

Climate change is the subject of Nobel Peace Prizes, local and state legislation, international treaties, scientific consensus, and a misinformed or simply malicious opposition. What's missing from this list? On August 16, Al Gore was quoted in Nicholas Kristof's New York Times column as saying - "I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers ... and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants." He was right in asking, "where are the young people?" but missed the mark in defining our role in bringing about climate justice.

As an advocate for climate justice, I've heard mutterings over the past year of a brewing movement among the youth. Last weekend, thirty-eight UM students traveled to Washington DC for Power Shift 2007, the first ever conference on climate change organized for youth by youth. We participated in the emergence of a coordinated movement for climate justice taking its first steps to transform our nation. Six thousand students converged on the nation's capitol for Power Shift 2007, not to chain ourselves to trees or blockade dirty coal-fired power plants, but to lobby every member of Congress for 80% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the creation of 5 million new green-collar jobs, and for a moratorium on all new coal plants. The youth movement demands systemic change.

The youth are uniquely situated to create this change. The affects of climate change are already upon us – unprecedented wild fires, droughts, and stronger hurricanes – and will only intensify as our generation ages and brings our own children into the world. When the thirty-eight UM students joined 127 students from the state to lobby Congressman John Dingell for climate justice, we lobbied for a secure future that every member of our generation will share.

Building a sustainable and just future for ourselves and our children requires students to transcend traditional modes of activism. Last year, activists demanded that UM purchase 100% of its energy from clean renewable sources, such as wind and solar, by 2015. For this demand to be fulfilled, however, there must be sufficient sources of clean renewable energy available for purchase from the state grid. Recognizing the current lack of supply, the climate justice movement at UM united the 14 campuses of the Michigan Student Sustainability Coalition to leverage our collective power at the state-wide level.

On the weekend of September 28-30, 140 students from thirteen campuses met in East Lansing to explore issues of environmental justice and to acquire the skills to create change in their communities. Over that weekend, our coalition bonded as a community in action. In the month leading up to Power Shift, students from each campus worked closely with one another to bring 250 Michigan students to Washington DC. As a result of our united planning, Michigan brought more students to the capitol than any state other than Maryland and Virginia.

On Saturday November 3, the first full day of Power Shift 2007, as Spartans and Wolverines clashed on the football field, thirty-eight Wolverines, sixty Spartans, and 150 more Michiganders sat down together to outline the steps for creating a power shift in Michigan. On March 19, we will bring our vision of an ecologically sound, socially just, and economically secure Michigan to the halls of the state congress. In conjunction with the grass roots

organizing we do in our home communities, this will catalyze the Michigan's overdue transition to sustainability.

There is a bronze plaque dedicating a maple tree planted in 1989 outside the School of Natural Resources and Environment on the Diag. The plaque reads "In the future may we not have to be concerned over global warming. May efforts to reforest, recycle, and conserve energy eliminate this escalating crisis. This maple was planted on the eve of Earth Day 1989, to symbolize our hope." Most of the class of 2011 was born in 1989. The time for business as usual solutions has passed. Youth across Michigan and the nation have awakened to the challenge and are asserting their natural leadership in creating a sustainable and just future for all.