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Opinion

Another Voice / The environment

Another Voice: New York is leading the way on climate change

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By Lynda Schneekloth

In December over 190 nations signed the U.N. Paris Climate Agreement. Imagine. The nations of the Earth came together and agreed that all are threatened by global warming caused mostly by the burning of fossil fuels. Each country made a commitment to set goals and policies, to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to renewable energy.

But how is that going to happen here in the United States, where the federal government seems incapable of action and the fossil fuel corporations have so much power? It is going to happen state by state, and New York is leading the way.

In January, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced the goal of 50 percent renewable energy by 2030, a reduction of 45 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and a rapid program for energy efficiency. At the same time, a coalition, New York Renews, was formed to move on the climate crisis.

NY Renews is made up of environmental organizations, labor, social/economic justice groups, the Working Families Party and other groups that have drafted legislation: the New York State Climate and Community Protection Act. This bill, which has already passed two committees, mandates climate goals, creates a process to ensure that resources are equitably allocated toward vulnerable communities and works to ensure clean energy jobs with binding labor standards. It also requires all state agencies to evaluate their climate and equity impacts.

Another action is the investigation of ExxonMobil by Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman to determine whether the company lied to the public and investors about the risks of climate change. It has been documented that Exxon has known and researched climate change since the 1970s and has used data from various climate models in the design of infrastructure and future planning.

At the same time, Exxon sent millions of dollars to climate denier groups working to manufacture doubt about the reality of global warming to protect its interests. Critics of Schneiderman and the 16 other attorneys general working on this investigation are claiming a violation of the First Amendment, saying the corporation is protected as a "person." While lying is not illegal under U.S. law, fraud is. The First Amendment does not protect fraud, which is lying to or misleading investors to make a profit or influence business decisions.

We stand with the attorney general, the governor, Legislature and NY Renews. New York State is moving on climate justice. We need to raise our voices in support of climate action to protect our families, our livelihoods, future generations and, indeed, life on this planet by mandating the economically and sustainably sound energy transformation to renewables.

Lynda Schneekloth is chairwoman of the Sierra Club's Niagara chapter.

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