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Balancing Concerns is Hard

As this is being written our Kentucky General Assembly leaders are negotiating an agreement with a very large energy company about building plants in Kentucky that will liquefy and gasify coal.

An August 8, 2007 letter from Senator McConnell notes that Kentucky is one of the top three coal producers in the US in the past half century. The coal industry has resulted in 60,000 jobs as well as enabling our relatively low electricity rates that are attractive to new industries and the jobs they bring.

However, I continue to struggle with some previous questions to this newest move regarding new coal use in Kentucky.

First, the two plants will generate a lot of global warming gas. The going response to that: the gas will be captured and buried in a process called sequestration.

Now this sequestration process is already in use—carbon dioxide is forced into the ground to push out more oil. This process entails movement, and so my haunting question: how can we guarantee that the CO₂ we bury will stay put where buried? Won't it be a catastrophe of major proportions if there is a big leak of this buried CO₂? How long will it have to be buried? Can we guarantee that? What is our responsibility to future generations - including a high number of them?

For some key information, Sister Joetta Venneman has pointed to the Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org/global_warming/solutions), one of our really mainline environment organizations. They produced a fact sheet in February 2007 that noted some really important concerns regarding coal liquification: Liquid coal could

- “nearly double global warming pollution per gallon of transportation fuels,
- “increase the devastating effects of coal mining felt by communities and ecosystems.”

My second big previous-question concern: Some of the best scientific wisdom on the planet says our global community needs to REDUCE global warming emissions by 60-80% by 2030 or 2050. It is not going to help if Kentucky keeps adding to these emissions in efforts to use one of our key natural resources and to preserve current jobs. Sooner or later, what is bad for our planetary community is bad for Kentucky and for the United States.

Thus a need quite previous to this coal industry deliberation: we need to REDUCE our demands on natural resources and exploitation of them. We just can't find other ways to keep on living and using resources the way we are doing currently. Any technological fixes are like just using a new filter on cigarettes to address the health care problems smoking induces (this wisdom point from *America* magazine's editor July 16, 2007).

Our auto industry increasing the miles/gallon on cars would do a tremendous lot to address our need for less energy and more energy independence. Why don't we work harder to get this much better fuel efficiency?

Jeremy Grant, writing in *The Financial Times* August 14, 2007 believes our beloved country is repeating far too many mistakes of the Roman empire—chief among them: steadfastly staying on an *unsustainable* path. How can Earth possibly sustain our current onslaught?

Wouldn't we be much wiser to “think outside the box” regarding education of all Kentucky residents and the types of new work needed to live more sustainably?

As Gordon Heritage and Justine Dennis in Culvertown have noted, their guideline amid all these choices, “What would grandma do? WWGD” Given all the pieces in our difficult deliberations now, indeed, how would our ancestors come down on these choices?

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.