

10 Principles for Just Climate Change Policies in the U.S.

The Environmental Justice movement has demonstrated that pollution's effects often fall disproportionately on the health of people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities. The effects of global climate change, which is caused in large part by fossil fuel emissions, are no exception. Climate change, in fact, could have broader and more severe impacts. For example, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities are the first to experience negative climate change impacts like heat death and illness, respiratory illness, infectious disease, and economic and cultural displacement. Climate policy must protect our most vulnerable communities.

Here are 10 PRINCIPLES FOR JUST CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES that will ensure the protection of our livelihoods:

1. Stop Cooking the Planet

Global climate change will accelerate unless we can slow the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. To protect vulnerable Americans, we must find alternatives for those human activities that cause global climate change.

2. Protect and Empower Vulnerable Individuals and Communities

Low-income workers, people of color, and Indigenous Peoples will suffer the most from climate change's impact. We need to provide opportunities to adapt and thrive in a changing world.

3. Ensure Just Transition for Workers and Communities

No group should have to shoulder alone the burdens caused by the transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to a renewable energy-based economy. A just transition would create opportunities for displaced workers and communities to participate in the new economic order through compensation for job loss, loss of tax base, and other negative effects.

4. Require Community Participation

At all levels and in all realms, people must have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Decisionmakers must include communities in the policy process. U.S. federal and state governments, recognizing their government-to-government relationship, must work with tribes as well.

5. Global Problems Need Global Solutions

The causes and effects of climate change occur around the world. Individuals, communities, and nations must work together cooperatively to stop global climate change.

6. The U.S. Must Lead

Countries that contribute the most to global warming should take the lead in solving the problem. The U.S. is four percent of the world's population but emits 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. All people should have equal rights to the atmosphere.

7. Stop Exploration for Fossil Fuels

Presently known fossil fuel reserves will last far into the future. Fossil fuel exploration destroys unique cultures and valuable ecosystems. Exploration should be halted as it is no longer worth the cost. We should instead invest in renewable energy sources.

8. Monitor Domestic and International Carbon Markets

We must ensure that carbon emissions and sinks markets are transparent and accountable, do not concentrate pollution in vulnerable communities, and avoid activities that harm the environment.

9. Caution in the Face of Uncertainty

No amount of action later can make up for lack of action today. Just as we buy insurance to protect against uncertain danger, we must take precautionary measures to minimize harm to the global climate before it occurs.

10. Protect Future Generations

The greatest impacts of climate change will come in the future. We should take into account the impacts on future generations in deciding policy today. Our children should have the opportunity for success through the sustainable use of resources.