

The Register-Guard

Opinion

Guest Viewpoint

Let's give the gift every grad needs: a livable planet

By Mary DeMocker

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Beloved graduates marched to “Pomp and Circumstance” in their shining gowns. I took pictures and wept. Valedictorians reminisced. Graduates performed poignant poems, songs, dances. Administrators shared inside jokes and thanked parents for support. Guest speakers offered soaring advice on seizing the future.

No one mentioned the elephant in the auditorium.

Here's the speech that was missing, the speech my generation needs to hear, given by graduates to those who loved and supported them every step of the way:

“Dear parents, grandparents, and every adult who cares about us:

“First, we love you. We thank you. You rose early, made PBJs and walked us to school. You read stories. You helped us with math. You brought juice and cheered as we jogged around the track to raise money for PE. You tried to keep us safe when we needed to spread our wings. You taught us not to bully. When heartbreaks, science reports or recitals reduced us to tears, you brought tissues and told us you believed in us — over and over — until we believed in ourselves.

“We love you, so we tried our best. We studied hard and cleaned up our messes. We sat on window sills in overcrowded classes. We slogged through more testing in a year than you faced in four. We spoke out, got involved and pushed through resistance. Because you taught us to.

“Now, we're poised to take the world by storm. But there's a problem: The world is taking us by storm. Climate chaos will soon dominate our lives. And unless your generation changes the

direction things are headed, our planet will overbake by midcentury, when we're the age you are now. That's our reality.

"We're not supposed to mention this when we're offered decades-old graduation advice to 'spread your wings and fly.' But we paid attention in science class. We know tomorrow's world will incinerate our wings.

"It doesn't have to go that way. Those climate doctors who diagnosed the planet's fever also offered a prescription: Bring the atmosphere's carbon count down to a sustainable 350 parts per million. How? Cut emissions 6 percent yearly. Sequester carbon in the soil. Reforest madly, everywhere. Now.

"You've tried to help by shrinking our family carbon footprint, but that will never be enough. We need to cut industry's footprint. That means we must stop new dirty energy projects and force the U.S. government to lead global recovery programs and emissions reductions. Everyone's waiting for the world's carbon hog to kick off the diet.

"We don't blame you for problems you inherited. We don't question your love. But when you wave us off with a rueful 'Good luck with our mess,' we're stunned, because you've never abandoned us before, and if you truly understood our situation, you wouldn't now. So we'll spell it out:

"We don't have decades. We have a year, two years, maybe four. Each year we don't reduce emissions by 6 percent, the percentage required rises — next year to 8 percent, the following to 10 percent. At six years, cuts required reach an impossible 15 to 20 percent. But on a global level, 6 percent is doable. Scientists emphasize we must begin now, because this opportunity won't last.

"This is where you come in. We're kids. We've arrived at this terrifying chapter in humanity on your watch. Only you can make the sweeping changes needed fast enough. You hold the power. We need you to wield it.

"You thought your work as a parent was mostly done, but you need to start anti-bullying campaigns again, this time on the global playground. Here's how: Stop dirty energy kingpins who profit from the wreckage of our future. Deny Ambre Energy's permit to build a coal export terminal along the Columbia River. Block the new pipeline between Klamath Falls and Coos Bay. Force policymakers — you elected them — to divest from dirty energy, and invest in sustainability. Implement a carbon fee with 100 percent of the funds going to the public. Support Eugene's Climate Recovery Ordinance.

"Yes, these require political action. Not your comfort zone — but what democracy demands. What our future requires.

"If you're overwhelmed, if you falter, we'll recycle those beautiful words you offered when we considered quitting: You can do it. You're good, capable and courageous. We'll bring juice and

cookies. We'll hold your hand and work beside you. We'll bring tissue when you grieve what's been lost.

“You've gathered to bask in our accomplishments. We look forward to celebrating yours.

“With our gratitude and our bottomless love,

“The Class of 2014.”

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