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Dalai Lama brings message of hope and inspiration to Oregon

BY KAREN JEFFERY

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Saturday May 11 was the first day of a four-day event in and around Portland, with a stop in Eugene for a public talk on “Universal Responsibility and the Inner Environment: the Nature of the Mind.” Booths representing Oregon non-profits or selling food, music, and Tibetan cultural items surrounded the inner stadium. Music and dance, from colorful Tibetan cultural dancers to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, filled in before and after events.

Our own Senator Jeff Merkley opened the day’s events, welcomed the Dalai Lama back to Portland after twelve years, then introduced the panelists: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, John Kitzhaber (Oregon Governor), Dr. David Suzuki (scientist, author, DS Foundation), Andrea Durbin (Executive Director, Environmental Council), and moderator David Miller (host of Think Out Loud on PBS). He reminded us of the huge challenge we face to reverse current climate trends and save our environment. “With emissions hitting 400 parts per million this week, the time to step up to our stewardship of planet earth is now.”

Governor Kitzhaber began by reminding the 11,000 filling the coliseum that through personal advocacy, Oregon led the nation with its beach bill, bottle bill, and renewable energy bills.

The Dalai Lama opened with stories from his childhood in Tibet, when they drank crystal clear water from streams. He called on all global leaders to come together to begin to take care of our home, because although he escaped Tibet in 1959 (and went on to thrive elsewhere), there is no escape from planet earth. It is our only home, and we must care for all of our children and

generations to follow by developing new ways of thinking and acting...honoring impermanence and acting non-dually.

David Suzuki created even more urgency, saying we have passed too many tipping points and “we must act now. Humans are dependent on nature, on our earth, and we have created perils for all species by ignoring that dependency. Bringing our own behavior back into balance is critical. In 1900 there were only one and a half billion people on earth. We were rural, farmers, dependent on nature. We understood the importance of our environment. Now we’re over seven billion, mostly city-dwellers –whose highest priority is economics, not soil/water. Many people and corporations don’t understand what farmers knew then, but we fail to understand at our peril.”

“Climate change is our number one issue,” said Andrea. “Future generations will ask what we did, why we didn’t act. We are the experiments, exposed daily to ever-increasing toxicity of air, water, food, buildings...it is immoral and wrong.” She continued, “Our US system is broken; regulation has totally failed to protect us. With over 87,000 chemicals in use, only 200 are tested. Since states must act to begin some national action, I urge you to call your legislators...then hold them accountable.”

Kitzhaber questioned our working models. “Consumption as an economic model is unsustainable and unworkable. We measure the wrong things – GNP measures only economic points, when we need the economy to work within the limits of nature and our environment.”

Rethinking paradigms is essential. Health, education, regulation — all our systems need to be included. He was encouraging. “With increased understanding and activism, we will find solutions.”

The Dalai Lama picked up on measurements of how well we’re doing, which are clearly out of whack when we’re ruining our planet, creating crises, increasing poverty. People are part of nature. Corporations are not. And money isn’t everything. “Freedom is important, creativity demands freedom, but free to ruin the world? More concern for others would provide the balance needed, the ability to see beyond the GNP. Consumption and greed, regardless of the consequences, must be changed through teaching ecology, oneness, kindness.”

For the Governor, the rate of consumption is key. In our pursuit of happiness, we waste so many resources, including human lives. We lose family time, time for contemplation and creativity.

Suzuki reminded the audience that 70% of our economy runs on consumption, not focusing on what makes us truly happy. We fail to see the bigger picture – when 1000 workers perish in a Bangladesh factory, for our cheap shirts. The air, water, soil, human interconnectedness – these provide our riches. But our news is segmented, failing to show the interconnectedness of our consumption and greed, the waste despoiling our planet. It’s just a factory crumbling here, a loss of jobs there, ill health from toxins – without understanding and providing context.

“We need to examine our own lifestyle, to think globally and act locally in making better choices each day,” shared Andrea. “There are better riches: human affection, friendship, joy, peace,

knowledge. Instead, our entire precious human life is facing enormous difficulty. Still people will say ‘I support the environment, but I’m not an environmentalist.’ Yes, the bottle bill was landmark, but that was decades ago! Where are our laws now to change what we measure (to include natural wealth, the cost of pollution), to protect life on this planet, to put people and communities back in the economic/environmental equation?”

Kitzhaber asked how we get to putting a price on carbon. “We all know we need to get there. Why not sooner than later?” He is encouraged by what California is doing, with Washington and Oregon close behind. If the West Coast goes there, we can lead the nation with “trickle up leadership.” “We’re doing it with healthcare, why not the environment?”

A number of questions followed from the audience locally and globally – from Twitter, Facebook, and other Internet locations, where the entire week’s events were live-streamed.

?: What is the Buddhist understanding of environment?

HHDL: The Buddhist way includes respect for all life, nature. Buddha got enlightened under a tree. Monastic precepts are all about caring for (people, plants, animals...) Monks in Thailand, India, and many other countries are very active working for protection of the environment. It’s based on the concept of interdependence and that all sentient beings matter, are to be held dear. Old concepts like we/they ignore our interrelatedness. We are 7 billion...together.

DS: Each stakeholder fighting for their position doesn’t work. We need to leave our vested interests and begin with what we agree on, building from that platform. We all breathe, so clean air should be our clearest priority. Then water and its cyclic existence, soil from which to feed the world.

HHDL: We meet with scientists and need to embrace the new. Challenge is how to get people to let go of old ideas for new ones...to be realistic. Old concepts were good...then, but we have to change. It’s quite simple really. Our world is round, not flat.

?: How can we turn anxiety over the environment into action?

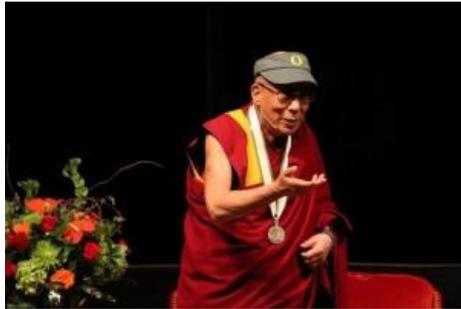
AD: Education is important, but it doesn’t compel change. We need some sort of economic self-interest, societal norm. We need motivators to change social norms, moving from the individual level to governmental. We used to have bi-partisanship; cooperation is lacking today, and it’s what is needed to get things done.

JK: We need to ask the right questions. We already have a carbon tax – it’s in high hospital costs, human misery, the military, joblessness, insecurity, pollution. We need to measure differently, show the REAL costs of carbon, use full cost accounting.

DS: Yes, we need a paradigm shift. We have urgent catastrophes now. We need to depoliticize the environment. We shouldn’t need a ‘green party’. We ALL need to act as a single species...as if we’re being attacked from outer space...and take action. It’s un-American not to meet this

challenge. We need global housekeeping (ask any woman); we need personal and political action...now.

JK: I have two wardrobes – this (points to slacks, sports coat) and jeans and boots. We all need to pare down. And we need an inspired goal, like the moon launch.



HHDL: Education is not just knowing information. Its purpose is to develop conviction based on reality. It's about listening and critical thinking (which needs facts) and experience. Then understanding comes. That knowledge can change our way of life.

At 1:30, following the noon break, Earl Blumenauer (US Representative, 3rd District) opened the afternoon session with remarks introducing the Dalai Lama: "He's a man of faith AND science", a Nobel Prize winner and recipient of the US Congressional Medal of Honor...and now a Portland Trailblazer (number 14 jersey), with a U of O visor, and now a Portland Bike pin. (Pins him...laughter)

HHDL began, "so happy to be back in Portland. Portland has a special relationship with the environment, and we can all learn from this city and from Oregon." His afternoon talk was about compassion, the wish for others to be happy, the importance of nurturing love, tolerance, forgiveness, and fundamental values through practice. It is the basis of love between persons, harmony between religions, a source of joy. Humans need maximum affection when young. It's a key factor in well-being and motivation for kindness and friendship towards others. "Warm heartedness is the key to a happy life," he said.

"Make conservation a habit. share the importance of ecology. Educate others to reduce, recycle, and reuse. We must take the initiative. It's the compassionate way. Simplicity is extremely important for happiness. Having few desires, feeling satisfied with what you have, is very vital."

The Dalai Lama concluded and dedicated the day with katas and kata blessings to all 11,000 present, reminding us to use our potential.

"In addition to nonviolence in our relations with each other, we also need to employ a much greater sense of nonviolence in relation to the environment, because a healthy natural environment is essential to the survival of life on our planet."

You can view the week's events here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6hNwoE7wSM&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

Karen Jeffery is a columnist, freelance writer, editor, photographer, publicist, activist, and Resource Unlimited. Reach her via mauitutu@gmail.com

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