

Essay

On a Green New Deal in America

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Abstract

The appeal for a Green New Deal in America is timely, because we face dangers created by climate change in increasing measure, but the rhetoric politicians use in framing Climate issues is divisive. To have a hope of dealing with the many complex problems arising from changing climates, we must strive to make appeals and solutions as inclusive as possible, because failing to do so will hurt everyone.

Keywords: Green New Deal, climate change, natural heritage, future of humanity.

Human beings must give consideration to the beliefs and ideals of all those whose help is needed, to make meaningful progress in dealing with the effects of climate change and slowing or halting the damage of human activity to the environment. It is reckless to imagine one party or political camp can carry the process to completion on its own. Instead, there must be participation of all parties, to assure that the action taken is fairly handled yet sufficient to address the severity of the problem. But we frequently ignore that two people will want the same thing for very different reasons. One person might want to preserve the Grand Canyon because it is a legacy for our future, while another wants it preserved because it is part of the heritage from America's past, and preserving it honors the wishes of the great explorers and founding fathers. It is not wise to ignore these dichotomies, when what you are trying to preserve is what's left of the natural environment for our entire planet. This requires that leaders everywhere rise to the challenge by using inclusive language and avoiding toxic rhetoric, when addressing these issues. Too often, politicians here in America use language that is divisive and alienates people across the aisle, to highlight the benefits of their party's view, but the severity of our need for immediate action to save the environment dictates a universal appeal to the humanity of political friends and foes alike. Beyond this, politicians must create and promote realistic alternatives to the way things are done today.

Instead of naively saying we need to have 100% renewable energy and setting a date, we need greater commitment to programs of research and development that will get us to overcome our dependence on fossil fuels faster. We also need to understand that industries must employ current technologies and utilize fossil-fuel energy to change over to sustainable energy sources, even if we commit to a clean future and start today. We should aim to use sustainable practices,

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while working to restore nature and guarding against catastrophic effects of climate change, but not be so insistent it prevents getting things done. We must aim for maximum sustainability of the natural environment, if we hope ourselves or the human race to survive, because the best way to assure humanity's survival is to keep nature alive. But the fact we are in danger of losing the natural world we rely on is easily lost among the barrage of threat signals we process every day, if we watch or listen to the news. Perhaps years of seeing the 'doomsday clock' set at a few minutes to midnight during the cold war made people complacent, and then unmindful that now climate change is the bringer of our doom, which will likely be a greater threat than nuclear war once was.

Instead of focusing on the threat, however, or the immanence and inevitability of catastrophes if we sit and wait, we need to both inform people and to assure them that we can engineer changes to save our planet. In the movie "Tomorrowland" a young girl's faith in the potential for innovators to create a better future was able to turn back the doomsday clock and convince George Clooney's character to save Tomorrowland – and so assist bright young people dreaming about and engineering the future. But the movie highlights the fact that tales of doom and threats for our immanent demise have become things people learn to live with and tune out, while going about their daily lives, and not something we can deal with or even think we have the power to change. Creating a better future, to improve our lives and our standard of living or to preserve a legacy for our children, won't motivate some to make lifestyle changes to help the environment. But inaction won't remain an option for long, because the situation is increasingly dire. Now that climate change is a threat to our homes and families, and to the lifestyles we have come to enjoy, many more are waking up to the reality climate scientists have been talking about for years. We clearly need to take action, but as clearly we have not adequately valued the people and the knowledge required to solve the problems we face. Scientists were once highly respected, but that respect has been eroded, and they are not alone. Innovators and developers face many challenges in the USA, which deter getting viable products to market, yet investors still expect to reap most of the profit if they succeed and innovative new products actually can be marketed.

So the main challenge in solving the climate problem is to make it more attractive for thinkers and innovators to create solutions for climate problems, by rewarding them adequately for doing so. However it is almost as important to nurture new ideas until they become mature technologies, or many of our best chances will be lost. Investing only in easy answers is a mistake. The total profit is far greater if a long view is taken for research and development. It is unwise for investors or politicians to expect an immediate return on R&D investments for some technologies needed to fix today's problems. Instead funding should seed progress toward developments that will benefit all involved. Batteries and other energy storage devices can work

in combination with wind or solar energy to allow peak usage when the wind is slack or the sun is down. Superconductor research enables us to tap natural features far from inhabited areas, to deliver power where it is needed more efficiently than our current grid. So geothermal and wave power generation could then provide more power than we currently use, where any excess would spur development. In addition, several laboratories are aching close to solving the longstanding problems with fusion power so, given current progress, we can expect viable commercial fusion generators to appear in the next 20 years. If we keep this research alive, we can count on relief from dependence on fossil fuels and more as these new technologies come online.

The greatest relief might come from basic research, so an inherent difficulty is that we can't know which research programs will create the best solutions by choosing what appears to be the quickest route to an answer. Solving problems in fundamental Physics or Chemistry and dealing with Engineering challenges that would prevent progress are often left out of the picture, even when they are the central issues. But a 20 year development timetable can be cut down to 15 or even 10 years, if enough manpower and funding are utilized to make it happen. The reason why some essential technologies are not available already is because they were not considered a priority 10 or 15 years ago, and the focus was on things providing more immediate gains. So we have a greater challenge today, to develop new technologies in a hurry, or suffer irreparable harm. This makes it more important than ever to bring everyone to the table and to keep all options on the table, except the option of ignoring the problem while making matters worse and hoping that Nature will somehow repair things on her own. Political ideologies are based on ideals, where the need to take action is more pragmatic or practical – which should supersede questions of party affiliation or ideology – but in today's political climate people are seen to be insincere if they do not hold fast to their party's ideals. Unfortunately, those ideals have changed over time, so they do not clearly resemble the traditional party values people have come to identify with.

One of my scariest childhood dreams featured shape-changing donkeys and elephants, whose exaggerated features became a terrifying nightmare. As a child, I did not recognize it was about politics. But as an adult, I am faced with the literal embodiment of that nightmare, because both political parties I grew up with have acquired some of the worst ills of their rivals, while retaining too little of the integrity that made their ideals sincere. Both the Democratic and Republican party have sacrificed realism in favor of unrealistic ideologies that don't align well with the best interests of the public. And in many cases, those who hold seats in government are expected to accept a lie or half-truth, rather than to speak the truth about what is happening in the world. However, climate change issues affect all human beings equally, and do not favor Democrats or Republicans. Maximizing sustainability of life is the unstated obligation of all

public officials, but the way we talk and act about climate issues varies distinctly across party lines. Though we talk about basic issues of public safety, the ability for businesses to continue to operate, and our capacity to maintain a working infrastructure, folks remain divided over whether there is a problem at all. And this is true even though scientists are almost uniformly agreed that we are in the early phases of a climate crisis from which nature as we know it might not recover – an unprecedented mass extinction event. So there is clearly a need to put ideology second and stand up for the truth! The threat from climate change must be dealt with right now.

We have been lulled into a false sense of security by the slow pace of onset and the more pleasant aspects of a warmer overall climate. Unfortunately, the most telling effect of a warming climate is not warming itself, but a destabilization of prevailing weather patterns to create more extreme weather events. This is partly caused by Onsager reciprocity, where an exchange between modes of energy occurs in storms and other weather systems, so that heat becomes motion or wind, and later wind creates heat through friction (for example), so that each phase change begets other changes. So instead of higher temperatures, what we see is greater change and more unstable weather patterns overall. In this way, more numerous extreme weather events like hurricanes and tornados result from the fact that added warmth creates other changes in the atmosphere – and extreme weather becomes more likely because of increased instability. At this point, a cascade of events has already been set in motion where melting ice caps will create sea level rises, and this will inundate many areas that are heavily inhabited and centers of industry. The combined effects of rising sea levels and increases in extreme weather events will leave some regions devastated. Climate change is already a threat to our national security, and it threatens to cripple our military preparedness as centers of military strength like Norfolk become the victims of a rising tide. If some leaders have the mistaken notion we can wait to find or implement solutions, they need to be informed that the problems we face won't go away unless vigorous action is taken.

But in many ways, the Military is already bearing the brunt of advancing climate issues, because they are called on to assist those in need. Since our military is already dealing with the effects of climate change abroad, and with the global unrest created by those effects, we should acknowledge it is a security threat. We have seen droughts or floods in previously fertile areas, which forced people to move from their homes, and we know that at least some of that change came from human activity. This is change that causes unrest worldwide which must be dealt with. But it matters little if the changes we observe are mainly human-caused or resulting from natural cycles, because we face extinction either way, unless we make it a national priority to guard against the ravages to come while we develop the means to reverse climate damage. To create working options for doing things differently, we need to acknowledge that there are extremely

hard problems to solve, but that it is crucial to our survival to solve them. It won't be easy. We need the same kind of focused intense effort as with the Manhattan project, but with the determination and long-term commitment to a goal that allowed us to send astronauts to the Moon. Those efforts required the mutual support of political rivals, in order to succeed. We would be fools to imagine taking something of similar difficulty to completion without some support from both political parties and from independents as well. But many suggestions proposing a Green New Deal for Americans don't include any plans for how the proposed actions can be made appealing or necessary to those across the aisle from the Democrats, and so they are destined to fail.

Finding ways to save the natural environment should be a priority for everyone alive who values life or nature, but unfortunately climate change has become a highly political issue in the U.S., while unified action remains necessary to address the problems adequately. Whether we wish to preserve the grand traditions of the past or create a brighter future for our world's children, that can only happen if there is some semblance of a natural world left on this planet. Unfortunately, we can't see Climate change as a divisive issue, and assume one party can fix it on its own, unless we're prepared to give up on the battle to keep humanity and planet Earth alive. If that is not a battle we can afford to lose, there is no place for petty and hateful rhetoric that only fuels the division between the parties. Instead, everyone who is sincere about making headway toward solving climate change issues must be prepared to include others and respond flexibly to their needs regarding the programs required, to assure that an adequate response can be mounted. Both the types of government program needed and the way such programs can be funded are likely to spur debate, even if there is a basic agreement on the need to take immediate action to combat the problem. The ideological issues will remain, but we can't let them to cloud the picture so much it prevents action from being taken. And if that action is to be effective, we need to do something rapidly. If we are too dependent on progress, and we don't fund the means of progress adequately, we will lose the race. Ergo, ways must be found to craft appeals to deal with climate issues in language that addresses both the liberal and conservative ideal. Since it has become a problem affecting everybody by this point, we need everyone's help to solve it.

Facing a climate crisis, our first responsibility is to assure it is survivable. If we think in terms of maximizing survivability, that is a good thing. If we focus too strongly on saving any one group of people, or even on saving only the human race, we may lose the chance to have a surviving population of humans at all. And many plans have dealt only with how we can manage the survival of a few. The best approach is to nurture nature back to health, so we will all be able to depend on her to nurture us and future generations. If we kill nature off, the chances for human survival drop dramatically, maybe even to zero, because we have never faced such a situation

and don't know how to survive. Maybe if we had already been to Mars as colonists, humans could have learned enough to know how to survive independent of the natural world here on Earth. But if this is a near impossible problem for the best of the best, what chance do average people have of survival? And clearly, America needs to be part of the solution, if we are going to save the planet. If I seem to be painting a picture that is too gloomy to be real, I only wish the reality was less grim, and I want people to have a realistic assessment of the challenges we face. The warming of our planet has been a slow burn, instead of the rapid impact with nuclear weapons, but the long-term or eventual impact from climate change will be far greater – if we do not wake up to the fact we are already facing a crisis. Whoever is serious about dealing with these issues must be willing to put ideological differences aside, because everyone alive will lose otherwise.