



# Candidate Guide for Climate, Health, and Equity in 2024

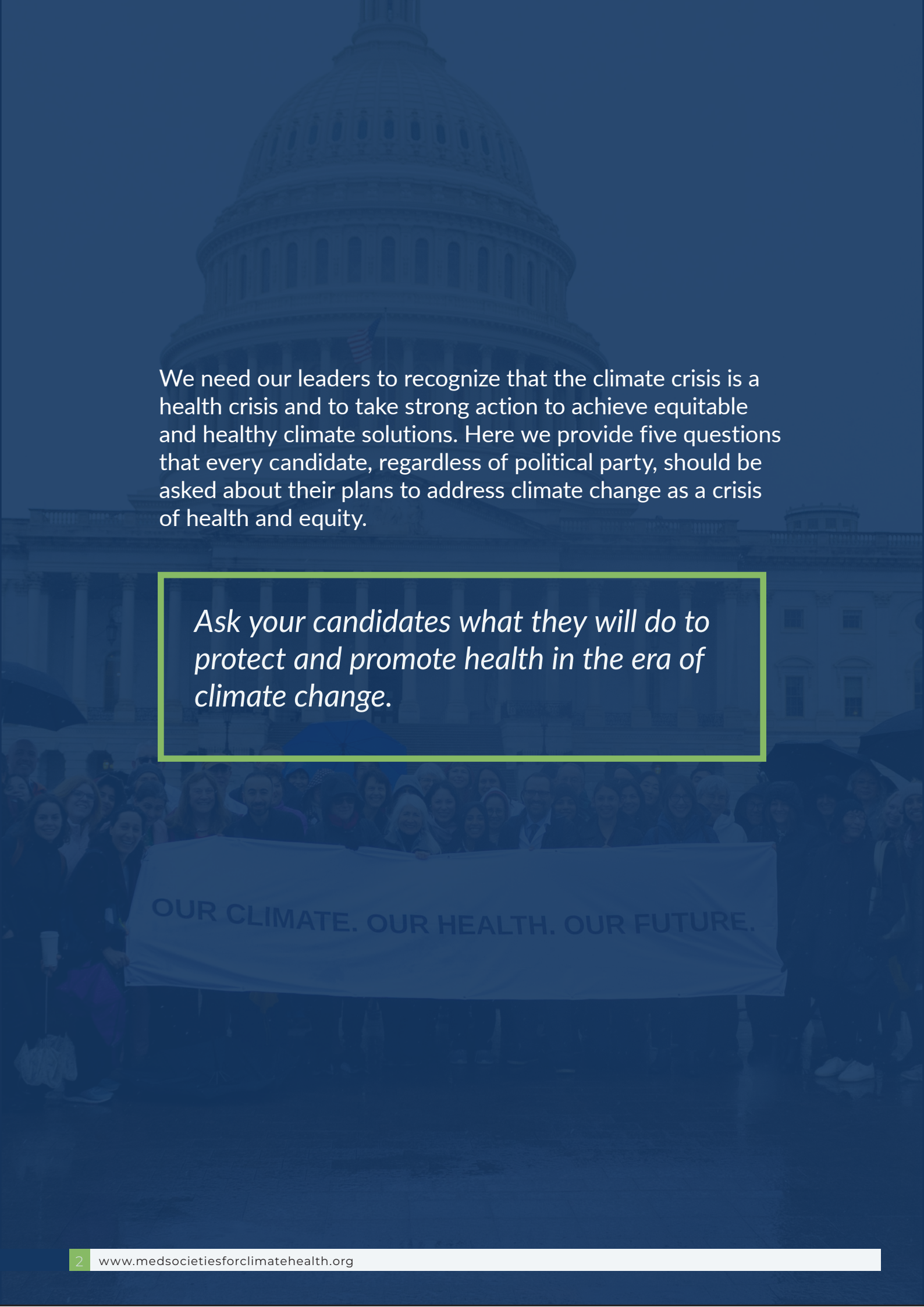
The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health



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**CLIMATE & HEALTH**

[www.medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org](http://www.medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org)

The background of the page is a dark blue-tinted image. The top half shows the dome of the United States Capitol building. The bottom half shows a large crowd of people, many wearing blue clothing, holding a white banner that reads "OUR CLIMATE. OUR HEALTH. OUR FUTURE." in blue capital letters.

We need our leaders to recognize that the climate crisis is a health crisis and to take strong action to achieve equitable and healthy climate solutions. Here we provide five questions that every candidate, regardless of political party, should be asked about their plans to address climate change as a crisis of health and equity.

*Ask your candidates what they will do to protect and promote health in the era of climate change.*

# How to take action and use these questions



- Candidates participate in many events and forums, which are either sponsored by community-based and political organizations or hosted by their own campaign. Sign up to participate—see if you can send in questions in advance or sign up to ask a question. To find events, you can sign up for candidates' mailing lists, reach out directly, or use an [online resource](#). If you're with a 501(c)(3), make sure you first understand the legal limitations of your organization. Bolder Advocacy has a [good resource](#) to start with.
- Consider emailing these questions to all candidates from each party running for office to remain nonpartisan. Ask them to read it or ask if they'd like to discuss it on a call.
- Consider choosing 1-2 questions, re-formatting them as a brief op-ed, and submitting it to a local media outlet. Share the questions with local organizations and ask if they can disseminate.
- When communicating with candidates, include your own perspective as a provider or public health professional, and make it as localized as possible—how have you seen climate change impact health firsthand? We've included a few case examples as you consider your own local context.
- Consider hosting your own virtual, nonpartisan candidate forum to learn about the views of many candidates. If a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, ensure that you understand the legal guidelines and guidance—here's a [good resource](#) to start with.
- Share these questions with your colleagues and on social media.
- Visit your candidates' website and review their position on climate change. See if these questions can be answered through their stated policies on climate.

**Climate change exacerbates extreme heat and weather events, causing continued disruptions in our healthcare systems. Evacuations or closures of facilities, power outages, and transportation challenges hinder access to healthcare, especially in marginalized areas. How will you ensure resilient health systems to sustain healthcare services during climate-related crises for all?**

Climate harms are already at our doorstep, affecting the capacity and operations of our health systems (see Case Study) and driving up health care costs. Extreme heat events alone are responsible for **\$1 billion in health care costs** from increased heat-related illness, lost productivity, and surges in demand for health care. In cities like Phoenix, a combined heat wave and power blackout from an overtaxed grid **could send half of the city to the emergency room**, making resilience planning essential.

Funding is available through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) **to support resilience and weatherization measures**, install energy-efficient heating and cooling, and implement renewable energy generation on site. **The Department of Health and Human Services** has a compendium of resources to help health

care systems achieve resilience that should be supported and bolstered with more resources. Candidates should commit to utilizing those investments and advocating for their importance.

Our public health system also needs resources for better real-time monitoring and response to climate-related disasters and harms, including wildfires and heat illnesses, and to train the public health workforce—including community health workers—to promote and protect physical and mental health in the era of climate change. While climate disasters in 2023 alone cost \$92.9 billion dollars, programs such as the **CDC's Climate Ready States and Cities Initiative** has a \$10 million allocated which is insufficient given the scale of worsening disasters.

## CASE STUDY

During Hurricane Ida, the CrescentCare community health center in New Orleans, Louisiana lost electricity. When gas-powered generators failed, nearly \$250,000 was lost in medicines and vaccines. Many patients were unable to access health services and life-saving medicines. Since then, CrescentCare **has taken significant steps to boost climate resilience**, including installing solar microgrids and backup battery systems which allow the facility to remain operational during severe weather events and serve as a community hub in the event of natural disasters.

**Over the past four years, the EPA enacted regulations reducing climate pollution, such as the new cars and trucks standards. Powerful industry-funded lobbyists have tried to weaken these rules. How will you support the EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment? Additionally, how will you safeguard pollution-burdened communities from further environmental harm?**

Exposure to pollutants from power plants and the transportation sector is extremely detrimental to health. Experts estimate that every year, soot (or particulate matter) is responsible for **85,000 to 200,000 excess deaths** in the United States, while mercury pollution from power plants can cause significant neurocognitive harms (see table). Regulating pollution from trucks is particularly important, as trucks represent a small fraction of total on-road vehicles but generate the greatest share of harmful air pollutants, including dangerous nitrogen oxides. On their own, these emissions can cause diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, emphysema, asthma, COPD, and chronic bronchitis, and harm communities living close to truck traffic, which are disproportionately composed of low-income people and people of color.

Candidates should support EPA regulations that align with scientific findings and prioritize health and equity impacts. This entails enhancing regulations for soot, mercury, and pollution from vehicles, trucks, and power plants. Reigning in pollution in our transportation sector yields numerous health benefits (see table). Additionally, candidates should ensure sufficient funding for the EPA and state regulatory agencies to update and enforce regulations effectively, resist politicization of regulatory agencies and safeguard the employment rights of civil servants.

## BOOSTING HEALTH FOR CHILDREN: BENEFITS OF ZERO EMISSIONS TRANSPORTATION AND ENERGY

Children are among the most vulnerable to fossil fuel pollution and climate change. A recent report by the [American Lung Association](#) estimates that a transition to an all electric power and transportation sectors would prevent

- 2.79 million pediatric asthma attacks
- 147,000 pediatric acute bronchitis cases
- 2.67 million pediatric upper respiratory symptoms
- 1.87 million pediatric lower respiratory symptoms
- 508 infant mortality cases

## HEALTH HARMS OF SOOT AND OTHER POLLUTANTS

COMMON POLLUTANTS	ASSOCIATED HEALTH HARMS AND FINANCIAL COSTS
Soot (or particulate matter)	Burning fossil fuels releases microscopic soot particle pollution into the air, which can trigger cardiovascular disease and respiratory ailments. Soot has been estimated to cause about 100,000 premature deaths annually. Total annual health costs surpass <b>\$820 billion (as of 2020)</b> .
Ozone Smog Pollution	Emissions from fossil fuels and higher temperatures fueled by climate change increase ozone pollution, which can trigger asthma and may worsen cardiovascular, metabolic, nervous system, and reproductive outcomes. Total annual health costs are estimated to be approximately <b>\$7.9 billion</b> .
Mercury	Mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants is a known neurotoxin that can harm the developing brains of infants, and is associated with heart disease, neurological damage, endocrine disruption, diabetes risk, and compromised immune function. As of 2017, the neurocognitive issues alone that are associated with mercury exposure cost approximately <b>\$4.8 billion</b> per year in the US.



**Fossil fuel pollution disproportionately harms communities already burdened by pollution, racism, poverty, and health inequities. To tackle its health and climate impacts, we must phase out fossil fuel use and support a clean energy shift. What policies do you endorse for this transition? Do you support integrating climate change impacts into permitting decisions for gas, coal, and oil production?**

The International Energy Agency and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have both stated that curtailing new fossil fuel infrastructure is necessary to meet climate goals. The U.S. will not meet its commitments to emissions reductions if it continues to support expansion of new drilling and oil infrastructure. The approval of LNG (liquefied natural gas) projects are particularly concerning, as LNG has a [larger greenhouse gas footprint than coal](#), and, if approved, current projects being considered by the U.S. could result in [3.9 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions](#), the equivalent of the entire annual emissions of the European Union.

Candidates should commit to halting further build out of fossil fuel infrastructure and advocate for a clean energy transition. Candidates should also support recognizing the climate harms of oil and gas production when making permitting and land use decisions at the local, state, and federal levels. By requiring these considerations in all future decisions, we can prevent the approval of new projects, and the approval of mega-projects, like the Willow project in Alaska, which contributes substantially to US emissions.

## HALTING NEW LNG

In January 2024, [a pause](#) was announced on building new Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export terminals in the Gulf of Mexico, citing environmental justice and health concerns. The CP2 facility being considered in Louisiana would have resulted in emissions equivalent to 42 million cars per year, in addition to toxic and carcinogenic air pollutants like benzene. Advocates [are working now](#) to make the pause permanent and expand to all LNG and related fossil fuel infrastructure.

## 4

## What is the role of the US on the world stage when it comes to climate change? How will you position the US to lead on climate internationally and rebuild trust with the global community?

Historically, the U.S. has contributed 25% of total carbon emissions to date, and continues to be the second-largest carbon dioxide emitter, contributing about **13.5% of the global total**. Additionally, the U.S. is not currently on target to meet its emissions reduction goals of 50-52% by 2030 under the Paris Agreement. The U.S. has an important role to play in international climate negotiations; failing to meet our already limited commitments harms our credibility on the global stage.

The climate crisis is also a global crisis, which means that our success in averting catastrophic climate change relies on all nations reducing climate pollution.

However, nations with less wealth and historic emissions will need resources both to spur green economic development, and to protect their people from the effects of climate change. The U.S. has committed \$3 billion toward the Green Climate Fund toward this end, but has only committed \$2 billion to date. If the U.S. and other countries meet their commitments, **the carbon savings** would be the equivalent of 669 coal power plants, and increase resilience for 912 million around the world.

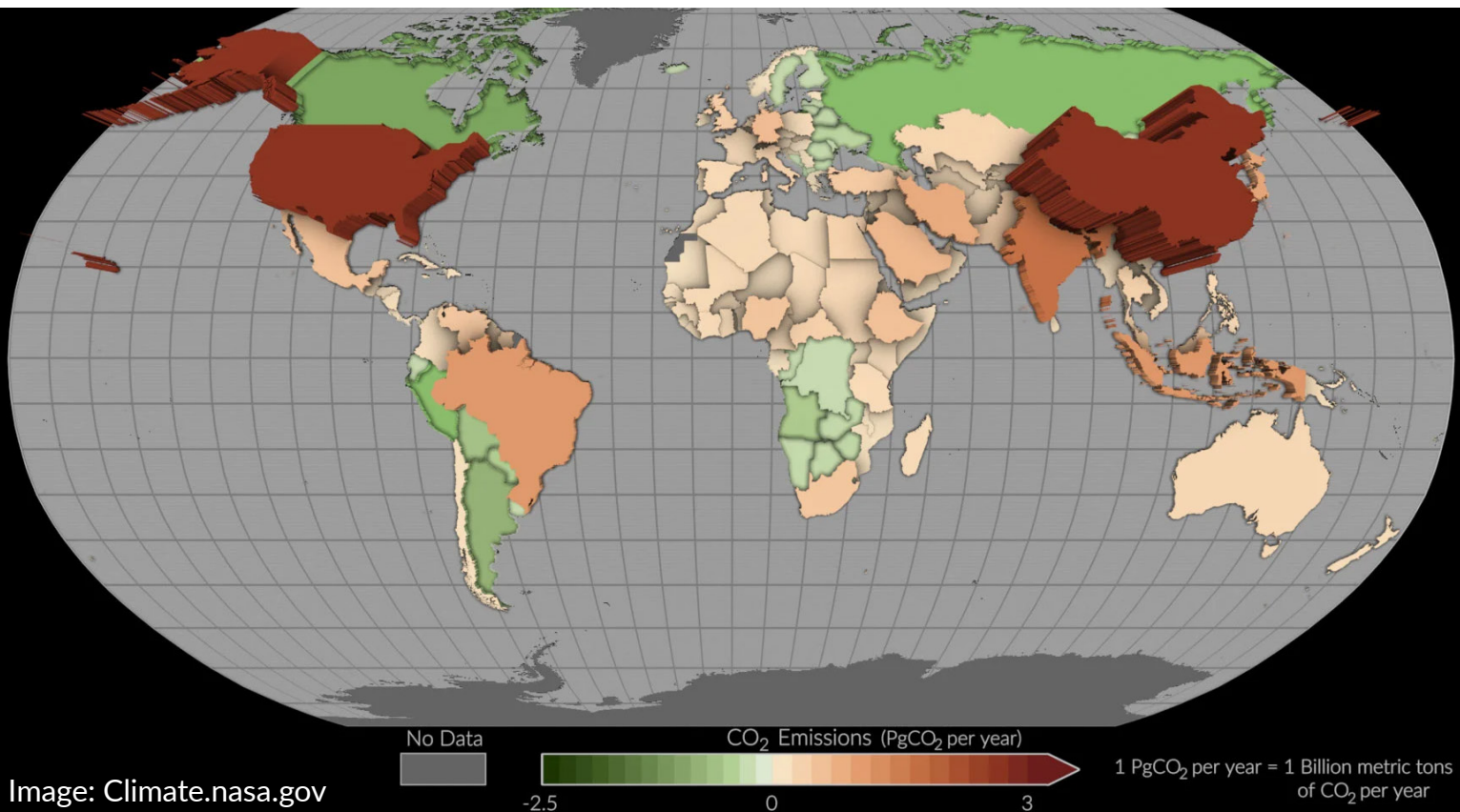


Image: Climate.nasa.gov



## A just transition to renewable energy necessitates prioritizing community and worker perspectives. How will you ensure equitable, climate-resilient communities are built and supported throughout this shift? Additionally, how will you involve community leaders in decisions affecting their health, environment, and economy?

While we need to swiftly transition to a zero-carbon economy, without careful planning, this shift may leave certain workers and communities disadvantaged. A just transition ensures equitable distribution of benefits across energy, transportation, building, and agricultural systems, while mitigating potential negative impacts. [The Justice 40 Initiative](#) and [Executive Order 14008](#) were important first steps to ensure federal investments flow toward communities that are hit first and worst by climate change; however, [significant barriers have arisen](#) that will require a continued dedication of resources, coordination, and accountability to achieve the goals of Justice 40. Candidates should support the continued investment by the federal government toward a just transition.

Important elements of a just transition include investing in clean energy workforce training, stabilizing fossil fuel workers' retirement funds, ensuring livable wages for clean energy jobs, subsidizing electric vehicle purchases, expanding weatherization and renewable energy access for low-income families, and safeguarding community health from climate change impacts, particularly in vulnerable communities. While a transition away from polluting fossil fuels and toward renewable energy will look different in each part of the country, centering community input will be essential in developing the policies and programs that can support shifting economics (see Case Study).

### CASE STUDY: STEPS TOWARDS A JUST TRANSITION

Recently, the [three Detroit automotive manufacturers, General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis](#), agreed to a [United Auto Workers \(UAW\) deal](#) that will better protect workers in the transition to increased electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing. The deal increased worker wages and helped ensure better job security, while simultaneously expanding automakers' investments in electric vehicle production. Automakers committed billions in investments, with substantial funding going towards meeting increasing US demand for EVs. Battery plant workers were also included in the deal, expanding the benefits of UAW membership.

This deal helps ensure that the transition to renewable energy does not have to come at the expense of auto workers by protecting employee wages and committing to keeping EV manufacturing in US factories.



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