In early June 2012, the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), at the urging of Governor Cuomo in the NY-Sun Initiative, established a solar Feed-in-Tariff. LIPA agreed to purchase solar power at the rate of 22 cents per kilowatt-hour under 20-year contracts. Within six weeks, the top tiers of the demonstration project dealing with large plans were oversubscribed. In late October, LIPA expanded its Feed-in-Tariff project to 170 megawatts, including 20 megawatts from wind, geothermal, and other renewable energy sources. A recent study by Synapse found all of Long Island’s residential units could be powered by renewable (wind, solar, and water) energy by 2020, and the entire island, including businesses, by 2030. The Niagara Group is attempting to obtain a similar Feed-in-Tariff demonstration project in Western New York. The international successes of the Feed-in-Tariff project over the last year have been enormous. Since the fall of 2011, Germany’s Feed-in-Tariff program has increased its clean renewable electricity production by 300% to meet 17% of its electricity needs. In July, a German utility adopted an aggressive Feed-in-Tariff in July 2011, after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Japan expects solar installations alone to provide at least 3.2 gigawatts (3.2 megawatts of electricity), or the equivalent of approximately 3 nuclear plants. The Ontario Canadian two-year report on its Feed-in-Tariff showed that it had produced contracts for 4.6 megawatts of renewable energy within the first two years of its existence. They are expecting up to 50,000 jobs in renewable energy as a result of the program. Italy recently adopted a Feed-in-Tariff model, after struggling for years with a Renewable Portfolio Standard similar to what we currently have in New York State.

And how about the United States? President Obama’s re-election has encouraged suggestions to create a national Feed-in-Tariff Program, developing renewable energy utilizing a system of funding similar to the National Highway Trust Fund. The President spoke at a Feed-in-Tariff conference at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Decisions by FERC last year opened the way for states to establish Feed-in-Tariffs. If a state requires that a certain portion of its electricity be produced from renewable energy sources, prices can be established for these renewables to be purchased by utilities. Revenues collected from a Feed-in-Tariff would go into a National Energy Trust Fund; just as a portion of our gasoline taxes go into the National Highway Trust Fund. These funds could be distributed to states that elect to implement Feed-in-Tariffs and invest or exceed federal guidelines. (See Chris Neider’s 11/14/12 article Beyond Carbon Policy Coal and the National Feed-in-Tariff at www.smartplanet.com.)
Consciousness. How do we move beyond the individualistic story and just be against anti-environmental actions, we have to move beyond the economic injustice and mass extinction. Most of us participate in both of these stories all the time as the economic decline, resource depletion, climate change, first has structured the very environment we live in and we continue to work in the face of power, and how to make our lives better. The argument doesn’t question endless economic and technological success that will end forever. We are losing the forests, the fish, the bee, we are wiping out whole species. We are losing the richness of community and most of what makes life meaningful. We are now on the brink of losing the biological support systems we need to survive.

A friend, a colleague who loves the earth and has worked ceaselessly on behalf of all life for many years, recently confessed that he is depressed. Many of us share this feeling. Here we are facing the greatest crisis that humans have ever faced because we have modified the life sustaining system of the planet, and people are out of control. The Great Turning is rooted in the Great Unraveling, and how I wish we could give a gift of the earth we grew up in to our children and their children. But we’re not even close— we’re not even asking the right questions. The crisis of the century is that between the years of 1995 and 2020 will be found wanting. No Great Generation here—yes, dedicated, brilliant, knowledgeable, persistent, networking people, and thanks to all—but no great culture.

But we can’t despair. That’s actually what the ‘forces of evil’ want. But we do, occasionally, need help to carry on. I found Joana Macy and Chris Johnstone’s book, ACTIVE HOPE: How to face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy to be a formidable reminder of why we continue our work. However, we can’t take care of ourselves as individuals and communities of intention at the same time.

The premise of the book is that all cultures live in stories. We are the result of stories and actually choose. “When we find a good story and fully give ourselves to it, that story can act through us. I am not only me, but am the result of countless structures and spatial practices built into the environment.” (230) It is this uncertainty that calls our attention, there are just two illuminating points that might give all of us a different sense of grounding in our individual and collective lives. We are all aware of the ‘hyper-individualism’ of industrialized cultures that has caused us to remove ourselves from the larger circle of communities and being. An alternative ecological self is deeper and wider, not just in space and across species, but in time. From this viewpoint, ‘act your age’ takes on a totally different perspective. As we each are a part of a flow of species that started 3.5 billion years ago, we can see how we come from a creative life force, a force that now resides within us. We can join the flow and reconnect, we can acknowledge how deeply we care about the earth and all people. Honoring our pain is affirming as long as we move through the pain spiral in and out of it. To deny grief is paralyzing.

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The gift of uncertainty: Nelson Mandela once said, “It always seems impossible until it is done.” (186) Macy and Johnstone write, “Thank goodness for uncertainty. When we know the future isn’t yet decided, there is room for us to play a role in influencing what happens.” (230) This book tells us that moves us to gather with others and take action again and again, because we never know where the tipping point may be, where an action might begin a shift that moves mountains and cultures. We are losing the forests, the fish, the bee, we are wiping out whole species. We are losing the richness of community and most of what makes life meaningful. We are now on the brink of losing the biological support systems we need to survive.

The Great Turning, points to the new way of living on this earth, our home. Millions of people across the globe are engaged in this creative practice of active hope to stop the destruction, to provide new ideas about how to live meaningfully, and to shift the consciousness of our extraordinary species away from the suicidal path we seem to have chosen into a cosmos of gratitude and wonder. The book ends with a promise that begins “I vow to myself and each of you ...” (230) This book tells us that moves us to gather with others and take action again and again, because we never know where the tipping point may be, where an action might begin a shift that moves mountains and cultures.

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For more news, archives, and upcoming events, visit newyork.ssierrclub.org/niagara/

"Fracking" Continued

Stop the compromised discussion about fracking!!! Your question should be how to provide for the energy needs of this state. How? Create policies that quickly ramp up production of renewable energy. Stop the Feed-In-Tariff; stop direct and indirect support for the fossil fuel and nuclear energy sectors. Governor Cuomo, don’t throw us into the morass of extreme energy and weather events; lead us into a clean, healthy future!