**The op-ed template is designed to serve as a template for your own op-ed writing. We encourage you to use as much or as little of this language as you’d like. We’ve prepared it so you can simply update the text in red with your personal information and submit. Just note that most newspapers and outlets want fewer than 850 words (some want fewer, so check the website of the outlet you want to submit and see if they have guidelines).**

I could hear the mother crying before I entered the exam room. Her baby was sleeping in her arms. Despite being born prematurely, there were, fortunately, no major complications.

Except this: this baby was born twelve hours after his parents evacuated their home in Northern California due to wildfire. His home, his nursery, every gift his parents had received in anticipation of their first born child, is now ash. As she was evacuating his mother developed blurry vision and a pounding headache. The family drove directly out of the evacuation zone and to our local hospital.

I have been in practice for five years and I already have too many stories like this to count: stories of how climate change is harming the health of the babies, children, teenagers, and families for whom I provide care.

That’s why, as we head toward the November 3rd election amid a time of both historic pandemic and historic partisanship, I worry we’re missing the continuously growing threat to our health that people often don’t quite see: changing climate.

In the last decade, we’ve seen more frequent and deadly wildfires in the West. We see worsening air quality and stronger tropical storms and hurricanes. More intense rain and sea level rise are causing historic flooding. We have threats to our ability to grow enough healthy food or access clean, safe water. All of these have a physical and mental health toll.

Climate change is a health emergency, and what’s important now is to come together to take action. I’m hopeful because I know that in communities, towns, cities and states around the country that people are finding solutions. As a doctor, I know that some cures require more than a pill or shot. Climate solutions are like that – there are a lot of different steps we can take if we have leaders who will help us change our future for the better.

This fall, we need to get answers to two questions from any candidate who want to represent us.

The first question is this: How soon can we complete a transition to clean, renewable energy, like solar and wind? I see the impacts of fossil fuels and dirty air on the children/pregnant women/people with asthma/elderly patients I take care of. But it’s not enough to say you support this change. We need clear and decisive plans to make rapid energy transitions in the coming decade.

Many experts agree that we have the technology and know-how to get 100% of our electricity from renewables as early as 2025. This transition is also an economic opportunity that can benefit many in our country whose livelihoods and security have been decimated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second question is: What concrete actions would you take to address the fact that the health harms of climate change are hitting families with low-incomes and many people of color the hardest? Yes, climate health harms are hitting everyone, but the burden is not evenly shared. Across the country, there are communities where governments and banks, for example, denied loans and invested less in communities based on the race and income of residents. Now, these communities have fewer resources to respond to climate emergencies like heat waves, wildfires, and hurricanes. Incidentally, government and industry are more likely to have built highways and polluting factories that make the air and water dirtier and unhealthier in these communities.

More than 3 in 4 Black people living in the United States lives withing 30 miles of a polluting fossil fuel plant. We’ve witnessed firsthand the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on some communities who are live near sources of air pollution and are made more susceptible to harm from COVID.

We should all be asking [these 12 climate, health, and equity questions of candidates and more](https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CandidateQuestions-Aug2020.pdf), because climate solutions can improve our health today and the health of future generations. We need leaders at every level of government who can work with impacted communities to find the right answers to protect our health and safety moving forward.