

Climate Change

Introduction

My fellow citizens, the global climate is changing at an alarming rate, and human influences are clear. In the latest (2013, 2014) reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it has been concluded that since the 1950s, or the second industrial revolution, the atmosphere and the oceans have warmed, amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea levels have risen and concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased (IPCC). Within the scientific community, 97% agree that climate change is very real and a man-made threat.

Unfortunately, political intransigence is remarkably common – despite the fact that emissions continue to rise, limited resources are being provided for adaptation, and the scientific community continually warns of the possibility of global warming exceeding 4 to 6 degrees Celsius. “Climate change is real, man-made, and happening now. The stakes are too high not to act” (Obama 2016). It is the number one threat that faces our society today, and yet the policies associated have sabotaged efforts to control this environmental crisis. The need for unison moving forward is crucial to fighting and combating climate change.

Human Influence and Consequences

More than 130 members of Congress still deny the existence of climate change, costing us precious time in combating it. Our society has to step up, examine and analyze the scientific evidence and generate a plan, create conversation, and demand recognition of this environmental crisis in order to make progress and save our Earth for future generations.

Greenhouse Gases

Human activities result in the emissions of four major greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and the halocarbons (a group of gases containing fluorine, chlorine and bromine). These gases accumulate in the atmosphere which, over time, has resulted in concentrations increasing, causing many of Earth's climates/environments to adapt and change quickly. All of the increases have happened since the industrial era, strongly suggesting that humans have a direct effect on the rising concentrations in the atmosphere.

As more gases are emitted into our atmosphere, it produces a “greenhouse” effect. This is a warming when the atmosphere traps heat radiating from the Earth's surface towards space. This in turn has risen the average temperature of the Earth. Since 1880, the average temperature has risen by 1.53 degrees Fahrenheit (0.85 degrees Celsius) (IPCC). Even though this may seem a minor change, it has had disastrous repercussions. A one degree global change is significant because it takes a vast amount of heat to warm all the oceans, atmosphere, and land by that much. In the past, a one- to two-degree drop was all it took to plunge the Earth into the Little Ice Age. A five-degree drop was enough to bury a large part of

North America under a towering mass of ice 20,000 years ago. With the rising temperature, we can expect drastic changes in our climate within the next 50 years (NASA).

Oceans

The rise of sea level is a very concerning threat at this point. According to the law of Thermal Expansion, water at a higher temperature or under greater pressure expands more for a given heat input, so the global average expansion is affected by the distribution of heat within the ocean. Global warming has raised sea level by *8 inches* since 1880, and with more emissions each year, that rate is only increasing. These rapid increases threaten an enormous amount of damage. Across the country, nearly 5 million people live in 2.6 million homes at less than 4 feet above high tide. Compounding this risk, scientists expect roughly 2 to 7 more feet of sea level rise this century (IPCC).

Sea Ice

The temperatures in the Arctic have increased at twice the as the rest of the globe, and the region is expected to increase an additional 8°C (14°F) within the remaining century. Sea ice is normally regulated by sunlight (grows in the winter, melts in the summer). Now, there are more factors to consider in the disappearing sea ice. Warm ocean currents are traveling from the equator to the north and therefore usher in warmer water which consequently makes the sea ice growth process more difficult. Weather patterns can also affect sea ice growth. Under normal climate conditions, polar vortex winds keep cold air confined to the Arctic, but as sea ice coverage is decreasing, the Arctic is slowly warming causing the pressure in the atmosphere to build and then the polar vortex weakens which triggers record cold and fierce storms. At the same time, warm air will flowing into the Arctic to replace the cold air spilling south, which drives more sea ice loss. This reversal could be partially driven by sea ice loss, and so is expected to surface more often in the coming years (Underground).

The primary role of sea ice is to reflect the sun's radiation, very efficiently as it reflects about 90% of the Sun's total radiation. The ocean surface, however is almost black, therefore having an absorption rate of about 90% while only reflecting 10%. After something absorbs sunlight, it emits heat which means less sea ice will lead to a warmer Arctic and a warmer climate.

Reflection

The National Science Foundation says humans will have killed off so many species that ecosystems, the engine behind the function of our Earth, will start to collapse in as little as 232 years. Children are developing asthma and other breathing difficulties due to the amount of pollution in our populous cities. Over the past three decades, the percentage of Americans with asthma has more than doubled and climate change is putting those Americans at greater risk of landing in the hospital (Obama). Warmer sea temperatures are causing the atmospheric pressure to skyrocket, creating super storms like Sandy and Hurricane Katrina. The consequences of our actions are limitless, but there is still time to reverse the damage we have

brought upon the climate! But, we need to act now because by the time we find out it might be too late. One planet, one experiment.

Clean Power Plan

On August 3, 2015, I, along with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the Clean Power Plan.

“This plan is a historic and important step in reducing carbon pollution from power plants that takes real action on climate change. Shaped by years of unprecedented outreach and public engagement, the final Clean Power Plan is fair, flexible and designed to strengthen the fast-growing trend toward cleaner and lower-polluting American energy. With strong but achievable standards for power plants, and customized goals for states to cut the carbon pollution that is driving climate change, the Clean Power Plan provides national consistency, accountability and a level playing field while reflecting each state’s energy mix. It also shows the world that the United States is committed to leading global efforts to address climate change” (Obama, EPA, 2015).

Many are worried that we will sacrifice the economy in order to cut carbon emissions by introducing clean, renewable, energy. I have proposed a plan that means more investments in solar, wind, and other forms of renewable energy. This investment will not only grow our economy and strengthen our communities, but will also help to combat climate change.

Over the past six years, solar panels have increasingly become more affordable - the overall cost dropping almost 75%. In 2015, 173,000 people worked in the solar industry and it provided energy to over four million homes, and those numbers will only grow as more of the country begins to depend on renewable energy. Wind power capacity has tripled in the last six years and now supplies power to almost eighteen million homes.

Renewable energy will also promote investments in the U.S. economy. In 2012, wind power made up 42% of all new U.S. electric capacity additions, representing a \$25 billion investment in the U.S. economy. In order to conserve resources, build upon our economy, and heal our planet, it is important that our country transitions to using clean energy. “We can’t delay taking action on climate change - it’s one of the most pressing issues our nation faces, and it’s our responsibility as a country to set an example for the rest of the world” (Obama).

Legislation

Support

I will support any legislation that acknowledge the existence and severity of climate change, presents a plan that will effectively combat and tackle climate change by cutting carbon emissions, supports conservation efforts, while benefitting the economy and the American

people. The legislation has to be based on both emotional and scientific values, presenting data and experiences that relate directly with the impacts climate change has had on the economy, the citizens, and our environment. It must be evident that climate change is considered the most urgent and defining challenge of our time and there is a deep commitment to preserving the planet for future generations.

Oppose

I will oppose any legislation that proposes to dismiss climate change and label it as “far from this nation’s most pressing national security issue” (GOP Party Platform). I agree that the decision to combat climate change must be evaluated, understood, and based off of facts, but I will not stand for the facts being presented and then deliberately being disregarded. I will oppose any legislation that proposes to defund or discriminate against the U.N.’s Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or any other climate change or conservation organizations. Furthermore, I will not support any proposals to combat climate change through individual incentive rather than through the American community and collaboration.

Conclusion

Climate change is no longer a distant threat, it has moved firmly into the present, and that, to me, is terrifying. We have an obligation to preserve and protect this planet for our children and our grandchildren! In order to make progress, we need to all come together and combat this world crisis. Please stand with me in the fight and hopeful victory against climate change.

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Immigration

Introduction

The country was founded as and continues to be a country of immigrants. We have all come from around the world, and the United States continues to be a beacon of hope for many who desire to come here for life, liberty, safety, equality, opportunity, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness and success.

Immigration is such a large part of our history, it is built into our character. The current immigration system is a dire problem that needs to be addressed in order to rebuild the foundation that the United States of America was founded on: the acceptance and opportunity for equality and liberty for all.

I support legal immigration that meets and benefits the needs of families, communities, our economy, and our nation's founding principles. I recognize that our current immigration system is broken and measures need to be taken immediately to ensure the safety of our citizens, communities, and families, and strengthen our economy.

Illegal Immigration

More than 11 million people are currently living in the shadows as undocumented immigrants. "The immigration bureaucracy is full of backlogs that result in U.S. citizens waiting for decades to be reunited with family members, and green card holders waiting for years to be reunited with their spouses and minor children" (Democratic Party Platform).

Our current immigration system is dated. Our society has changed, and our immigration reform hasn't moved into the 21st century, resulting in discrimination against certain immigrants, especially those of color; the true motives behind our deportation and detention policies need to be questioned and altered to be more fair to everyone involved.

The system pulls families apart and keeps valuable, but illegal, workers in the shadows. Many don't realize the benefits that illegal immigrant workers bring to the economy. Immigrants bring new ideas and add to an American labor force that would be shrinking without them - they do the jobs we Americans don't want to do! Despite many beliefs, immigrants do not take jobs from Americans. There are little to no effects on overall wages and employments of native-born workers in the long term. Illegal immigrants who pay their taxes under a fake social security number are pure profit for the treasury and add billions of dollars to our national revenue every year.

Child immigration is a huge problem in and of itself. Many children immigrants are brought into the U.S. against their own will, or born here, and unaware about the consequences of illegal immigration. Many children who immigrated here early with their families are considered illegal adults in a country they have grown up in. The children of immigrants face many hurdles in their life in America and many of them don't know how to pursue success and happiness in this nation. Many of them don't have anyone to look up to and because they come from low income families, it is also very hard for them to afford a higher education to acquire a balanced job in our economy. There needs to be a clear path to success for children of immigrants in America. They should be eligible for state benefits, especially when it comes to seeking out higher education and we should always consider children of immigrants different from their parents.

For those who have not obtained legal citizenship through being born here, the path towards success in the U.S. is not necessarily clear - and even though kids grow up, for all intents and purposes, American, they're not, and this limits them to what they can achieve in their life.

This is why I have taken executive actions (The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans) that will give immigrant parents and their children, a pathway to citizenship. If they have lived in the U.S. for more than five years, I will provide relief from deportation if they register with the government, undergo background checks, and pay taxes. It will also allow immigration enforcement officials to focus resources on deporting felons, not families (Obama).

These actions to help reform our immigration system will strengthen our country, grow our economy by up to \$210 billion in ten years, and could shrink the federal deficit by up to \$25 billion over the next decade.

Immigration enforcement must be aligned with our values and should never have inhumane practices. "We should prioritize those who pose a threat to the safety of our communities, not hardworking families who are contributing to their communities. There should be no raids and

roundups of children and families, which unnecessarily sow fear in immigrant communities” (Democratic Party Platform).

Refugee Crisis

Refugees come from terror zones. Many of them have they live through experiences we, I, can’t even begin to imagine. Refugees do not come here voluntarily. They are forced to leave in order to save their lives. They come to the U.S. because it is a beacon of hope, they hope to build a new and safe future for themselves and their families.

Refugees, upon arrival in the U.S. are faced with many hardships. Many are put into rough neighborhoods, stricken with crime, low jobs rates and don’t have access to high quality education. Refugees are leaving everything they’ve ever known behind, the U.S. is alien and it is important that the people and the government recognizes that. Resettlement plans should be given more attention, helping refugees get jobs, housing, healthcare, education, and many other benefits we have in this country.

We, as the people, have a moral obligation to help relieve a global refugee crisis of epic proportions. These people have wounds that cut deep and to be thrown into an environment where nothing is familiar, I can imagine, is terrifying.

I can assure our citizens that their safety will not be put at risk in the addressing of the refugee crisis. All refugees should go through a high screening and background check process before being admitted to the U.S.

Refugees are people, just like us, looking to better their lives. The attitudes towards refugees have unfortunately been shaped by opinions on immigration and terrorism. Morality should drive the populous to do something for these individuals, these families, *children*. It is the duty of the American people to come together and fight for these people.

Legislation

Support

I will support the legislation if the DREAM Act or a version of the DREAM Act is present. There should be a clear plan that will help parents of citizens and lawful permanent residents avoid deportation. I will support the assurance in a bill that all Americans, regardless of immigration status, have access to quality health care. That means expanding community health centers, allowing all families to buy into the Affordable Care Act, supporting public health insurance programs.

Motions to end federal, state and municipal contracts with for-profit and private prisons and private detention centers will be supported. There should always be an oversight of any programs put into place, to make sure that there are no abuses and no arbitrary deportation programs.

Oppose

I will reject any attempts to impose a religious test to bar immigrants or refugees from entering the U.S. I will not stand for the divisive and derogatory language of Donald Trump. His "offensive comments about immigrants and our communities have no place in our society" (Democratic Party Platform).

I will not support federal, state, and municipal contracts with for-profit prisons or detention centers. Any deportation plans that involve the removal of priority deportation - the priority deportation of criminals and felons - will not be supported.

Finally, this stands for both my support and opposition, if legislation proposes a change to the reform, there will need to be extensive research on funding for these changes to be made, with an adequate explanation of how these changes will be beneficial to all involved - the American people, immigrants, and refugees.

Conclusion

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

This is a quote that is written at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Between 1886 and 1924, almost 14 million immigrants entered the United States through New York. The Statue of Liberty was a reassuring sign that they had arrived in the land of their dreams. To these anxious newcomers, the Statue's uplifted torch did not suggest "enlightenment," as her creators intended, but rather, "welcome." Over time, Liberty emerged as a symbol of hope to generations of immigrants, and this reflects upon what our country is to those immigrants.

Let's not lose sight of who we are as a nation. Our families have all come from somewhere. We are accepting of others and continue to be seen as a beacon of hope to many. Let us continue to be that light in this world.

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Student Debt Crisis

Introduction

Every child, no matter who they are, their background, their economic status, or where they live should always have access to a high-quality education. Money should never stand in the way of an education desired by a student, cost should never be a barrier in the individual setting oneself up for success in the 21st century.

It should always be a goal that students attend and graduate from colleges and universities debt-free. It is important that the opportunity to go to college, to pull from the resources they offer, and to come away with a foundation in skills that will benefit the graduate in the workforce is possible for everyone, without a crushing debt trail to pay off upon graduation.

History

In the 20th century, a pursuit of a college degree wasn't quite as important as it is today. Today, a college degree is essentially a requirement for the majority good-paying jobs. As the demand for college education has increased, so has the price, therefore causing students to take out readily available student loans to help subsidize the immediate cost of attending a college or university. But, while student loans help individuals obtain a higher education, the consequences comes later in life when graduates are suddenly buried underneath a heap of student debt.

In 1980, the average cost to attend a 4-year public university was \$7,600 per year. Today, that has skyrocketed to \$23,890-\$32,410 per year. Obviously, this has a major impact on the student population, causing them to take out more and bigger loans.

While most benefit from a higher education, the future is bleak for those with student debt. Student debt forces graduates to put off important milestones in their lives such as having families, buying a house or car, or even meeting a minimum healthy lifestyle.

Interest rates, even though they may not seem that bad, do make a big impact on these students right out of college. Undergraduate have to pay 3.76% - 4.66% interest rates on loans and graduates have to pay 5.31% - 7.21%, and those rates continue to rise the longer the loans are unpaid. Most people cannot pay the loan off immediately upon graduation, and end up more indebted than before.

Americans owe approximately \$1.3 trillion in student loan debt, spread out among 44 million borrowers. In 2016, the average student graduated with \$37,000 in debt, if not more. Throughout the past 30 years, this issue has grown exponentially, and will only continue to grow unless we provide a solution that benefits all involved.

Debt-Free College

"Bold new investments by the federal government, coupled with states reinvesting in higher education and colleges holding the line on costs, will ensure that Americans of all backgrounds will be prepared for the jobs and economy of the future (Democratic Party Platform). It should be that every student should be able to go to and graduate from college debt-free, and in order to

do this, working families shouldn't have to pay tuition to attend public colleges and universities. Community college should also be available to everyone, by being free of tuition.

Making sure that colleges and universities accept a diverse student population is a main priority. It is a goal that an increasing percentage of racial and economical minorities are attending and graduating from colleges and universities, without the fear of graduating in debt looming over their shoulders.

It is important that we recognize that in our nation, there is a diversity in the people. From low-income families, wealthy families, and racial and ethnic minorities, we must come up with a plan for student debt that will benefit everyone.

Working towards affordable college is the main goal, yes, but we will not forget about those who are currently seeking relief from the crushing student debt. For those people, refining your loans at the lowest rate possible should be possible and to prevent student debt in the future, education surrounding efforts and programs set in place to help with student debt will increase, simplification and expansion of the access to income-based repayment will take place so no individual ever has to pay more than they can afford, and interest rates will be cut for undergraduates because making "college more affordable is more important than the federal government making billions of dollars in profit off those loans" (Democratic Party Platform).

Public Service Loan Forgiveness and loan discharge programs should be kept in place and the prior standard in bankruptcy law should be restored in order to allow borrowers in student debt to discharge them as a last resort. "To make progress toward these goals, the government should offer a moratorium on student loan payments to all federal loan borrowers so they have the time and get the resources they need to consolidate their loans, enroll in income-based repayment programs, and take advantage of opportunities to reduce monthly payments and fees" (Democratic Party Platform).

Conclusion

Money should never cause a situation of uncertainty for families or individuals seeking to gain a higher education. Our nation should symbolize a benefit to all, and making a college education affordable is an important step towards recognizing equality for all economic statuses.

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