

National Religious Coalition on Creation Care

September 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Obama,

We wish to thank you for the steps that you and your team have taken to address climate change. We recognize that you face one of the most obstructionist Congresses in U.S. history, but we urge to you to use your Executive powers and moral authority to exercise bold, visionary, and consistent leadership to avert climate catastrophe. Every CO2 emission causes additional damage and creates additional risk.¹ Extracting and burning fossil fuels is no longer an ethical choice. The world as we know it cannot survive with an “all of the above” energy policy.

We speak to you from a faith-rooted conviction that it is our God-given task to care for the earth by exercising a loving responsibility as stewards and guardians. The National Religious Coalition for Creation Care (NRCCC) is composed of members of all the major religious groups in America, including Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Muslims, Evangelicals and Orthodox Christians. Joined in prayer, and united with people of every religious tradition, we advocate for a right relationship to God’s creation.

Many forces now converge to threaten our planet’s well-being – including, among others, a rising population, ocean acidification, deforestation, habitat loss, and pollution – but we are particularly concerned about the climate crisis, which threatens to unravel the web of life and to destroy the world that God created.

You understand that today’s choices will have enormously significant consequences for the future. As you said in your speech introducing the Clean Power Plan, “no challenge poses a greater threat to our future and future generations than a changing climate.” Existing reserves of fossil fuels are more than sufficient to carry us through a rapid global transition to clean, safe, renewable energy. It is deeply unethical to continue to search for and to extract additional carbon-based fuels.

Therefore, we specifically urge you to take the following Executive actions, which do not require Congressional approval:

1. Communicate to the American public in a special nationally televised address the following:
 - The level of carbon dioxide in the global atmosphere is higher today than it has been for 3 million years, when sea levels were between 50 and 80 feet higher than they are today.
 - Six glaciers on the huge West Antarctic ice sheet are in a process of unstoppable melt that will lead to an eventual sea-level rise of 1.2 meters (4 feet), which means that we have already condemned to destruction Charleston, New Orleans, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Saint Petersburg, and Miami.
 - The transition to a more arid climate in the U.S. Southwest and northern Mexico may

¹<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/09/30/2699121/real-budget-crisis-co2/>

already be under way,² and if we continue on our present path, we increase the risk of locking in permanent dust bowl conditions in the U.S. Southwest, as well as in southern Europe, northern Africa, southern Africa, and Western Australia.³

It is crucial that the language of “emergency” be adopted in this speech and in all your statements about climate change. Because of this country’s dependence on fossil fuels, Americans have been subsidizing the destruction of our own cities. Our nation must change course.

We urge you to conclude your speech with a call to mobilize the nation with the same focus and determination with which we mobilized during World War II, so that we reach 100 percent renewable energy in two or three decades;⁴

2. Become a staunch and vocal advocate for placing a rising price on carbon, using a fee structure. 100% of the fees would be returned to households as dividends, and a tariff would be imposed on goods imported from countries that don’t price carbon;⁵

3. Modify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the European Union so that they contain no language that would prevent a future Administration from putting a price on carbon emissions and from imposing a tariff on countries that don’t price carbon;

4. Stop all fossil fuel exploration and extraction in the Arctic and on all Federal public land. Stop all drilling and all fracking on Federal public land. Call for an immediate end to governmental subsidies and tax deductions that support the exploration, extraction, delivery and consumption of fossil fuels, and call for increased subsidies for renewable energy;

5. Reject the Keystone XL, Sandpiper and other pipelines, and reject proposals for expanding refining operations. Do everything in your power to ensure that Canadian tar sands stay in the ground;

6. Reject new coal leases on public lands, starting with current proposals to use BLM land. Opening public lands to coal mining would release 3 times the carbon dioxide that your Clean Power Plan would save by 2030;⁶

²<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/316/5828/1181.full.pdf?keytype=ref&siteid=sci&ijkey=CAIzmuA00800>

³ <http://www.pnas.org/content/106/6/1704.abstract>

⁴ Mark Z. Jacobson and Mark A. Delucchi, “A Path to Sustainable Energy by 2030,” *Scientific American*, November 2009, pp. 58-65; Jacobson, M.Z., Delucchi, M.A., “Providing all global energy with wind, water, and solar power, Part I: Technologies, energy resources, quantities and areas of infrastructure, and materials.” *Energy Policy* (2010), doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2010.11.040; Delucchi, M.A., Jacobson, M.Z., “Providing all global energy with wind, water, and solar power, Part II: Reliability, system and transmission costs, and policies.” *Energy Policy* (2010), doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2010.11.045

⁵ <http://citizensclimatelobby.org/carbon-fee-and-dividend/>

⁶ <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/06/01/3664633/blm-coal-lease-decision/>;

<http://www.sierraclub.org/compass/2015/06/massive-new-proposed-federal-coal-leases-sound-alarm-bells/>

7. Ban logging and privatization of our National Forests, both green and post-fire. Our National Forests sequester a tremendous amount of carbon and should be left standing. Veto logging bills HR 2647 and S 1691, and any other compromise logging bill that reaches your desk. Launch a major tree-planting program, support protection of tropical forests, and encourage world reforestation;

8. Modify The Methane Challenge Program emission goal to: “Cut methane emissions from this sector by 40-45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025, including limiting leakage to less than 1% at any wellhead, in any timeframe and in total”;

9. Urge the EPA in its calculation of U.S. fossil fuel emissions to include emissions from fossil fuels that are sold to or refined for other countries;

10. Support and personally promote an ambitious COP-21 agreement in Paris that includes clear and convincing short-term and long-term goals, and charts a course to a world based on clean, safe, renewable energy.

We are in the midst of a planetary emergency. With increasing alarm, scientists declare that we have only a very short period of time in which to avert an escalating, unmanageable cascade of changes that would render the planet ungovernable and possibly uninhabitable. The coal, oil, and gas industries already possess five times the amount of fossil fuel that, if burned, would propel the world into runaway climate change. If we continue with business as usual, scientists tell us that within two, three, or four generations we risk raising average global temperatures to a level that would destroy life as we know it on earth.

Until now humanity has seemed paralyzed by what U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has denounced as a “global suicide pact.” But a wave of religious protest and activism is rising up around the world. Religious leaders and institutions are proclaiming with one voice that climate change is a spiritual and moral issue that must be tackled without delay. Pope Francis’ powerful encyclical, *Laudato Si*, draws from the best of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and is gaining ringing endorsements from religious leaders. Evangelical leaders have expressed strong support,⁷ and over 400 rabbis have signed a Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis.⁸ Islamic leaders from 20 countries recently released the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, urging action based on a religious imperative to protect the planet.⁹ Anglican bishops just issued a fresh call for action on climate justice.¹⁰

As people of faith, we agree with your statements that it is unethical to leave a ruined world to our children and grandchildren and to generations yet unborn. We have a moral responsibility to stop

⁷ <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/06/23/3673212/faith-leaders-back-pope-on-climate/>

⁸ <https://theshalomcenter.org/torah-pope-crisis-inspire-400-rabbis-call-vigorous-climate-action>

⁹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/muslim-leaders-support-islamic-declaration-on-climate-change/2015/08/18/661490d4-45df-11e5-9f53-d1e3ddfd0cda_story.html

¹⁰ <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2015/08/anglican-bishops-call-for-climate-justice-action-in-new-video-series.aspx>

the surge of extinctions now underway because of climate change. These extinctions threaten the viability of humanity's food supply. We refuse to stand idly by while the lives of the poor are devastated, suffering first and most grievously from the effects of climate change.

As you saw two weeks ago in Alaska, climate change is intensifying. We urge you to respond to this emergency with the conviction, consistency, and comprehensiveness that the situation requires. We urge you to exercise your Executive powers and moral authority as President to accelerate our nation's transition to an economy based on clean, safe, renewable energy, such as sun and wind, and to protect the poorest and most vulnerable. We need you to educate the public that fossil fuels are an increasingly immoral -- even suicidal -- option for our nation.

We ask you to act decisively and consistently, so that future generations will look back with gratitude on your legacy of hope. With our best regards, please accept a copy of NRCCC's book, Religion and Global Climate Change. We are upholding you in prayer, asking God to bless your efforts to inspire and mobilize this country to choose a life-sustaining path.

Faithfully yours,

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For the members and organizations of the NRCCC (NRCCC.org)