QEW Participates in Revisions to FCNL Policy Statement

by John Payton

About every 10 years, Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) revises its full Policy Statement. This is the document that “forms the foundation and vision for all of our work,” according to the instructions FCNL gave to Quaker churches, meetings, and organizations participating in revising the 2003 Statement. The revised statement will guide FCNL staff on the positions they take on legislation on our behalf until the next revision.

As a member organization of FCNL, about a dozen QEW Steering Committee members and staff participated recently in a conference call discussion to generate suggestions for revisions to the Policy Statement. Our discussion focused mainly on public policy issues related to the economy and environment. Based on this discussion, a document of suggested revisions to the Policy Statement was drafted and approved for submission to FCNL.

This document, which is cited below, includes:

- a suggestion that FCNL consider adding a fifth "we seek" on a global economy in right relationship with Earth to its vision statement
- a statement on how our growth economy is inconsistent with Quaker testimonies
- a statement on the urgency of addressing global climate change
- specific policy suggestions of interest to QEW

In addition the QEW submission included some suggestions for wording changes in the revised Policy Statement, which are not included here.

Here is the statement of QEW suggestions submitted to FCNL:

Because the way our economy functions is an integral part of concerns that cut across the other four "we seek's" of the FCNL Vision Statement, Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) suggests that FCNL
consider adding a fifth "we seek" to this statement, one that focuses specifically on the economy: i.e., "we seek a global economy in right relationship with the whole commonwealth of Earth." Adding such a goal to our vision statement would give greater visibility to economic issues in policies that FCNL does or does not support and would provide FCNL with opportunities to highlight how our economy functions in ways that are in conflict with the historic Quaker Testimonies of equality, integrity, simplicity, community, and peace.

In maximizing growth and wealth accumulation, our current economy magnifies social and economic inequalities by concentrating wealth; uses false measures of prosperity (i.e., gross domestic product, which includes expenditures on waste, war, and destruction and excludes non-paid work); requires us to increase spending and consumer debt to keep the economy from collapsing; and promotes profits at the expense of secure employment that pays a living wage and provides health care and retirement benefits.

Our growth economy also places future generations at risk by undermining the ecological integrity of Earth; fails to protect vulnerable and vital ecosystems; and contributes to worldwide violence and weather-related dislocations of human populations due to global climate change caused by our dependence on fossil fuels.

Since the last revision of the FCNL Policy Statement in 2003, our scientific knowledge of climate change has increased markedly. We know that the planet is warming at a faster pace than we previously thought and is impacting our environment more severely than previously anticipated, as indicated by the increasing frequency of extreme weather events across the globe (e.g., droughts, floods, heat waves), and accelerated loss of topsoil and fresh water, resulting in widespread crop failure and food insecurity and species extinction.

Scientific consensus now indicates that in order to prevent climate catastrophe we must keep the increase in average global temperature to no more than 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. This translates into emitting no more than 5.65 gigatons of CO2 into the atmosphere by midcentury. Since known fossil fuel reserves are 5 times the amount that scientists tell us is safe to burn, we have a compelling reason to leave most of these resources underground.

Our growth economy is in wrong relationship with the commonwealth of Earth. It is based on the assumption that the Earth belongs to humans to use as they see fit and that the natural world is a subset of the economy (See Romans 10:26 and It's the Economy, Friends, Quaker Institute for the Future, pamphlet #5). We urgently need to address this moral crisis through implementing economic policies to conserve energy, use it more efficiently, and develop renewables. We need an economy in right relationship with Earth that recognizes its purpose should be to provide equitable access to the means of life for all people and other living things and to preserve and enhance these resources for future generations. Such an economy recognizes that it is a subset of the natural world, not the reverse.

The dilemma we face is that we must reduce our levels of consumption in order to address the present ecological crisis, but such reduction would threaten our economy with collapse. In the face of this dilemma, "we urge the federal government to develop economic policies which will sustain general prosperity without high levels of consumption and the associated exploitation and pollution of the environment."(FCNL Policy Statement, Part IV, Section 2, 2003). These might include the following (the Policy Statement revision topic for each of the following suggestions is indicated in parentheses after each suggestion):

- making a job that pays a living wage available to every one who wants one, focusing especially on upgrading our infrastructure and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (employment)
- assuring that the full economic, environmental and social cost of energy is reflected in its price, while returning "dividends" from resulting increased fuel prices to those most in need and implementing production tax credits to developers of renewable energy (environment and the economy)
- prohibiting corporate political campaign contributions (electoral processes)
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Published on Quaker Earthcare Witness (https://www.quakerearthcare.org)

- changing corporate charters so that they require social and environmental goals, not just making profits (environment and the economy)
- assuring that international trade agreements incorporate fair labor practices and environmental safeguards and minimize the use of fossil fuels (environment and the economy)
- through regulation and subsidies phase out industrial farming methods, which threaten the environment and raise animals under deplorable, inhumane conditions, and promote the development of a local, sustainable, and organic food system (government support of agriculture)
- prohibiting the use of invasive methods to extract fossil fuels (e.g., hydraulic fracturing, off-shore drilling, mountain-top removal, and tar sands refining) (environment and the economy)
- ratifying and implementing international treaties and collaborating with international bodies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (environment and the economy)
- anticipating and providing relief to address the needs of those displaced by extreme weather events (economic transitions)
- protecting ecosystems and biological diversity from the effects of climate change (environment and the economy)
- as a developed country, making a "compassionate retreat" from a growth economy to a steady-state economy in order to make room for economic growth in developing countries as a way to lift them out of poverty without exacerbating ecological overshoot (environment and the economy)
- through regulation, taxes, and subsidies doing everything possible to keep at least 80% of known fossil fuel reserves in the ground (environment and the economy)

Thank you for inviting us to contribute to the process of developing a revised FCNL policy statement.

Shelley Tanenbaum
Clerk, QEW Steering Committee
March 2013

A note from John Payton, clerk of the QEW FCNL Support Working Group, about the process the group followed in drafting and submitting their suggested revisions:

We participated in this because FCNL invited all Quaker churches, meetings, and FCNL-member organizations to send suggestions for revising their policy statement, which is done about every 10 years. Ideally members of the QEW FCNL Support Working Group would have met in person to worship share suggested revisions. We would then have drafted a document based on our process. Next we might have broadened our process to include any interested steering committee members who wanted to react to our document of suggestions. Then the document would have been revised before sending to FCNL.

However, because FCNL's deadline of April 1 was before our spring-summer steering committee meeting, we could not hold these face-to-face meetings. So we conducted the two-part process (Working Group and steering committee members) via phone conference call.

As with other participants in this process, we hope some of our policy concerns that are either not addressed in the current policy statement or not sufficiently addressed will be so in the revised document.

We need an economy in right relationship with Earth that recognizes its purpose should be to provide equitable access to the means of life for all people and other living things and to preserve and enhance these resources for future generations.

From QEW's proposed revision document for FCNL's policy statement