First, thank you for this moving recognition. None of us are self-made; I’ve been shaped considerably by the remarkable ones who populate this movement. Including by you, the volunteers of America, who volunteer the time, passion and articulations of these days for the sanity of it.

I’m asking that when you return to the real world places you inhabit, that you will please remain open to the growing phenomenon of local democracy. I’m referring to the inherent power we possess collectively to say “no,” there will not be “consenting” communities; the inherent power we have to repudiate corporations that claim rights superior to human beings; the collective say we have to defy deadly transports of radwaste through our towns. More than ever we are the authors of our fates, whether we act, or not.

Abolitionist champion William Lloyd Garrison frustratedly said, years before the Civil War that we’re still fighting today that “The apathy of the people is enough to make statues leap from their pedestals and hasten the resurrection of the dead.” Perhaps Lloyd was an optimist.

Grassroots democracy has only vestigially existed at different times in American history, and never universally permeated our society. Our economic system rests on the myth that capitalist success is self-made. Local democracy is deemed the province of detractors, losers and obstructionists. We live in times of commodified apathy, where materialistic success substitutes for passion about of whether we “care” about our world, even as it divides and immobilize us from acting on our collective behalves. This dead zone in our social discourse has been profitably exploited by corporations to induce governmental misdirection, perfecting creation of the corporate state. And government has responded: with ubiquitous illegal surveillance; a
regulatory scarecrow gutted of protective capacity; criminalized free speech; the eco-terrorism label for those seeking preservation of the commons and for the public to participate in the decisions affecting us all.

Our Tweeter-Mobster-in-Chief didn’t come as the result of one election. He’s the consummation of commodified apathy.

I’m a field lawyer for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund. CELDF has revived an old idea. CELDF organizes people abused by energy and environmental travesties by helping prepare and circulate initiative petitions for public votes, against fracking, disposal of its wastes, and gas megapipelines in Ohio. These campaigns always run afoul of the Chamber of Commerce and the American Legislative Exchange Council - ALEC. Corporations want to keep decision making at the levels of government they’ve carefully bought.

Rediscovering and using these forgotten tools makes voting on issues a form of civil disobedience. How about a local ban on hauling spent fuel through your town? Give your town the gift of criminal punishments for transports of weapons or waste through it. Legislate your county’s denial of consent to a radwaste dump. Legislate nature’s right to exist; prohibit air, soil and water from exposure to nuclear perils and make citizens the legal guardians with the power to sue on behalf of nature. These changes are utterly necessary for the survival of the planet.

Maybe here in DC you find yourself imploring a member of Congress or staff person who is pointedly uninterested in what you have to say. To hell with Congress, go home and empower people to take back control. Even if you don’t have the time to lead a local democracy effort, embrace it as an ally. Because in the end, all we have is our noise, to defeat the forces of commodified apathy. Call it the resurrection of the dead.