

Lauren Vice

Oxford Scholars

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Climate Activism and Economics

As we quickly approach the 2020 Presidential Election, the issues Americans find most pressing to their country are being brought forth through each campaign and debate. The candidates continue to speak on policies regarding healthcare, immigration, human rights, and notably, climate change. Climate change is a primary topic due to the concurrent actions of the United Nations. Throughout the course of 2018 and 2019, the United Nations released their Climate Reports. Initiated by treaties such as the UN Climate Change and UN Development Programme, these are the, “Key reports on climate action, climate economics, and on issues that highlight climate impacts and solutions” (UN Climate Action). With the effects of climate change becoming more prevalent each day, it is only natural that it be greatly discussed campaign course.

Until he dropped out of the race, Governor Jay Inslee of Washington, was running a presidential campaign almost entirely based on climate policy. In fact, it was Inslee who suggested the Democratic National Committee (DNC) hold a primary debate solely for the climate change. While the DNC declined the offer, Inslee’s proposal sparked a discussion, one that is still alive even after Inslee’s dropping out.

While addressing climate change as a whole is the end goal, it is the economics of climate policy that lead to these tension filled debates. When politicians see climate action, they

either see money well spent or wasted. The Trump administration is displaying this very notion with every climate policy they create, and overturn. In fact, when they replaced Obama's previous Clean Power Plan - "would have reduced CO2 emissions from power generators by 32 percent compared to 2005 levels by 2030" (Kann) - they replaced it with *Affordable* Clean Energy rule. Although this rule could further damage the air quality and even deter human life, according to the EPA Administrator Andre Wheeler, it will give the coal-fueled power plants, "the regulatory certainty they need to continue to reduce emissions and provide affordable and reliable energy for all Americans" (Kann).

Climate change is however, so much more than economic policies. Over the past year climate activism has skyrocketed, especially among the youth. Young climate activists, such as 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, have been protesting through their youth-led organizations. Greta's organization, Fridays For Future, encourages students to strike from school and take to the streets and council buildings, demanding climate action. Other important organizations include, "Zero Hour, the U.S. Youth Climate Strike, and Sunrise Movement" (Ramadan).

Progressive politicians, including some in the running for president, are also creating new climate policies and treaties of their own. The Green New Deal, a climate resolution sponsored by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass, is a "plan to rapidly switch to clean energy to head off the worst projected effects of climate change" (Sarlin).

At the UN Climate Summit, held in New York on September 23rd, 2019, countries came together to discuss the promises made by world leaders, to reduce their carbon emissions by weaning off of fossil fuels. At this summit, "65 countries had announced efforts to achieve

net-zero emissions by 2050, several asset fund managers said they would aim to get to a net-zero portfolio of investments by the same year, and dozens of businesses said they would aim to abide by the Paris Agreement targets” (Sengupta).

Although many countries are working towards change, the US has only been rolling back on climate action, and has promised to pull out of the Paris Agreement. It is this very reason that the new candidates are promising more climate action. According to UN Climate Change, “The latest analysis shows that if we act now, we can reduce carbon emissions within 12 years and hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C and even, as asked by the latest science, to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (UN). The last four years have been the hottest ever recorded, entire ecosystems are dying, and ocean levels are rising. With the help of young activists, and politicians working towards cleaner policies, our country can come together to ensure the longevity of our planet.

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