RETHINKING OUR MISSION

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At our meeting on March 2 I suggested that it might be time to integrate our concerns about nuclear power with other emerging energy issues. I was encouraged in this by the fact that one of the very early critics of nuclear energy, Arjun Makhijani, recognized, in his book of 2007, *Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free*, that climate change is now the major threat we face.

As the issue of climate change is recognized as the major global threat, some otherwise thoughtful people proposed more nuclear plants as an energy source that does not emit carbon dioxide. Those of us who are aware of the dangers of nuclear energy know that we must urge that both nuclear energy and fossil fuels be phased out as soon as possible.

The threat of fracking is also generating more concern in Michigan. We should oppose it because it wrecks the land and wastes our precious water. But above all, we should oppose it because its purpose is to extract more natural gas at a time when all burning of fossil fuels must end.

There are alternatives to nuclear power and fossil fuels, and they are already being developed. First, energy conservation and more efficient energy use could cut our “need” for energy in half. Second, renewable sources of energy from wind and sun are coming on line, even without much support from a government that seems to be controlled by huge fossil fuel corporations. We must urge our government to assert its independence and take steps to slow global warming and climate change.

The need for a shift in energy sources is urgent. The burning of fossil fuels which emit carbon dioxide has already raised the temperature of the earth by .8 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. The parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is now over 392, up from about 280 ppm before fossil fuels were burned. The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is going up at the rate of 3% per year. In about 15 years this could raise global temperature to 2 degrees Celsius. Scientists warn that this should be the absolute limit, and even this could thaw the tundra and release methane which is at least 20 times more powerful than carbon dioxide to warm the atmosphere.

We face great dangers, so I like the proposal of “Safe Energy Future” as the name of our group.

The threat of energy related issues is global. But if we want to include fracking as a major concern we may want a name like “Safe Energy Future in Michigan”

The main thing is not to let local environmental concerns distract us, or the public, from the major problem of climate change. As the earth heats up our lives will be much more difficult.