

# High Risk, High Hopes: A Year of Climate Conversations

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/high-risk-high-hopes-year-climate-conversations>

Recorded on December 6, 2019



**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One, changing the conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment.

**Greg Dalton:** In 2019, climate rose to the top of the national agenda.

**AOC:** We have the Green New Deal, and we have Green New Deal projects.

**Inslee:** I am the only candidate who says this has to be the top priority of the U.S.

**Greta:** My message is that we'll be watching you.

**Greg Dalton:** Youth activists skipped school and spoke truth to power, while Democrats - and even a few Republicans - competed on climate policies more than ever before.

**Matt Gaetz:** You can either believe the climate deniers, or you can believe your lying eyes. And I'm from the pro-science wing of the Republican Party.

**Greg Dalton:** The risks are high - but so are (the) hopes.

**Isha Clarke:** Our task is to fuel our fear into passion and determination. There is no other option but to win this fight.

**Greg Dalton:** The Year in Climate Conversations. Up next on Climate One.

---

**Greg Dalton:** Climate One conversations feature oil companies and environmentalists, Republicans and Democrats, the exciting and the scary aspects of the climate challenge. I'm Greg Dalton. On this special episode we look back at the climate stories of 2019 by listening to excerpts from a year of

conversations - beginning in a US Senator's office.

[Start Playback]

**Isha Clarke:** Our earth is dying literally. And it is going to be a pricey and ambitious plan that is needed to deal with the magnitude of that issue. And so we're here asking you to vote yes on the resolution for the Green New Deal because that is the only way that can work --

**Dianne Feinstein:** That resolution will not pass the Senate. And you can take that back to whoever senator here.

**Isha Clarke:** Why do you think it won't pass?

**Dianne Feinstein:** I'm telling you because it doesn't have a single Republican vote.

[End Playback]

**Greg Dalton:** That's Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein talking to Isha Clarke, a high school student and activist in Oakland, California, who was confronting the Senator over the Green New Deal. That video went viral and later Isha described how it unfolded starting with a rally in the street outside the senator's office in San Francisco.

**Isha Clarke:** There was a crowd of about 100 people very lively, very passionate and I spoke and it was great. And there were some kids or youth activists, excuse me, from -- very important, from Bay Area Earth Guardian's crew who wanted to present a letter that they had written to Sen. Feinstein and they invited all the young people who were there to go out and present the letter. And just for some reason she happened to be in her San Francisco office that day and they invited us up after some pushback and here you have the renowned Sen. Feinstein interaction.

**Greg Dalton:** Senator Feinstein issued a tweet a statement thereafter saying I want the children from the Sunrise Movement to know they were heard loud and clear. I've been and remain committed to doing everything I can to enact real meaningful climate change legislation. So Isha Clarke, tell us what it was like to go stand there toe to toe with a political legend in California.

**Isha Clarke:** It was, you know, I think for me it was less about the actual interaction and what happened after that then what happened after that. There was I felt accountability to what just happened and for me as a young person as a person of color I'm kind of used to people talking to me like that, let's just be real. And so when I was in that interaction I didn't really recognize how disturbing it was until I saw that the video hits 10 million views on Twitter and was all over CNN and all over the news. And for me it was really powerful to have my voice become such an important way in politics and media. And I think the conversation now isn't really about Sen. Feinstein anymore and it's really about politicians in general and power holders in general, who aren't and haven't been taking the necessary steps to reverse this climate crisis.

**Greg Dalton:** You've also said that Sen. Feinstein learned and gained some respect for you. How do you think it affected her?

**Isha Clarke:** You know, I hope that all that is true and but, you know, the reality is that I don't really know how she responded to the interaction and I would love to have a conversation with her if she's willing about next steps proceed in a more productive manner. I hope that in watching the reaction of that interaction she like you said learn from it and realized the power of her voice, especially to young people to the future generations. And though she's been an extremely powerful force in American politics that there are still things that she could have done and she didn't or, you

know, and that goes for her peers as well. And so I think that conversation needs to be had about holding our politicians even who were powerful people accountable because there's always something more that can be done.

**Greg Dalton:** How did this sudden fame affect you. You were on Amy Goodman which is like wow, you know, how do this being suddenly I mean you're a junior in high school being thrust into this national spotlight. What was that like?

**Isha Clarke:** It was crazy. I mean I know I'm dope I love myself and I love -- it was so, thank you, it was really cool to have Amy Goodman in my earpiece that was crazy. And, you know, getting all of this attention and I'm just a kid from Oakland and now I'm like on national news and some people know who my name is and are like listing it next to AOC, like that's crazy. But, I think that for me what was important from that wasn't my fame but my new platform. And like that I can actually use my voice in a way that is impacting people who can make real policy change can make the change that I've been wanting for so long. And so I just feel grateful to be able to have had and hopefully continue to have the spotlight to have my voice heard in a way that's really impactful and meaningful.

**Greg Dalton:** You say that respect is very important to you, you take it to every place you go and yet there you were kind of interrupting a senator. How do you challenge power by being respectful? Is there a contradiction can you do both?

**Isha Clarke:** You know, I think that truth is respectful and that you can speak truth in a way that is compassionate and authentic and to me that is respect. And you know, I recognize that she is a well-respected politician she is an elder in the community and that I was to address her accordingly. But at the same time I felt a responsibility to tell her the truth and to bring the truth to her and that if she was gonna ignore the truth that I had to continue to push my voice and to make sure that my voice was being heard in a space that she was trying to bring that down in.

---

**Greg Dalton:** Oakland student activist Isha Clarke, who gained fame in earlier this year for a viral video in which she and other youth activists confront Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein over the Green New Deal. That resolution, co-sponsored by New York representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Massachusetts senator Ed Markey, is largely responsible for the greater focus on climate this election cycle. Last spring I spoke to Senator Markey, a 73-year-old member of the Democratic establishment, and asked him what it was like working on the Green New Deal with AOC, who is challenging the party's status quo and at 30 is young enough to be his granddaughter.

**Ed Markey:** We share a passion to create a movement which is going to change the relationship between the American people and the fossil fuel industry their power, their money, their ability to distort what happens in Washington just has to change. And so what Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez and I agreed upon in introducing the Green New Deal was that we were going to try to lift the gaze of Americans to the constellation of possibilities in terms of deploying clean energy technologies, creating millions of jobs. And finally once and for all wresting the power in Washington away from the fossil fuel industry and their control over the climate agenda for the planet.

**Greg Dalton:** Though there's some resistance coming from within your own party. Barney Frank, longtime progressive colleague of yours, said the Green New Deal was a loser in 2020 and said that society could only absorb so much change it wants. What do you say to that, that this is too ambitious?

**Ed Markey:** Well, the polling says that climate along with healthcare is now at the top of the interest especially of democratic primary voters in our country. And I think that what we're going to find is that it's becoming a voting issue. The intensity level is very high and that increasingly Republicans are going to understand that they are going to vote against the solar and wind and all electric vehicle revolution at their own political peril. So I think there's something very special that's happening we can see it especially in young people at the high school and college level. We can see it all around the world actually millions of young people are now marching. It has an intensity that I think is going to make a big, big difference in the 2020 election cycle.

**Greg Dalton:** What's your plan for the Green New Deal, is it to lay foundation to develop policies so obviously nothing's going to happen with a climate denier in the White House. What's your plan for the next couple years what are you trying to do?

**Ed Markey:** Well you are right. The denier in chief is sitting in the White House he says that it's a Chinese hoax. So politically, we could hope that he could change his mind in the next year and a half, but it's more likely he's going to continue to try to use the remaining 50,000 coal miners in America as a proxy for how he fights for blue-collar workers in our country. And we care about those coal miners and we want to ensure that there is a just transition for them. But at the same time what we're going to do is make the case that we've already created 350,000 wind and solar jobs, that there are millions of clean energy jobs writ large already in our economy and that there are millions more to be created, and that the economic argument is absolutely overwhelming and the moral imperative is equally compelling. So I feel very confident that if we are more aggressive if we lean into the issue if we're willing to stand up and fight for it, all across the country on campuses out at town meetings in the suburbs there are people now rising up who weren't there in 2016 who are going to make the voting difference in the next election.

**Greg Dalton:** Who on the Republican side do you see as parties that you can deal with on this issue. A lot of the moderates are gone, Carlos Curbelo, who started the Climate Solutions Caucus, lost to a Democrat, Lamar Alexander introduced an R&D Bill, but he also heaped ridicule on the Green New Deal, he is a moderate. Do you have people on the other side that even perhaps privately you think you can do business with on climate?

**Ed Markey:** Well, some Republicans are bringing out old ideas for more incentives for nuclear power and carbon capture and sequestration. But, we've yet to hear people say that they would support permanent tax breaks for wind, and solar and for all electric vehicles and for battery and storage technology. So we haven't heard that yet. So only at that point, you know, is it reasonable to say that Republicans are moving towards a position where we can put together a bipartisan bill that would in fact make a meaningful difference in terms of reducing greenhouse gases.

---

**Greg Dalton:** U.S. Senator Ed Markey, one of the co-sponsors of the Green New Deal. You're listening to a Year of Climate One conversations. Coming up, we'll hear more about the prospects for bipartisan progress on climate.

**Carlos Curbelo:** We went from having 4 or 5 Republicans in the house who are even willing to acknowledge this issue to having 45 join the Climate Solutions Caucus acknowledge that this is a real threat and that the government has a role in solving it.

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next - when Climate One continues.

---

**Greg Dalton:** We continue now with a look back at A Year of Climate One Conversations. I'm Greg Dalton. David Gergen is a political analyst and former presidential adviser who served in the administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. When we spoke earlier this year, I asked him what changes he's seen in the politics around climate following the 2018 midterm elections.

**David Gergen:** Well I think the politics have changed dramatically. If you look at both parties they have not taken in the presidential elections in the past they have not taken climate as seriously as they might to our, I think everybody surprise. As I recall in the debates of 2016 with Hillary and Trump, I'm not sure that anybody ever asked them a climate question. I think of that, there were like three debates and nobody asked the question. And now it's not always on top of mind, but it certainly mostly on the top of mind for Americans. I think that's a significant part because of these storms and fires and what people have seen. Almost every American now has a friend who's been affected.

**Greg Dalton:** So it's on the agenda, you know, some people might say also it's Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who's been a vehicle for that. How do you see this playing out from now. Democrats don't really agree on how ambitious to be and what's the Republican alternative.

**David Gergen:** Well it seems to me Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has great heightened interest and heightened focus on climate and you have to give her credit for that. I do think there's a danger for the Democratic Party if it embraces the entire Green New Deal in all of its glory. Because it's about much more than climate, it's also about transforming our society and the equity and dealing with the inequities in our society. All of which is to be appreciated, but if you adopt that as your platform as opposed to your aspirations you don't have to tell people how you're gonna pay for it. And that is so mind blowing I think the Democratic Party has been wise, I think Nancy Pelosi has been wise to focus on the climate aspects of the plan and not on the other the rest of it into a secondary category or on the back burner as they sometime say in politics. But to focus on what we need to do by 2025 or within a 20-year period whether we can get back into Paris and whether we can look at something like the Baker-Shultz plan. There are other alternatives now which I think need to be on the public agenda to debate.

**Greg Dalton:** Some people environmental justice advocates would hear that and say, oh you're asking for us to wait again as we so often do. While the affluent people, coastal people solve their concerns and the people of color have to take a backseat again. And I think some environmental justice advocates I've interviewed would say, we're not gonna take a backseat in the green economy like we did in the brown economy.

**David Gergen:** With all due respect, I don't think people are living in California who got chased out of their homes many of them died were elites. The people in Iowa who are farming along the Missouri river where the walls are crumbling, and the water is flooding the states. These are not, you know, elites I don't think the question is the elites versus everybody else. The question is what can we do rapidly that would alleviate this and be fair to all. And obviously that includes people who are living in urban areas that are, you know, like in Flint, Michigan and we have to deal with that as well. But you have to be realistic about how are you gonna pay for things. And if you want to do Medicare for all, you want to have free college for everybody and you want to do all these climate issues. If you don't have priorities you get nothing done. Let's take it one step at a time and get it done. We've been arguing and arguing everybody knows the Republicans have been hopelessly dismissive of science. We need the country to come together and do some serious things in the next four years or it's gonna be too late.

**Greg Dalton:** So some combination of the Green New Deal and the Baker-Shultz plan something --

**David Gergen:** Yeah, something, certainly green. I am not quite sure of the new deal part, that's what I'm questioning. Because I think it's, you know, these are aspirationally terrific but the planet is burning up. And listen, this is an international concern now it has risen not just on the U.S. but we are seeing the rest of the world increasingly is holding things up. I was in Davos in Switzerland this January for the world economic forum. They take an annual survey with CEOs from all over the world, lot of heavyweights come there. And they take survey about what are your biggest concerns. For four years in a row it has been the climate. Number one concern of CEOs and others around the world. And very importantly if you look at the top five concerns of people in Davos this year, four of them were about climate and the environment. This is a deep-seated response to an accumulating problem. I just can't tell you -- when historians look back if we're not careful, the Trump saga is gonna be like a little footnote. And the bigger story is going to be where in the hell were you people when the world was threatened that way.

---

**Greg Dalton:** Former presidential advisor and CNN commentator David Gergen on climate politics, public opinion, and the Republican party. Today's US EPA has been pursuing a different set of priorities than it did under previous administrations, including Republican ones. At his Senate confirmation hearings, the current EPA administrator, Andrew Wheeler, said that climate change was not the greatest risk facing humanity, but somewhere around an eight or nine on a scale of 10. When I spoke with him earlier this year, I asked what the current administration is doing to address a challenge of that scale.

**Andrew Wheeler:** We're moving forward with our ACE proposal, the Affordable Clean Energy Act, which will reduce CO2 from the electric power segment. We're also moving forth our Cafe Standard, which will also reduce CO2. On the ACE Proposal, it's projected to get 33 to 34 percent reduction in CO2 in the electric power sector over the life of the regulation.

**Greg Dalton:** Though I think there was a Harvard study that questioned whether that will really reduce reductions, reduce CO2 compared to the Obama Clean Power Plan, which I think that's trying to replace.

**Andrew Wheeler:** Well, you got to remember the Obama Clean Power Plan never took effect. It was stayed by the Supreme Court because, in my opinion, it went outside of the Clean Air Act. It's really hard to compare apples and oranges when you have a regulation that was never implemented outside the jurisdiction of the agency and the outside of the authority of the Clean Air Act versus a proposed regulation that follows the law, follows the Supreme Court precedents, and will reduce CO2.

**Greg Dalton:** A lot of this was really about coal. Coal production, coal capacity in the United States is down about a third from 2010. Banks, insurance companies, hedge funds are all moving away from coal, as you well know. Do you really think that that easing regulations on coal will help bring back an industry that's in decline for lots of reasons?

**Andrew Wheeler:** I think the important thing here is that we're not tipping the scales. The Obama Administration tipped the scales away from coal. It's not the job of the EPA, the authority of the EPA to pick winners and losers between the different fuel sources. That would be either Department of Energy or FERC, or even more likely, the state PUCs. Our job is to set the regulations that govern the industry, and that's what we're doing, and it's, and we believe we have a responsible regulation that will reduce CO2 in the electrical power segment, following both the Clean Air Act and the Massachusetts versus EPA decision.

**Greg Dalton:** There was an effort to require utilities to stockpile a bunch of coal, which even the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission didn't go there. That seems like a pretty clear effort to help coal by requiring power plants tends to stockpile coal

**Andrew Wheeler:** That is outside of the authority of the EPA, and I know the Department of Energy and FERC were looking into those issues. As far as their authorities are concerned, I think it's important to make sure that we have a balance of fuel sources in order to make sure that we have electric power for everyone across the country. But again, that's not the role of the EPA. Under the Obama Administration, the EPA really took that on as their role, which is not what the pavers set up to do.

**Greg Dalton:** And what is the way, if you say climate change is an eight or a nine, I heard you talk about the clean energy plan. What are the other ways to tackle climate change? Because we're seeing storms, fires and deaths in California. Storms are more severe. It's getting very expensive.

**Andrew Wheeler:** It is a global issue. It's a global problem that needs to be addressed globally but not through a mechanism such as the Paris Climate Accord, which is really unfair to the United States, United States manufacturers, and United States citizens compared to the people who live in China or India or other countries. If you're going to address it, it has to be done globally. But also equally important is looking at adaptation and making sure that when a natural disaster strikes that we rebuild in order to sustain a larger storm surge. As far as the California fires, I believe the unofficial name is Little Hoover Institute here in California. The draft of the report based upon the fires, and they blame the, the forest management practices of the last hundred years more than climate change. I think it's important not to lose sight of that aspect because we really do need to have better forest management in order to stop the wild destructive fires that we've seen in recent years.

**Greg Dalton:** There's forest management. I've interviewed some of the firefighters it's high winds, hot temperatures, a lot of fuel, low precipitation, lots of things kind of combined, no single factor.

**Andrew Wheeler:** But we can't say that this was just because of climate change, which a number of people try to do.

**Greg Dalton:** Sure. But would you say that it's amplified or turbo charged by, but not caused by? Anyone of Barry Bonds' home runs-

**Andrew Wheeler:** How do you define turbo charge? It's a factor.

Dalton: Right? We say here in San Francisco that we know that you can't attribute any one of Barry Bonds home runs to juicing, but we know that some of those 750 home runs wouldn't have happened without steroids. Last word in terms of, going forward, do you feel a sense of urgency on climate change or is this something that technology will solve and we have time to work on?

**Andrew Wheeler:** I have a lot of faith in technology. When I said at my hearing that climate change is not the biggest crisis we faced worldwide on the environmental side, I think our biggest crisis is on water and potable water, and the fact that we have a million children and people dying each year from lack of sanitary ...

**Greg Dalton:** Clean drinking water.

**Andrew Wheeler:** Clean drinking water. Right, exactly. I think that is a huge crisis. If we spent a fraction of what we're spending on climate change to provide those people with safe drinking water. We'd be saving a million lives a year. that is a crisis today.--

---

**Greg Dalton:** US EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler. You're listening to a Year of Climate One Conversations. I'm Greg Dalton. Despite the fossil fuel-heavy policies of the current administration, some Republicans have gotten out ahead of their party on climate. Carlos Curbelo was the U.S. representative for Florida's 26th congressional district from 2015 to 2019. While serving in the House he co-founded the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus. He told a Climate One audience that for the South Florida community he represented, the issue was very close to home.

**Carlos Curbelo:** In my community an area that is at about sea level and where most people live near the sea. The threat is real, it's imminent we get tidal flooding, our drinking water supply is threatened by saltwater intrusion. So that's why I decided to get involved. In 2015, when I got to Congress with Ryan, there were maybe three or four Republicans in the house who were even willing to acknowledge climate change this reality that we're facing. And having a lot of one-on-one conversations and starting the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus which was the first of its kind an effort to establish a dialogue and then cooperation between Republicans and Democrats in Congress. We really started changing things. So I think we bottomed out at least when it comes to Congress in 2014, '15. I think things are headed in the right direction now we just need to accelerate the process because time is running out.

**Greg Dalton:** Right. And Carlos Curbelo, we often talk about, oh, we can't do this fix because it will cost too much. But people don't think about the cost of not fixing it, right. We had Harvey, Maria, Irma, Midwest floods oh yeah Florence in the Carolinas and I mean we're up over \$100 billion in damages for these things not entirely caused by climate but partly. So how do you address the cost of inaction and the cost of action. Because it's always the cost of action that seems to be too much.

**Carlos Curbelo:** Right. And that's because well there's a natural disaster Congress just pass as a supplemental bill and then that solves everything. But a lot of people don't realize we're paying for that. I mean those are resources that we won't be able to use either today or in the future on education on transportation and all the other national priorities. So I would spend a lot of time in my district just educating voters. And I think everyone in elected office needs to educate voters and those of us who care about this issue, activists as well. We need to spend time educating voters with the mindset that we're trying to convince them not lecture them or shame them. Because I think that's the most effective way to bring people to our side and your--

**Greg Dalton:** Do you think Democrats do that sometimes?

**Carlos Curbelo:** Well, look, with all of these controversial issues everyone has a choice, right. We can either exploit the issue for maximum political benefit or we can work toward solutions. But that doesn't mean you can't do both, because obviously come campaign season there are contrasts to be drawn but I think especially after campaigns we need to find ways to work together. And the truth is, of course Republicans are responsible because for two decades they just balked on the issue completely, but in some ways I think Democrats and some liberal groups have been complicit because they've doubled down on this dynamic in our country, where Republicans don't want to be part of the solution, don't want to have a conversation. And Democrats want to own the issue entirely. We live in a country where the founding fathers established the government that's designed to work by consensus. And what I tried to do during my four years in Congress is to try to build out that coalition from the middle out. I think we made a lot of progress we went from having 4 or 5 Republicans in the house who are even willing to acknowledge this issue to having 45 join the Climate Solutions Caucus acknowledge that this is a real threat and that the government has a role in solving it.



**Greg Dalton:** So the Climate Solutions Caucus, 21 of the Republicans did not return from 18 to 19, 13 of them lost. So, you know, that caucus that you built has been pretty well damaged now. No new Democrats can join. Republicans can join. So, is all the wind out of the sails of that, you kind of built this coalition and now a lot of them got blown out in the midterms?

**Carlos Curbelo:** Well, certainly lot of Republicans retired and others were defeated in 2018. But the ones that remain I think there are 23 Republicans still in the caucus are recruiting new members. And although it's an option to abandon the Noah's Ark rule, I don't think we should do it. The Noah's Ark rule for those who have no idea what I'm talking about and are thinking, you know, back thousands of years ago. It just means that to join the caucus if you are a Republican, you needed to find a Democrat who would join with you. If you are a Democrat, you needed to find a Republican. And let me tell you I think that was the best thing we did because that sparked hundreds of casual conversations between Republicans and Democrats about this issue. Now of course a lot of people wouldn't join but they were kind of forced to have a dialogue to explain to their colleagues why they would join or not join. And of course many of them ended up joining. And again, we all put our jerseys on come campaign season, but I think if we are going to address these big challenges, climate change, I think being the greatest one our country faces, we need to have these conversations, we need to create healthy political environments where these solutions can get done.

**Greg Dalton:** Carlos Curbelo, Republican representative for Florida's 26th congressional district from 2015 to 2019. Though Curbelo may have lost his seat, more and more Republicans are finding that they ignore the topic of climate change at their peril. Meanwhile, Democrats trying to capture their party's presidential nomination, are competing for the boldest plan, to invest in clean energy and confront the climate challenge. Washington Governor Jay Inslee created a foundation for many of those plans until dropping out of the race in August. The mantle of "climate candidate" then was taken up by billionaire activist Tom Steyer.

---

**Tom Steyer:** If you think about actually dealing with climate in the real world it's a global problem. If we do a perfect job in the United States on January 21, 2021, the day the new president is sworn in it's not nearly enough. You know if you look at what we have to do we have to lead a coalition of countries around the world to solve this problem. And the question is why would they ever listen to the United States of America unless we've got our house in order. It's an emergency treat it like an emergency. It's got to be people based. Every single thing that I've learned over the last 10 years about running propositions and getting votes about coming up with fair policies about putting together any kind of responsible Democratic coalition involves being a grassroots oriented movement. And so if you're not doing that in my mind you're gonna have the wrong policy and you're not gonna win. And so if you're just talking about the United States and policies that you hope to get voted in at some point in the future, I don't think that's nearly enough to be honest, Greg.

**Greg Dalton:** You talk about pragmatism what can get done and the Green New Deal. Some people even on the left have criticized the Green New Deal for being fuzzy, overly ambitious. And so is the Green New Deal -- first of all, it's a resolution, it's aspirational it's not a bill they're not specifics there. You think you can get something that big through that fast?

**Tom Steyer:** So I don't how many of the people in the audience or the people listening have actually read the Green New Deal proposal. It's about five pages. It's very broad and I think that's

absolutely appropriate. If you're talking about rebuilding and changing the economy then you have to understand it's not a siloed policy issue it's something that goes across issues and that touches many different parts of the economy in the country. And I think the Green New Deal fits the answer to the scope of the problem. I think it's very responsible in the way that it addresses this problem broadly and I'm a big fan of it. It is just a proposal and a guideline but I think that it got a lot of attention in a very good way and it was vilified by the right-wing press, you know, the Fox News' of the world the Breitbarts that exaggerated what it was to try and make it seem like something that it isn't. It's actually a very responsible and thoughtful document that I think push this debate forward in many ways. I'm a big fan.

**Greg Dalton:** And one thing that the Green New Deal that other green plans didn't do is it addressed some issues of capitalism, wealth distribution, jobs, etc. Do you really think that that is at the root of it because some people would say, hey, climate's so big and serious and urgent let's tackle that and we'll get to some of those other things later. Because we can't do it all at once our nation can only absorb so much change at once. So can you address capitalism and climate at the same time?

**Tom Steyer:** Well, I think that if you're talking about rebuilding the United States, you're gonna have to put that I mean in our plan it's \$2 trillion of government money over 10 years, plus a bunch of regulations and rules like building codes like EV requirements like the renewable portfolio. So changing the way we do business broadly in this country so that the \$2 trillion of expenditure by the government will be dwarfed by how much the private sector spent. So if you're going to do that, you're gonna rebuild this country. I think it's important to reflect on how that's gonna be done in a fair way and in a way that will make us richer, better employed grow faster be healthier. As a businessperson I can tell you the common response of people who are trying to deny climate and prevent progress is to say we have a choice between a healthy economy and a healthy environment and that is an absolute lie. That's a false choice. We're gonna have a healthier economy and a healthier environment and we proved that years ago and talked about it here. If you look at the cost of renewables versus the cost of fossil fuels on a per kilowatt hour basis, renewables are cheaper than fossil fuels and will continue to get cheaper. So when people talk about oh, it's gonna be bad for the economy because the cost of energy will be higher the opposite is true. We can create lower-cost energy without even talking about the health costs of old-fashioned pollution from coal or the climate cost of the pollution of putting CO2 in the atmosphere.

---

**Greg Dalton:** Democratic presidential candidate Tom Steyer speaking at Climate One earlier this year. You're listening to a Year of Climate Conversations. Coming up, assessing the risks and finding hope.

**Katherine Hayhoe:** We view the solutions as a greater threat than the impacts whereas in actual fact it's exactly the opposite. There are many beneficial solutions that can increase the quality of life but the impacts are here today and they're bad.

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next when Climate One continues.

---

**Greg Dalton:** You're listening to A Year of Climate One Conversations. I'm Greg Dalton. Climate gentrification can turn a city's poorest neighborhoods into some of the most desirable real estate

around. As people are attracted to areas of lower vulnerability, property developers see an opportunity. Earlier this year we spoke to Valencia Gunder, a community organizer and climate educator in Miami, where the billion-dollar Magic City project is threatening to transform the neighborhood of Little Haiti. She told us about the very real effects of climate gentrification felt by Miami's poorer communities. To see the impacts first-hand, Valencia took me out for a walking tour of Little Haiti.

**Valencia Gunder:** So right now we're at Northeast 2nd Avenue in 59th Street in Little Haiti which is like Little Haiti's downtown. We're standing right in front of the Caribbean Marketplace which is attached to Little Haiti's Arts Center. It's surrounded by Haitian business, small business and things like that. Colorful.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah.

**Valencia Gunder:** You can hear the Caribbean music, you can smell the Caribbean food. You see the Caribbean folks here being great.

**Greg Dalton:** So we're looking at some storefronts recently closed storefronts. What are they, what used to be there what happened?

**Valencia Gunder:** So they were small businesses, Haitian owned businesses that used to be there. A few months ago they were all evicted at the same time. They all closed their doors in the same day. They try to fight it as a community, the community tried to step up but it just could not do it because the building is actually owned by somebody else. They can't afford to stay there and quite honestly, these new developers and investors don't want those types of restaurants or businesses in their community now. But that's just something that the people of Little Haiti or just communities of color come to Little Haiti for in the first place, right. The culture, the fact that we can get Haitian food here, get Haitian culture here and honestly, they are taking it away, they are stripping it away so Little Haiti won't even be Little Haiti anymore. Because all of the businesses are leaving and all the culture is leaving and all the residents are leaving. So what's happening is we're starting to see transients, Northeastern folks moving down to Miami. We're starting to see a lot of tech industry coming to Miami we're starting to see a lot of people from the beach come over to Little Haiti and they are actually whitewashing the culture and communities like Little Haiti. Because there's no Little Haiti unless you have Haitian people with Haitian culture. So they are literally wiping it away little bit by little bit by displacing the business owners and the residents.

**Greg Dalton:** Valencia Gunder, a climate change educator and founder of Make the Homeless Smile in South Miami. Even for people who are not directly threatened by rising seas, climate change is shrinking the livable world. In his 2019 book, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, author David Wallace-Wells describes how he became aware - and afraid - of what humankind is doing to itself.

**David Wallace-Wells:** I'm 36 years old I was raised mostly in the '90s, I came of age in the '90s is I have a kind of very end of history perspective on the future. I thought, you know, I knew that markets were imperfect and globalization was imperfect. And, you know, the future was not going to be endless bounty for everyone on earth. But I also felt that we could probably count on it getting better and I thought that climate change was going to be part of that story that it was an issue it was a major issue but also one that was within our power to address and control. And that probably the leaders that we had would be responsible enough to take care of it. I also felt that the story was a long one. I had sort of been led to believe like I think a lot of us that climate change is a really slow moving phenomenon and that meant that we didn't need to take dramatic action quickly. We could develop our way out of the problem we could invent our way out of the problem. When I realized

just a year or two ago that, you know, half of all of the emissions that we put into the atmosphere in the entire history of humanity have been put into that atmosphere the last 30 years that really, really opened my eyes. It made me think this is not something that will unfold in the lifetime of my grandchildren. It something that's unfolding in my lifetime in fact, has already unfolded in my lifetime. When I was born the planet's climate was relatively stable scientists were worried about the long-term but in the near-term things were okay. We're now in a situation where we're basically face-to-face with real climate catastrophe and that is because of what's been done just in 30 years. The next 30 they promised to be just as consequential. And we could in those 30 years choose to take a path that produces some incredibly terrifying depressing punishing climate impacts or one that allows us to avoid at least most of those impacts and secure a kind of more fulfilling and prosperous and just future for ourselves and our children. And the scale of that story remains astonishing and kind of invigorating to me as a storyteller, it's an epic saga. It's the kind of thing that we only use to see in mythology and theology. We really do have the fate of the world and the species in our hands and each of us who's alive today is a protagonist in that story making choices political and otherwise they're going to determine that future. That's just incredible drama. And so in addition to fear I was sort of woken up by the sense of the scale of that story. And as a storyteller the need to share the sense of drama with, you know, any reader who would have been basically.

**Greg Dalton:** So your book is heavy-duty and you write it, it's a synthesis it looks like kind of the second half of the bell curve kind of the more damaging perhaps less probable outcomes. How do you sit with that and hold that darkness without getting sucked into it. Because I've seen people like I would say, you know, Jim Hansen spent so much time looking at dark models that he kind of got, he got pretty dark and dour himself. How do you prevent yourself from being consumed by the darkness that you're trying to share with us?

**David Wallace-Wells:** Yeah, I mean part of it is living myself a bit in denial and in complacency and compartmentalization. I think probably that's gonna be a human response to this kind of suffering no matter how much of it unfolds, which is a tragedy and something we should fight against. But I also think it's in ways kind of inevitable. But, you know, I also try to remember that as horrifying as some of these really climate impacts could be, you know, if we end up on the track we're on at the end of the century we could have twice as much war as we have today. We could have agricultural yields that are half as bountiful as the ones that we have today trying to feed 50% more people. We could have a global GDP that's 30% smaller than it would be without climate change it's an impact as twice as deep as the Great Depression it will be permanent. All these places in the world would be hit by six climate driven natural disasters at once. Climate refugees in the hundreds of millions, perhaps in the billions according to the U.N. Those impacts are horrifying they can sound and seem paralyzing. But I also try to remember that they are ultimately a reflection of our power over the climate because the main thing that's driving climate change is human action it's how much carbon we put into the atmosphere. We have our hands on those levers. If it is possible to get to that quite hellish 4 degree scenario that we're on track for that is just a sign of how in control of the climate we are. And therefore how much we could conceivably choose a different path should we want to. Now, there are a lot of political obstacle social obstacles cultural obstacles that would prevent us from making different choices rapidly and really avoiding all of those outcomes. But I think we fall into a trap when we think of this story as being beyond our control something that's unfolding without our input. The only thing that's actually driving it is our input. And, you know, that leads us to some complicated questions about who we are and what our inputs are and who's making these decisions and, you know, again those are really complicated questions. But pulling back and adopting a kind of global perspective. If we find ourselves living in a climate dystopia it will be because of human action. And to me that's an argument for more action in the other direction now. And ultimately it's a kind of perversely empowering perspective.

**Greg Dalton:** David Wallace-Wells, author of *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, speaking at Climate One earlier this year. As his book makes clear, the risks of inaction on climate are high, which can lead to a paralyzing fear. What's needed, according to climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe, is rational hope - rational in understanding the magnitude of the problem but hopeful in being motivated by the vision of a better future. Katharine is Director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University and winner of last year's Stephen H. Schneider Award for Outstanding Science Communication. At the ceremony on the Climate One stage, she addressed some of the biggest myths about climate change.

---

**Katharine Hayhoe:** The biggest myth that the largest number of people have bought into people who disagree with the science people who agree with the science is the myth that the impacts don't matter to me they're about future generations or the polar bear or people who live far away, but the solutions do matter to me and I don't like them. They are gonna disrupt my comfortable life they're gonna be unpleasant, they may even be punitive, they could ruin the economy, next thing you know the government is gonna be setting my thermostat. So we view the solutions as a greater threat than the impacts whereas in actual fact it's exactly the opposite. There are many beneficial solutions that can increase the quality of life but the impacts are here today and they're bad.

**Greg Dalton:** And you also talk about this fact, I don't know post fact world, climate there's lots of facts flying back and forth and talk about the importance of facts and identity.

**Katharine Hayhoe:** So when you ask people do you agree with the simple fact that climate is changing, humans are responsible and the impacts are serious. The number one predictor of whether people will agree with those facts -- the scientific facts that we've known that date back to the 1850s -- it's not how much education people have it's not how much they know about the science it's not how smart they are. Actually the smarter we are the better we are at cherry picking information to validate our pre-existing opinions.

**Greg Dalton:** Lot of deniers are highly intelligent.

**Katharine Hayhoe:** Yup. The single most important predictor is simply where we fall on the political spectrum. So it has become a matter of identity to say, oh, I don't agree with all that stuff. And that's why again it's so important to begin our conversations with identity, with a value, with the part of people's identity that they already have that is good that we can honestly at least admire if not actually agree with and share. And then from that position of shared values, walk together connecting the dots to why since we are both the type of person who cares about -- we could both be hunters or birders or hikers. You live in the same place or you care about your kids or, you know, you served in the Armed Forces or you go to a similar type of church. There's a million points of connection that you could have, the point is making that shared connection first and then walking together to connect the dots to why both of you, because you are that same type of person who shares that same interest or value, would naturally care about the changing climate.

**Greg Dalton:** Katharine Hayhoe, a lot of the climate conversation you mentioned earlier that the government is gonna set my thermostat, a lot of the conversation people feel bad because of what they eat or what they drive. So get us to the shame and should part of the climate conversation which I think is a real hangup for a lot of people.

**Katharine Hayhoe:** Oh yeah. I mean, I have talked to a farmer in West Texas who thinks it's all natural cycle but he look at me and he'll say, I know I drive a big truck but I need the truck. So even still, we have the sense of we're using these resources. I was at a meeting once with other faith

leaders and I'll never forget one of the people in the room turned to everybody else and he said, you know, every time you turn on a car you're sinning. And you know how that made me feel? I wanted to go find the biggest Hummer I could and just turn it on and just drive circles around them. Because I was like okay, so I got here to this meeting you're saying that was a sin. I live in a place where there's no public transport so going to work is a sin. My child is sick, I take him to the hospital that's a sin. Thank you very much. It was the most frustrating and infuriating reaction and that made me realize wow that's what we all feel when we're told you can't do this you shouldn't do this, you're a bad person for that. And so I really appreciate that you asked the question and we even have a Global Weirding video specifically about this the question about fossil fuels. And I would just like to say I am grateful for fossil fuels. I would not be here today if it were not for fossil fuels. Fossil fuels freed women from unspeakable drudgery, fossil fuels actually helped end slavery in this country and fossil fuels brought us all the benefits of modern life that we enjoy today. But just like a child that grows beyond formula in the same way we too are already growing and must grow even faster beyond fossil fuels and we can do so because of the benefits that they brought us.

**Greg Dalton:** Katharine another part of the climate conversation is voluntary virtuous restraint. Less meat, less air travel, a little more of this, is that gonna get us there, is that necessary and sufficient or is that kind of are we deluding ourselves if we think that going vegan is gonna create the kind of change on the scale is required?

**Katharine Hayhoe:** No, it won't. And a very distant second after people who don't accept the climate, science of climate change very distant second the most amount of attacks I get on social media are from vegans who think that it will solve the climate crisis and they don't like it when I say I actually crunched the numbers on methane emissions and it won't. Does that mean it's pointless? No, it doesn't mean it's pointless. In fact individually, depending on our lifestyles for many of us the most important thing we can do is eat lower down the food chain, reduce food waste, look at plant-based diet. But individual choices are not gonna fix this thing depending on how you crunch the numbers individual choices are only gonna take a 30% maybe max 40% of the way there. The bottom line is we have to completely change the way our entire society gets its energy from fossil fuels. And that means that every option has to be on the table. It is not I will do only this and this will fix the world. There is no I will do only this. And so that's why one of my personal favorite encouraging resources is Project Drawdown. They said correctly there's no silver bullet but there's a lot of silver buckshot. And they went through and they listed a hundred different solutions and some of these solutions are very surprising. Reducing food waste is near the top because we throw a third of our food away. Well you know that's something that's pretty simple that I can do personally in my life but I can also advocate for it in the community. Education of women and girls of course is one of my absolute favorites on the list. There's a lot of smart soil management, putting carbon back in the soil, smart agricultural practices. And so getting back to your original question. In our community we fly a lot for most of us the biggest part of our carbon footprint is flying and so there's, you know, flying less, don't fly. I said, you know what, I'm not about less I'm about smart. Let's eat smart, let's live smart let's travel smart let's get our energy in smart ways. Let's do this in a way that's better. It's not about returning ourselves voluntarily to medieval times, it's about moving forward into the future and to do so we have to do everything smarter. Not because we have to, but because we want to; because it really is better for us, it's better for our health it's better for our pocketbook it's better for the world too.

**Greg Dalton:** Katharine Hayhoe, Director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University.

**Greg Dalton:** To hear more Climate One conversations, subscribe to our podcast at our website: [climateone.org](https://climateone.org) or wherever you get your pods. We've been nominated for "Best Green Podcast" at the i-Heart Radio Podcast awards presented in Los Angeles in January. That's super cool. We want to thank you for your support and i-Heart Radio. Keep writing those reviews, they really do help.

**Greg Dalton:** A quick reminder that as a non-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals like you to produce these podcasts every week. We hope you'll consider making a tax deductible donation to support Climate One, which will be matched up to \$15,000. Please go to [climateone-dot-org-slash-donate](https://climateone-dot-org-slash-donate).

**Greg Dalton:** Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. Sara-Katherine Coxon is the strategy and content manager. The audio engineers are Mark Kirchner, Justin Norton, and Arnav Gupta. Devon Strolovitch edited the program. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, where our program originates. [pause] I'm Greg Dalton.