



Get On The Bus By Janet McDonnell

One thing's for sure, I'm not as young as I used to be. The last time I took two back-to-back overnight trips, I was traveling through Italy on a Eurail pass, I was in my twenties, and I didn't miss a beat. This time, after taking an overnight bus to Washington DC to join in the Forward on Climate rally, and then taking another overnight bus home, the bags under my eyes reached to my chin. But I'm glad I went.



2012 was a rough year. The dire impacts of climate change were undeniable as we suffered through rampant wildfires, a record draught, and hurricane Sandy. As 2013 began, I resolved to do more to join the call for action, not just from behind my keyboard, but also in person. Some of the seeds of that resolve were planted last November when I went to see Bill McKibbin, founder of 350.org, on his "Do the Math" tour. Being a right brain kind of gal, math has never been my favorite subject, but Bill gave us just three numbers to remember: We can burn less than 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide and stay below 2°C of warming – anything more risks catastrophe for life on earth. And fossil fuel companies now have 2,795 gigatons in their reserves.

It's clear that we have to draw a line, and the Keystone XL pipeline seems like a good place to start. The proposed pipeline would carry crude oil from Canada to refineries in Texas. There are an estimated 240 gigatons of carbon stored in the Alberta tar sands, and it is the dirtiest form of fuel on the planet, producing between 3 and 5 times the greenhouse gas pollution of conventional oil production.



When I heard that the Sierra Club was organizing two buses from Chicago to DC, I bought a ticket and hopped on board. Those buses joined 130 others from 28 states, helping to bring over 40,000 people to participate in the rally. The weather was cold (19° with wind chill!) but the energy was high. There were people of all ages, from families with young children to senior citizens, and it was a happy, friendly crowd, with lots of passion and creativity on display, including a giant Statue of Liberty puppet and people in polar bear costumes.

The rally featured a number of speakers, but I was most inspired by the final one, Michael Brune, who said that despite the dire events of last year, he is optimistic, because he has seen how people coming together can effect change. As an example he talked about the 2 dirty coal plants that were forced to shut down on Chicago's south side. He believes the movement for clean energy is strong and growing. "We are on the right side of history," he said, and the huge crowd roared in agreement. With that, we set off to march to the White House. Along the way I met people from Milwaukee, Nebraska, Minnesota, and as far away as Oregon, all joining in the chanting, singing, and drumming.

When I finally returned home and recovered a bit with a nap and a shower, I flipped on the news to see if there was any coverage of the rally. There was Judy Woodruff, talking with Bob Deans from the Natural Resources Defense Council and Scott Segal, a pro-Keystone lobbyist. Segal referred to the protesters as "elites," and said it was "unrealistic" to believe that the oil would not be extracted one way or another. But the truth is climate change is hardest on the poor and most vulnerable in our societies. One marcher I saw carried a sign that said, "I am a Climate Refugee." Perhaps he was one of the many who lost everything in Hurricane Sandy. And as for being "unrealistic," it is truly delusional to believe we can continue at the rate we're going and think that there won't be drastic consequences.

I don't know if Obama will do the right thing and reject the Keystone XL pipeline, but I do know that either way, those of us who are concerned about climate change and our children's future cannot be silent. We have to come together and continue to make noise, wherever and whenever we can, to push our leaders to move faster towards a clean energy future.

– Photos Reuters/Joshua Roberts, Photograph: Nati Harnik/AP, Pipeline/HANDOUT_Reuters