.

We need to move fast, as a collective. We can each act locally, but we've got to think on a planetary plane. Borders

in today's world are only lines on a map.

Bring de Tocqueville Back

For starters, let's face reality. Sure, we're a great nation. But I'd love to see Alexis de Tocqueville back for an update at a Phoenix mall among feckless golden youth. Or at a Tucson gun show where old guys in boots arm themselves for Armageddon.

deTocqueville came in 1831 to see how France might improve its prisons. Now I could show him Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's inmates frying in summer sun. He would find we lock up 760 of every 100,000 inhabitants, seven times France's rate, more than Cuba and China combined.

He marveled at how people stayed free and happy by holding governments to account. When citizens grow apathetic, he wrote, democracies slide toward "soft despotism" and majorities tyrannize minorities. (He'd likely be amused by our term, sequester. In French, *sequestrer* means kidnap.)

Change *continued on page 6*

Change *continued from page 5*

We are no longer so exceptional. In a lot of countries any kid can grow up to be president. An American must raise a billion dollars and show Donald Trump a birth certificate. We sneer at others' corruption, yet ours is built into our institutions. Special interests can legally rent all the legislators they need.

Obsessed with ourselves, we don't see how others view our violence. A terrorist band killed 3,000 people in 2001 and we still rain fire halfway around the world. Our guns at home take 11,000 lives each year. In Japan, by contrast, gun deaths totaled seven in 2012, two fewer than deaths by scissors.

Urgent Priorities

Here are some urgent priorities:

Too often, we reduce "news" to nuggets that feed prejudice and agenda.

•First, we need a firm grip on global realities. That requires professional reporters along with thoughtful readers who absorb what they report. Today's avalanche of "news" from multiple directions would be great if we knew what to trust. Mostly, it only confuses us. Good stuff gets lost in a tower of babble.

Example: It was senseless to fixate on the Benghazi calamity. No government can field enough agents and troops to secure countless far-flung snake pits. We need to reduce frustrations that breed enemies who target easy prey.

•Second, we have to elect people who remember their oaths of office. Here is Robert Reich (Secretary of Labor under Clinton): "Conservative Republicans ... basically shut Congress down. Their refusal to compromise is working just as they hoped: No jobs agenda. No budget. No grand bargain on the deficit. No background checks on guns. Nothing on

climate change. No tax reform. No hike in the minimum wage. Nothing so far on immigration reform."

Our legislators do not shoot their way into office. We vote them in and we can bounce them out when they put their own interests ahead of ours. We need to undo gerrymandering that lets minorities hold majorities for ransom.

•Third, we need to realize that in the long run schools matter most. When I start a class, I'm always stunned at how little 21-year-old journalism students know about the world they are about to inherit. At the end, I'm thrilled at how eager they are to keep learning more. That interest should start in third grade.

Each Reaper drone missile load costs at least \$320,000, enough to hire a handful of teachers who can explain to future generations why it is a bad idea to blow up distant strangers. If some kids disagree, fair enough, as long as facts, context and critical thinking factor into the process.

Squeezed by Banks

Half a century of poking into other societies has shown me that people are more alike than they are different. They know injustice when they see it, social and otherwise. Muscular nations with big appetites need to keep that in mind.

Latin America is finally narrowing the rich-poor gap. Ours widens. Corporations rule. Banks we bailed out squeeze us at every turn. Other nations see health care as a human right. Our version enriches insurance companies, overburdens doctors and does little for many it was meant to help.

This is no commie rant. I reported from the Evil Empire when it collapsed. Soviet socialism didn't kill it. People finally had enough of leaders

who used state power to favor a chosen few and quell dissent. Sound familiar?

But only half of us even bother to vote, let alone protest. Look how Turks reacted when the prime minister tried to make Taksim Square into a shopping mall.

What America Was

Wherever I go, friends tell me they miss what America was and could be. Gustavo Gorriti, the most respected reporter in Peru, sent chills up my spine.

"I admire the United States profoundly," he said. "Some of my best years were spent there." Like so many others, he studied the American style of journalism that set the world standard. Now, he says, that is over. "We now all pay the price of your having devastated real newspapers," he said.

As he sees it, few Americans realize that a complex public-private universe operates over their heads. When an Edward Snowden attempts to shed some light, he is hounded as a traitor into the enemy camp.

'Too Crazy' for Orwell

"Orwell would have thought this was too crazy for his novels," Gorriti said. He fears Europe is being muscled to follow along, eroding democratic foundations built up over centuries.

"There has to be a reaction from the people," he concluded. "Americans have to take their country back. If people don't act in the United States, in Europe, we are going to lose the greatest achievement of human history."

Farfetched? Orwell wrote "1984" on the Scottish island of Jura. Just recently, the BBC reported, Jura vanished from view. Google inexplicably wiped it off the map. This was later corrected but the point was made. When virtual replaces real, anything is

possible.

We need to bang away at family and friends and then widen our circles. TV won't help much. John-Boy Walton narrated how Franklin Roosevelt shepherded America out of the Great Depression. Today we have faux reality and that porcine putz with preposterous hair on Celebrity Apprentice, who takes such delight in bellowing, "You're fired."

Firm Action

People can be inspired. Stéphane Hessel, in his 90s, sold four million copies worldwide of a pamphlet, *Indignez-vous!* Roughly, Get Off Your Butt. Then he wrote *Engagez-vous*. Stay Off Your Butt, and Keep At It.

Hessel was French but his message was universal. He advocates simple firm action, not violence. Civil disobedience only incites police to break heads. We need to understand that those cops work for us. And so does Congress.

In America, if a 99 percent majority cannot revive a hallmark democracy and a free-choice economy, that metaphoric frog has already croaked.

Mort Rosenblum is a former Associated Press special correspondent and ex-editor of the International Herald Tribune. You can find more of his perspective on Facebook at Reporting Unlimited.

The Daily Climate is an independent, foundation-funded news service that covers climate change. Views expressed are the author's and not those of The Daily Climate. Find them on Twitter@TheDailyClimate or email editor Douglas Fischer at dfischer@DailyClimate.org.

Note from the Editor: *The Daily Climate is my favorite global warming site.*