



Federal policies for an ambitious and equitable response to climate change

August 2019

Ten years ago, Congress lacked the vision for real action on climate change. Policymakers focused on market-based policies like cap and trade and carbon taxes as silver bullets, mistakenly believing that the rational reaction of markets to a carbon price would reshape an economy dependent to fossil fuels. But around the world, these policies have failed to drive the changes needed to avert climate chaos, and in many cases, perpetuated pollution in low-income communities of color.

Today we realize that climate policy must combine environmental stewardship with economic, social and racial justice. In addition, **federal climate policy will require not only aggressive mandates but massive public investment** — a missing piece from previous climate proposals steeped in market fundamentalism. The next president of the United States should support ambitious and equitable federal climate policies, including efforts to:

- Establish mandates to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 62 percent by 2030
- Make a rapid and just transition to 100 percent renewable, resilient and just energy and food systems
- Ensure a Just Transition advances social, racial and economic justice
- Make massive public investments and realign federal programs, financing and incentives to support these transitions
- Uphold the U.S.' international climate obligations

1. Establish mandates to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 62 percent by 2030

Like all other nations, the U.S. must do its fair share to equitably address the global crisis of climate change, taking into account its responsibility for causing climate change and its capacity to act. In order to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels with a low chance of overshoot, the United States' fair share of the total global mitigation effort is — at a minimum — 28 percent, equivalent to a national greenhouse gas reduction target of about 62 percent by 2030.¹ The EPA must maintain its authority to regulate greenhouse gas, or GHG, and federal mandates and public investment programs need to be instituted to meet this target and drive GHG reductions across the economy. In particular, Friends of the Earth Action believes:

- Federal GHG reduction mandates must refer to absolute reductions. "Net" emissions reductions are not good enough. For example, regenerative agricultural practices can sequester carbon, but they should be done *in addition to, and not instead of*, carbon reductions in the energy sector.
- Reduction strategies must eschew false solutions such as carbon trading and carbon offsets, which have been proven to exacerbate pollution hotspots.

¹ A more distributionally progressive approach would suggest the U.S. fair share is more like 40 percent of the global effort. This is roughly equivalent to 9 GtCO₂ of the 33 GtCO₂ total emissions reduction required globally by 2030. Given that the size of the United States' fair share of reductions is larger than its current emissions, this effort should be divided between domestic mitigation and enabling mitigation globally. Domestically, the U.S. must reduce its emissions by approximately 4 GtCO₂ by 2030. The 5 GtCO₂ remainder of the U.S.' fair share must be achieved by enabling mitigation in developing countries through the provision of finance, environmentally sound and socially just technology and capacity building. These methodology and mitigation figures are based on the work of the Civil Society Equity Review Coalition. For more, see [After Paris: Inequality, Fair Shares, and the Climate Emergency, A Civil Society Science-and-Equity-Based Assessment of the NDCs, December 2018.](#)

- Reduction targets must not be met via expensive, unproven technologies that extend fossil fuel use, such as carbon capture and storage.
- Reduction targets must not be achieved via controversial and risky climate geoengineering techniques, including solar radiation management, greenhouse gas removal and sequestration and weather modification, which could have devastating impacts.
- Major fossil fuel companies should be held legally liable and accountable for climate damages.

2. Make a rapid and just transition to 100 percent renewable, resilient and just energy and food systems

In the energy sector, this means adopting policies, programs and incentives to:

- Rapidly phase out all extraction and burning of fossil fuels, starting with a ban on new fossil fuel leasing in federal lands and waters and a moratorium on federal permits for fossil fuel projects that have the greatest impact on frontline communities and sensitive ecosystems.
- Pursue a managed decline of existing fossil fuel projects and nuclear power plants.
- Aggressively phase up energy efficiency programs, including adopting mandates and investments to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2035, which will require investing in energy storage and updating our electrical grid.
- Phase out “green” energy sources that create environmental harm, such as biofuels, nuclear power and biomass and waste-to-energy (e.g., from concentrated animal feeding operations or waste incinerators) projects. This includes ending the federal corn ethanol/ biofuels mandate.

In the agriculture sector, this means adopting policies, programs and incentives to:

- Cap GHG emissions from the agriculture sector.
- Transition away from industrial animal agriculture (concentrated animal feeding operations) and chemical- and energy-intensive monocultures.
- Aggressively support diversified, organic and regenerative agricultural practices that rely on low/natural carbon inputs and that store carbon in healthy soil.
- Promote organic and ecological small- and mid-scale food production systems to help local economies and create higher numbers of dignified jobs than energy-intensive large-scale commodity agriculture.
- Shift public food purchasing and feeding programs (e.g., school lunch) away from carbon-intensive animal foods toward healthier, climate-friendly plant-based alternatives.

In the transportation sector, this means adopting policies, programs and incentives to:

- Curb sprawling urban development, including through investments in highways, roads, etc.
- Invest in infrastructure that connects our cities and suburbs in ways that reduce vehicle and air traffic.
- Invest in an extensive national network of public transport, including a national rapid train system, and in public transit systems that are fully powered by renewables and are accessible to those who need them most.
- Support the build-out of charging stations and the affordability of electric vehicles.
- Clean up and reduce the carbon footprint of the shipping industry.

3. Ensure a Just Transition advances social, racial and economic justice

Climate policies and programs should ensure that workers and communities, especially those from and impacted by the fossil fuel sector, are made whole through strategies to compensate for losses, and to support them in adapting and thriving in a new economy. Friends of the Earth Action supports:

- A federal green jobs guarantee that pays a family-sustaining wage and ensures dignified and safe work.
- Federal policy approaches that support communities, cities and states in leading the creation and implementation of Just Transition, climate adaptation and climate resilience plans.
- Planning processes that are transparent, participatory and involve affected communities, especially ensuring the participation of minority and low-income communities and those hit first and worst by climate impacts.
- Just Transition strategies that promote local solutions that make good on the promise of public ownership and cooperative control.
- Just Transition strategies that uphold and expand human rights, including labor rights such as the right to organize and collectively bargain. In particular, climate initiatives must uphold indigenous peoples' treaty rights and their right (under the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) to Free, Prior and Informed Consent for legislation or developments that impact tribal lands, resources or heritage.
- Climate policies that protect rights to water, food, land and energy for all, including energy sufficiency: renewable energy access at a level that respects everyone's right to a dignified life.

4. Make massive public investments and realign programs, financing and incentives

We need a Green New Deal that would rival the scope and impact of Franklin D. Roosevelt's public investment plan. Without aggressive public investment, it will be impossible to reach the carbon reductions needed, let alone make the transition described above in a just and equitable manner.

Friends of the Earth Action supports:

- Rolling back tax cuts (e.g., the 2018 Trump tax cuts, which will cost \$2.3 trillion over 10 years), raising new revenue (e.g., closing offshore tax havens, which could raise \$129 billion to \$205 billion per year) and scaling back on some current budget expenditures (e.g., cutting military spending by \$350 billion) to pay for a Green New Deal.
- Realigning existing federal programs and institutions to foster this transition. For example, federal institutions such as the Tennessee Valley Authority should wind down nuclear and fossil fuels while scaling up renewable energy.
- Redirecting spending programs, such as the Farm Bill (\$1 trillion between 2019-2030) and the national school lunch program to support a transition to organic, regenerative agriculture.
- Eliminating subsidies and incentives for fossil fuels (over \$100 billion over 10 years), including international subsidies such as Export-Import Bank financing, and redirecting them to renewable energy.

5. Uphold the U.S.' international climate obligations

Finally, the U.S. must rejoin the global community and constructively engage in good faith in the Paris Agreement and its implementation. We must do our fair share by not only making our own domestic mitigation commitments, but also providing climate finance. Under the next president, the U.S. must:

- Provide developing countries with finance to adapt to and mitigate climate change and provide funds for loss and damage² in quantities and via mechanisms commensurate with what science and justice demand.³ As a start, the U.S. should fulfill the \$2 billion balance of the U.S.' overdue pledge to the Green Climate Fund and provide an additional \$6 billion as part of the Fund's first replenishment process.
- In addition, the U.S. must also enable and facilitate the transfer to developing countries of environmentally sound, socially just technologies that are appropriate, affordable and easily accessible.

² Loss and damage refers to the economic and non-economic losses caused by both extreme (e.g., floods, fires, etc.) and slow onset (sea level rise, desertification, etc.) events caused by climate change.

³ For example, in its 2018 [Adaptation Gap Report](#)³, the UN Environment Programme conservatively estimated an annual adaptation price tag of \$140 billion-\$300 billion by 2030 and \$280 billion-\$500 billion by 2050 for adaptation only.