

Round Table On Climate Change Held In Glastonbury

By STEVE SMITH |

HARTFORD COURANT

The Glastonbury Martin Luther King Community Initiative held a community conversation on climate change and how it relates to both social justice and employment.

Robin Guimont, one of the group's co-presidents, said that while Martin Luther King may not first and foremost invoke thoughts on climate change, he did address the issues of environmental impacts on our lives.

Providing much food for thought, rather than lectures, the speakers mostly focused on social justice and how it relates to environmental factors.

Keynote speaker and moderator John Humphries, the executive director of the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, said that King's thoughts on climate were expressed in a speech about Vietnam, in which he said that "tomorrow is today," and that "procrastination is a thief of time."

"He was assassinated one year to the day after this speech," Humphries said, adding that King had begun shifting toward unifying people across movements and helped lead to his assassination.

The Green New Deal ties into King's teaching, because it includes climate action, job creation, and working to reverse historical racial and economic inequities.

"The work is not new," Humphries said. "It's very helpful to have this packaging to bring it all together."

Larry Williams, Jr. is the labor coordinator for Sierra Club's Labor and Economic Justice program and the president emeritus and founder of Progressive Workers Union.

Orlando Velazco, the director of the Office of Health Equity (OHE) at the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), said that health equity, or rather inequity, becomes apparent when looking at data, and showed the relationship in Connecticut between ethnicity and cases of lead poisoning.

Children under the age of six who were tested for lead poisoning showed a disparity between black, Hispanic, and white children - with the latter being the lowest rate of incidents, and the other two notably higher.

"You can see that strides have been made between 2012 and 2017. All of these lines have gone down, but this disparity still exists, and it persists," Velazco said. "There are actually two disparities shown here. Where do all of these people live?"

Factors that cause conditions, including lead poisoning and asthma, can be mitigated by better environmental policy for everyone.

"We all know that climate change increases the ground level of ozone. The ground level of ozone makes temperatures rise. That temperature rise leads to increases in asthma attacks and then we have to look at who the people are who are most affected by them," Velazco said. "It obviously affects the sick, the

children, and the senior population. We don't want to see our temperatures rise, because we can see all the things that happen."

Shubhada Kambli, the sustainability coordinator for the City of Hartford, said that our treatment of nature reflects our treatment of ourselves and of each other. Seeing people around the country work together, she said, is great, but we need more people to fight climate change and environmental injustices. There are efforts that have been underway in Hartford, including a conference on sustainability with people from across the country.

"[In Hartford], we have a fuel cell micro-grid, that on a daily basis, powers a school, a library, a senior center, and a community health center," she said. "During power outages, it's able to power up a gas station and a grocery store. This is, in a sense, an insurance policy against severe weather."

The city is also in the initial phases of green infrastructure, Kambli said, including a residential rain barrel program that will be implemented this summer. Kambli said that mitigating gas emissions and improving air quality in residential homes is another priority in Hartford.

The audience was asked to break into pairs, and then the pairs were asked to combine into groups of four or six, to reflect on the questions and thoughts presented by the speakers.

One group reported that the levels of lead were what grabbed their attention the most. They said they'd like to see policies that include incentives for communities that are marginalized by climate change. Another asked about educational programs, to get young people involved in environmental programs.

"It takes a village," Kambli said. "We're working with so many different stakeholders - multiple different grassroots community organizations to get these things to happen. Groups are very critical to get the word out to the community."

For more information, visit www.glastonburymkci.org.



John Humphries moderated the event, and also led the audience in a sing-along.



Orlando Velazco, the Director of the Office of Health Equity, in the Connecticut Department of Public Health, spoke about the relationships between ethnicity and exposure to health risks, such as lead.



Audience members formed mini-round-tables and shared their thoughts about how the environment is related to both jobs and social justice.



Members of the TALK (Truth in Action with Love & Kindness) show their new shopping bags, made from recycled t-shirts, which are available via skiptheplasticglastonbury.org.