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A political tipping point on climate change?

By Bill Carney and Belle Cole

With the presidential election heating up and world leaders converging on Paris for global climate talks, could it be that we're finally reaching the political tipping point necessary to solve the crisis of an overheating planet?

"It's the climate, stupid!" proclaimed an NPR anchor the day after the first Democratic presidential debate, rebooting the famous mantra that guided Bill Clinton's first White House campaign, "It's the economy, stupid." Of course it still is the economy that attracts votes, and all five Democratic candidates made clear that the path to a thriving economy could also lead directly to the restoration of a thriving planet.

What better way to achieve a more equitable and sustainable economy, they asked, than by focusing public incentives and private investments on curbing the looming costs of runaway climate change?

The solutions are already at hand, whether a 100 percent renewable electricity grid, emission-free electrical vehicles, or weather-tight and energy-smart homes and businesses.

Only the political will has been lagging.

Progress in Congress may be harder to discern, but even there some Republicans are finally recognizing the reality of climate change — and the possibility of profit from market-based solutions like putting a price on carbon pollution that reflects its actual cost to society and planet.

Might that old GOP "drill, baby, drill" chant soon morph to "earn, baby, earn" as economic ingenuity trumps the aging oil oligarchy?

Underlying these shifting political and economic tides is a growing sense of moral outrage at the negligence shown and damages done, both to the Earth and humanity, by those responsible for climate change and other environmental assaults.

"Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies," Pope Francis told Congress last month, invoking "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

The pope's encyclical on the environment, timed to sway the United Nations climate summit starting this month in Paris, is fueling a sea-change in attitudes as people of good will around the planet begin to think of the Earth and all people as one — and to call together the collective will to step beyond our bondage to fossil fuels and back from the abyss of irreversible climate change.

California's own climate leadership will be on full display at the UN meeting.

For just one example, we can all take pride in the state's model of carbon pricing, a cap-and-trade program that returns a quarter of the fees imposed on burning carbon to assist our most vulnerable communities with transit, solar, energy-efficient housing and other improvements that benefit those who have done the least to cause climate change but are often the first harmed by its impacts.

It's an approach that mirrors the assistance that industrial powers whose wealth was largely based on burning fossil fuels now need to provide to less developed countries world-wide.

Marin has played its part in leading by example towards a climate-friendly future.

But our actions will bear full fruit only when amplified by action across the nation and around the world. You can find out how to spur that action — and continue building the momentum of this unique moment in our planet's history — at a major forum being convened in San Rafael by Rep. Jared Huffman and over three dozen Marin environmental and social action groups.

"Time to Lead on Climate — CA: US: UN," will take place 7 p.m. Nov. 9 at Dominican University, featuring business, government, grassroots and religious leaders, including California UN climate delegate Ken Alex and a video introduction by 350.org founder Bill McKibben. Find out more at leadonclimate.org. *Bill Carney is president of Sustainable San Rafael and Belle Cole is the leader of Marin Organizing for Action, the two groups organizing the Nov. 9 forum.*

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