

I'm from Pittsburgh, my name is Frank Kirkwood.

I volunteer with MarchOnHarrisburg, but I speak here for myself. For the last seven years MarchOnHarrisburg has been working to stop the domination of our democracy by the wealthy - starting by ending the culture of daily gift-giving by lobbyists to legislators as well as other reforms, such as publicly funded elections, that will get big money out of the political system.

Last year, along with others in Pennsylvania Action on Climate, I was arrested in the office of Senator Yaw, protesting the culture of corruption in this Legislature - the corruption that is ruining our planet and our futures.

Political power is the ability to make the future what you want it to be. Right now, the fossil fuel industry has the political power to make our future, the future it wants: one where it continues to sell fossil fuels and our planet continues to get hotter. Is that the future you want? Of course not.

But you, we, lack political power because of the weapons the industry can use to stop change, such as payments to campaigns and to the parties, unlimited and unreported gifts and vacations, revolving door jobs for legislators, and the ever present threat by industry to massively finance an election day competitor to any legislator who stands up to them. As a result, we are all headed fast into the ideal future of the oil and gas industry.

I have four questions for legislators and climate activists and anyone else who expects to live at least a few more years:

Is it reasonable to expect the oil and gas industry to willingly make the changes necessary to avoid the worst of global warming when for decades they have hidden the truth about their products, lied to the people, and still today they are funding large propaganda campaigns to suppress public opinion. Plainly, the answer is "NO".

Is it reasonable to expect the oil and gas industry to willingly make the changes necessary to avoid the worst of global warming when they own a trillion dollars of fuel that will be worthless if they have to leave it in the ground? Plainly, the answer is "NO".

Is it reasonable to expect this Legislature to make the democracy changes necessary to avoid the worst of global warming when they won't even agree to stop taking meals, drinks, gifts and vacations from oil and gas lobbyists? Plainly, the answer is "NO".

If we keep re-electing Representatives and Senators who will not support the democracy reforms necessary to disarm industry, is it reasonable to expect anything other than seeing our planet turning into an earthly hell? Plainly, the answer is "NO".

There is only one thing you can make your Representative do: Clean out their desks and go home after they have lost the election. That's it! That's our power.

So, people, let's get together! If your representative is part of the problem and refuses to support the democracy reforms necessary to disarm industry, then find somebody in your town who IS willing to work for OUR future.

Only 13% of Pennsylvanians think that this legislature is doing a good or excellent job. Groups that have been educating the public about the way Harrisburg really works get some of the credit for that low, low number. But, you know who deserves the most credit? The legislators themselves! The lobbyists! The endless flow of money from wealthy self-interests to the people who are supposed to be representing us.

We democracy reformers struggled through many years of Republican domination of the House and Senate. Then, in January, a new day dawned as the Democrats took control of the House. Many Democrats believe that the House Democrats are less corrupt than the Republicans. Are they? Let's see. Let's see if the House Democratic leadership will allow a vote on democracy reform bills - starting, right now, with the gift ban bill. Let's see if your representative is willing to take away the weapons the fossil fuel industry uses to hold this legislature captive and passive. Let's see if your representative will take away the industry's power to make the future and give that power back to the people, so that we can have the future we want.

Let's see.