



NEXTGEN CLIMATE

To: Anderson Cooper, CNN

From: Tom Steyer, President, NextGen Climate

CC: John Podesta, Chair, Hillary for America; David Hamrick, Campaign Manager, Martin O'Malley for President; Jeff Weaver, Campaign Manager, Bernie 2016; David Saunders, Advisor, Jim Webb 2016; Jerauld Adams, Treasurer, Chaffee 2016

Date: September 29, 2015

Subject: Climate Change, Clean Energy and the Democratic Primary Presidential Debate

Introduction

Last week, Pope Francis stood side by side with President Obama and told the American people, "climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to a future generation." Pope Francis' moving call to action capped off a remarkable year in which we've seen clean energy start to compete head-to-head with fossil fuels and our leaders take dramatic and substantive steps to cut carbon pollution and accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy.

Now, the key question is how will our next president build on this momentum—and set even more ambitious targets to tackle climate change head-on and accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy. Hillary Clinton, Martin O'Malley and Bernie Sanders have all recognized that climate change is an urgent threat to our economic and national security. They've all made clear that they oppose the Keystone XL pipeline and drilling in the Arctic, and they all support the full implementation of the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan. O'Malley has also [signed](#) the #50by30 pledge committing to power our country with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030 and a spokesperson for the Clinton campaign has [said](#) her clean energy framework meets this goal.

But the candidates have yet to discuss their specific plans to comprehensively address climate change and build a clean energy

economy. That's why NextGen Climate has called for the Democratic Party to add a debate entirely focused on climate change solutions and clean energy. We also believe that, as the moderator of the first Democratic presidential primary debate, you have a unique opportunity to push the Democratic presidential candidates to move beyond platitudes and engage in a robust debate about solutions.

A Top-Tier Issue for Democrats

Climate change is a top-tier issue for Democratic voters—and in the past few years taking action on climate change has become central to Democratic elected officials' policy agendas across this country. An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll from May showed that climate change ranked as one of Democratic voters' top three priorities (along with health care and economic growth/jobs). Polling conducted by Hart Research shows that 84 percent of Democrats want our leaders to commit to powering our country with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030. Climate change and clean energy are also set to play a significant role in the general election: 61 percent of voters in eight battleground states say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who addresses climate change by significantly increasing the amount of clean energy used to power our country.

This strong support for climate action comes as Democratic leaders have made climate action central to their efforts to drive economic growth and protect public health. From the Clean Power Plan to landmark climate agreements with China and India, President Obama has made transitioning to a clean energy economy a top priority in his second term. Democratic governors are currently implementing bold policies that build a clean energy economy and cut carbon pollution. And just last week, Senate Democrats introduced a bill that would repeal fossil fuel subsidies, create and support at least 3.5 million jobs and cut carbon emissions by at least 34 percent.

This action is a reflection of voters strong support for climate action. To be a leader of the Democratic Party—and the country—you have to lead on climate change. Democratic voters have come to expect much more than concern about climate change from their leaders: they expect concrete

action.

The Urgency of Addressing the Climate Crisis

Why do Democrats care about this issue so much? The fact is climate change is an urgent threat to our health, economic and national security—and would exacerbate poverty, income inequality and conflict across the world. From heat-related deaths to increased cases of asthma, the health effects of climate change disproportionately impact the most vulnerable in our society—particularly children, the elderly, and communities of color. And just last year, 16 retired three- and four-star generals and admirals issued a [report](#) identifying climate change as a “catalyst for conflict,” and the Pentagon’s 2014 [Quadrennial Defense Review](#) laid out the very serious threat posed by climate change—including poverty and political instability.

Transitioning to clean energy not only mitigates these harmful impacts—it also represents a remarkable opportunity to build an economy that works for everyone—while cutting pollution, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, creating jobs and driving economic growth for decades. In the first half of 2015, renewables accounted for more than two-thirds of new electricity generation across the United States—and solar jobs have been growing 20 times faster than the broader economy. The fact is, a clean energy future is within our reach.

Conclusion

We’ve heard from Democratic candidates about the Keystone XL pipeline, Arctic drilling and the Clean Power Plan. Now on October 13th, Democratic voters want to know specifically how they will prevent climate catastrophe and create a fairer, stronger clean energy economy. During the first Democratic presidential primary debate, I urge you to push the candidates to articulate, defend and refine their plans—ensuring that they will be prepared on day one to address climate change. Democratic voters—and the urgency of the climate crisis—demand nothing less than a robust discussion about how tackle this issue and build a clean energy future.