

Transformative Power of Climate Truth

Updated 2/2016

The Climate Mobilization: Spreading Truth, Demanding Mobilization

[The Climate Mobilization](#) (TCM) launched in September, 2014 when we began spreading the Pledge to Mobilize at the People's Climate March in New York City. Our mission is to initiate a World War II-scale mobilization that protects civilization and the natural world from climate catastrophe by eliminating net U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and restoring a safe climate for humanity [1]



We believe that the climate movement's greatest and most underutilized strategic asset is the truth: that we are now in a planet-wide climate crisis that threatens civilization and requires an immediate, all-out emergency response. We believe that this mobilization can be achieved only through the valuing and active spreading of climate truth. While we utilize a variety of organizing strategies, The [Pledge to Mobilize](#), a one-page document that any American can sign, is our tool for spreading climate truth and channeling the emotions it inspires into political power.

More than 3,000 Americans have signed the Pledge to Mobilize. Many are getting very deeply involved. More broadly, we are witnessing the formation of a new segment of the climate movement, call it the "Climate Mobilization Coalition" — a group of scientists, activists, and religious and community leaders — who are calling for emergency climate action.

This paper explores the transformative power — and strategic necessity — of climate truth. It explains why we believe our strategy, based around the Pledge to Mobilize, holds the potential for societal transformation on the massive scale that is necessary. This paper also addresses the concerns that the Pledge's language is too frank and frightening, and that the Pledge should call for a more "realistic," though inadequate, solution.

Originally published in April, 2015, this essay has been updated multiple times to include The Climate Mobilization's swift progress, as well as to address broader developments in the climate movement, such as COP 21, and "Laudato Si," Pope Francis' Encyclical, which is one of the most profound statements of climate truth ever made. It was most recently updated in the middle of February, 2016. A video, of myself, the Founder and Director of TCM, and Ezra Silk, co-founder and Deputy Director of TCM, discussing many of the concepts in this paper, is available [here](#).

The Power of Truth for Individuals.

Humans have a remarkable capacity for imagination and fantasy. This precious gift allows us to create marvelous technological breakthroughs and brilliant works of fiction. Our imagination gives us the capacity to re-make the world. The downside, however, is that our powerful, flexible, creative minds can also readily deceive us.

In the field of science, there are processes—such as double-blind trials, replication and peer review—that check the human tendency towards distortion. As individuals, we must take charge of this process ourselves. Socrates advocated the active search for and discovery of personal truth in his statement, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Gautama Buddha, a near contemporary of Socrates, created a spiritual system that also emphasizes seeking personal truth and staying in touch with reality. This might sound easy, but distinguishing reality from fantasy is a life-long developmental challenge. The child, for example, must learn that monsters and fairies are not real. As she grows up, she must determine what is true about herself, her family, and the world—including the truth of her capacities, proclivities and limitations. She must question what she has been told, identifying distortions of reality, for example, "In this family, we always get along!"

There are two basic reasons why it is critical that individuals separate truth from distortion. The first is very practical. If someone does not adequately understand themselves and the world, they will have a very difficult time navigating it, or growing in response to it. For example, if a teenager believes himself to be invincible, he may break bones or worse before coming to terms with the reality of his vulnerability. Or if he has been told his entire life that he can accomplish any goal easily, he might be in for a rude awakening when he enrolls in advanced courses for

which he is unprepared. An accurate assessment of oneself allows a person to utilize their strengths and shore up their weaknesses.

The second reason was discovered by Freud, and used during the past century for psychoanalysis and related psychotherapies to relieve individual suffering and enhance individual lives. The truth is inherently energizing to the individual because the truth is often known, but defended against — repressed, dissociated and denied. This avoidance of the truth takes continual effort and energy. Take, for example a woman who finally admits to herself that she is a lesbian after years of fighting this knowledge. When the truth is finally embraced, a weight is lifted and a new level of personal freedom is accessed. The woman feels as though she has a new lease on life — and indeed she does, because she has freed herself from the constant effort of defending against the truth and has opened up new frontiers of possibility.

Sexual orientation is only one example. Shielding ourselves from unpleasant truths is a basic part of human mental functioning. That is why actively examining oneself is critical. Psychotherapy is a process of active examination, and the results can be impressive. First the client's depression lifts, then their interpersonal relationships improve, then they may even make a career change that is more rewarding. The truth is a healing, growth-promoting tool.

The Power of Truth in Social Movements

The great social movements throughout history have successfully applied the transformative power of truth en masse. The transformative truths of social movements are widely known before the emergence of the movement, but they are repressed, denied, and ignored. The institutions of society — the government, media, academy and religious institutions — collude in ignoring and denying the truth, failing the people they are meant to serve. Successful social movements take the truth into their own hands and force individuals, institutions, and especially governments, to reckon with, accept, and ultimately act on the truth.

Vaclav Havel championed “Living in Truth” rather than complying with the corrupt, repressive actions of the Soviet Union. His work played a major role in starting the non-violent Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, after which he became the first democratically elected President of Czechoslovakia in 41 years. Havel described the strategic power of truth:

“[The power of truth] does not reside in the strength of definable political or social groups, but chiefly in a potential, which is hidden throughout the whole of society, including the official power structures of that society. Therefore this power does not rely on soldiers of its own, but on soldiers of the enemy as it were—that is to say, on everyone who is living within the lie and who may be struck at any moment (in theory, at least) by the force of truth (or who, out of an instinctive desire to protect their position, may at least adapt to that force). It is a bacteriological weapon, so to speak, utilized when conditions are ripe by a single civilian to disarm an entire division.... This, too, is why the regime prosecutes, almost as a reflex action, preventatively, even modest attempts to live in truth. (1978)

The lies of the Soviet state in Czechoslovakia collapsed when confronted with the force of the truth. This was possible because, as Havel describes, the power of truth exists in everyone, including military officials, governmental leaders, and other elites. Most of us “know” the truth on some level, but it is buried under layers of defenses, fear and doubt. However, when people advocate the truth with clarity and moral certainty, the truth moves to the forefront of people's minds; it cuts like a spear through layers of denial and self-deception.

Gandhi pioneered the movement-building strategy called “Satyagraha,” or “Truth force”, which also has connotations of love and inner strength. Rather than using violence to create change, practitioners of Satyagraha used their inner resources to march, fast, and otherwise demonstrate the truth of their message that colonialism was inherently degrading and that India needed to govern itself. Once again, the truth won out; Satyagraha was critical in helping India achieve independence.

Martin Luther King utilized Gandhi's teachings and preached about the need for “soul force” in the struggle for racial equality. Before the civil rights movement, America rationalized, ignored and passively accepted the brutal Jim Crow system. The civil rights movement brought the ugly truth of Jim Crow to the center of American life. When non-violent protesters were met with hateful violence, and these confrontations were broadcast into living rooms across America, the truth could no longer be denied and defended against: The status quo was revealed as morally bankrupt. Major, immediate changes were plainly necessary. When a powerful truth is effectively communicated, change can happen very rapidly.

The Truth Allows Us to Grow

Facing the truth makes us, as individuals and societies, healthier and more resilient. It allows us to approach problems with rationality, creativity and energy that would otherwise be sapped by denial and avoidance.

Social movements invite us to put truth into practice — to live our lives in accordance with the truth, and to share it with others. This takes dedication and courage. Successful social movements provide the support, camaraderie, and sense of moral purpose that liberate these traits in individuals. When people become agents for truth and vital change, they are elevated, enlarged, and lit-up. The truth, and their role in advancing it, affects how they view themselves, what matters to them, and how they conduct their affairs. The power of truth allows them to transcend their limitations and redefine what is possible.

Psychologist and climate activist Mary Pipher puts it this way:

“We cannot solve a problem that we will not face. With awareness, everything is possible. Once we stop denying the hard truths of our environmental collapse, we can embark on a journey of transformation that begins with the initial trauma—the 'oh shit' moment—and can end with transcendence. In fact, despair is often a crucible for growth. When our problems seem too big for us to tackle, there's really only one solution, which is: We must grow bigger.”

In a social movement, one does not face the need for change alone, nor does one need to take action alone. We support each other's pursuit of truth, and urge one another to ever greater acts of courage. What is impossible by one or by a few becomes achievable by many.

The Most Powerful Truth of All

We are living in a state of planetary emergency and must mobilize our society on the scale of WWII in order to rapidly bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero, and draw down the huge amount of excess carbon dioxide that has accumulated in the atmosphere to have a chance of averting the collapse of civilization and the destruction of the living world. We are already witnessing increasing droughts, agricultural failures, refugee crises, epidemics, political destabilization and [state-failure](#). In the medium term we face global collapse of governance and food systems, costing humanity billions of lives. The fact that we have warmed the world to this extent, and show little sign of stopping, is evidence of widespread institutional failure. We cannot expect anyone else to save us. We must do it ourselves.

This truth, while deeply unwelcome, has the potential to be the most powerful, transformative truth of all. Climate truth has the potential to be more powerful than any country's independence; more powerful than overthrowing authoritarian states; and more powerful than civil rights or any group's struggle for safety, recognition and equality. Climate truth contains such superordinate power because all of those causes depend on a safe climate.

Martin Luther King famously said, “The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice.” If we do not stop climate change, we will never be able to build a just, free, healthy, loving society. The arc of history will be abruptly cut off. It will be “game over” — the experiment of humanity organizing into civilizations will have failed. This will almost certainly mean the death of billions of people and chaos, deprivation, and violence for the rest. It will be a miserable, deplorable fate. If we accept climate truth, we can channel the enormous power of our values, passions, empathy and hopes for humanity toward our fight for a safe climate.

Some people will feel that the climate crisis is not “the most powerful truth of all,” a distinction that should be reserved for the existence of God. Some even feel that the existence of God lessens or negates the need to act on the climate crisis. Pope

Francis issued *Laudato Si*, an earth-shaking encyclical on the relationship of humans, God, and nature, which firmly rebuts this position:

“It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be

protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

The "ecological conversion" that Pope Francis calls for is fundamentally the same transformation that The Climate Mobilization is attempting to achieve, on both the individual and societal level.

Avoiding Climate Truth

The fact that climate change threatens the collapse of civilization is not only known to scientists and experts. It is widely known — and vigorously defended against. Witness the popularity of learning survival skills and packing "go bags." People harbor the fantasy that in a collapse scenario, they would be able to successfully take their safety into their own hands.

Consider the recent profusion of apocalyptic [movies](#), [TV shows](#) and [video games](#). If we look honestly at the climate crisis, we realize that these portrayals of destruction are not as fantastic as they might seem; instead they are imaginative forecasts of the climate-ravaged planet that we are careening towards. As Pope Francis puts it, "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain."

Many Americans are willfully ignorant — they know that climate change and the systemic institutional failure it represents is scary, so they keep it out of their focus. They never read about it, perhaps telling themselves that they aren't interested or it's "not my issue." A 2015 Yale poll showed that only 16% of Americans hear anything about climate change from people they know once a month or more, while 25% never hear people they know talk about climate change!

Another common defensive reaction is to intellectually accept the "facts" of climate change, but to avoid connecting emotionally with its implications. This attitude can be seen by those who calmly, cynically state, "We are fucked," and yet remain utterly passive.

Pope Francis agrees that "accepting" the science of climate change yet doing nothing is immoral. He states, "Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it."

Feel the pain of climate truth and let it change you; let it guide you towards engagement. Accepting climate truth can affect not only your civic and political engagement, but also your priorities, goals, and sense of identity.

Allowing climate truth in, to borrow Naomi Klein's phrase, "changes everything." Despite what American consumer culture has told you, you are not an isolated actor, living in a stable country on a stable planet, whose main purpose in life is to pursue personal success, familial satisfaction, and constant gratification. Rather, you are living in a country, and on a planet, in crisis. Your primary moral responsibility is to fight for your family, your species and all life on earth. You didn't ask for it, you didn't cause it, and you probably don't like it. But here you are.

Here we all are, in personal and collective danger. Studies show that climate change is already killing [1,000 children a day and 400,000 people a year](#), a number that we should expect to rise quickly and abruptly as climatic and civilizational tipping points (for example, the breakout of water wars and food riots) are breeched.

If we allow ourselves to feel this reality, then our survival instincts can kick in. Our love for life and for each other can bestow us with courage and focus. We can be like the mother who lifts a truck to pull out her baby; a man who comes perilously close to drinking himself to death, but emerges from rock bottom, resolved to courageously face his problems rather than flee them. We can be like our grandparents, who, when faced with the threat of global fascism, rose to the challenge and embraced victory as their common purpose.

The Pledge to Mobilize: Harnessing the Power of Climate Truth

The Pledge to Mobilize, a one-page document that any American can sign, is a tool designed to help people fully face climate truth, and channel the emotions that arise into political power. The Pledge is a public acknowledgment that the climate crisis threatens the collapse of civilization, as well as a call for the United States to initiate a WWII-scale mobilization to eliminate our national net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 and enlist in an international effort to

restore a safe global climate. (Please see [The Case for Climate Mobilization](#), for a detailed scientific and economic explanation of our demands.)

The Pledge also contains a set of political and personal commitments to build the social mobilization required to achieve these demands. When you sign the Pledge, you agree to:

1. Vote for candidates who have also signed the Pledge to Mobilize over those who have not.
2. Support candidates who have signed, with time, money, or both.
3. Spread the truth of climate change, and the Pledge to Mobilize, to others.

The Pledge to Mobilize, rather than assuming that people “can’t handle” the truth of climate change, helps people handle and process that truth. Using the WWII analogy, we illustrate a time in which the United States successfully mobilized against an existential crisis. The Pledge challenges people to grow, cope with the truth, and become active agents for effective change, spreading climate truth, sharing the Pledge to Mobilize with others, and building a mass movement for a WWII-scale climate mobilization.

Kat Baumgartner exemplifies this. Kat had been concerned about climate change for several years, but felt hopeless and was not engaged in politics or activism. After taking the Pledge to Mobilize and becoming more engaged in The Climate Mobilization over several months, Kat quickly became one of our top organizers. Kat found leadership, courage, and dedication within herself that she was previously unaware of! Kat described her experience in a letter to friends:

“After retiring from the fire department and being lost for a while, I am so grateful to have found another purpose in life. I didn't think it was possible for me to find anything that I could feel as passionate about as I did about being a firefighter.... Our Pledge calls on the Federal Government to respond to the crisis we are facing in a way very similar to the response to WWII. Experts agree that only this type of response will save civilization from collapse and we believe that the Pledge to Mobilize strategy can fundamentally alter what is politically feasible!”

Transformations like Kat’s are vitally important because only people who allow themselves to be transformed by the climate truth can provide the fuel for a heroic, dedicated, and successful social movement.

The Pledge to Mobilize provides people with a point of entry into the global climate crisis—it provides a roadmap for how an individual can build power and effect change politically. By providing a clear route for expanding engagement, the Pledge boosts one’s sense of agency, empowerment, and active hope. Without agency, the scope of the crisis can cause despair and cynicism, or an obsessive focus on assigning and avoiding blame. Without the Pledge — or some other comprehensive political platform and social movement strategy that clearly and effectively tackle the climate emergency — people’s alarm and despair about climate change are paralyzing. Once one takes the Pledge, this emotional energy can be channeled into dedicated and effective action.

Bullshit: The Endemic Avoidance of Climate Truth

The Climate Mobilization is dedicated to bringing climate truth into the mainstream. Today, it is rarely spoken plainly. As leading environmental analysts Jorgen Randers and Paul Gilding (a Pledge signer and TCM Advisory Board Member) put it in 2009:

“It’s like belonging to a secret society. Conversations held in quiet places, in cafes, bars and academic halls. Conversations held with furrowed brows and worried eyes. Conversations that sometimes give you goosebumps and shivers, and a sense of the surreal—is this conversation really happening? This is what it’s felt like over the past few years, to spend time with some of the world’s leading thinkers and scientists on issues around climate change and sustainability. In public this group generally puts a positive, while still urgent interpretation of their views... But in private, often late at night, when we reflect on what we really think and wonder if the battle is lost, it’s a different conversation. The talk goes to the potential for self-reinforcing runaway loops and for

civilization's collapse. We discuss geopolitical breakdown, mass starvation and what earth would be like with just a few hundred million people."

Climate scientist Kevin Anderson commented during the COP 21 Paris conference that scientists are afraid of the radical economic and policy implications of their findings so "We fine-tune our analysis so it fits within the political and economic framing of society." The result:

"The whole setup, not just the scientists, the research community around it that funds the research, the journalists, events like this, we're all being—we're all deliberately being slightly sort of self-delusional. We all know the situation is much more severe than we're prepared to voice openly. And we all know this. So it is a—this is a collective sort of façade, a mask that we have."

These are incredible, crucial statements. Even leading scientists and thought leaders aren't being completely candid. Instead of frank discussions of the crisis, conversations are steeped in confusion, denial and irrelevancies. Much of this is due to the billion dollar misinformation campaign that the fossil fuel industry has waged to cast doubt on settled science. Another problem is the media, particularly the American media, which has systematically understated the urgency of the climate crisis, and has misapplied the concept of "balance" to give rogue climate deniers a place at the discussion table.

But there is also a dearth of courageous truth-telling on the part of environmental organizations and leaders, who chronically distort the situation to make it seem less dire, and the solution less drastic.

We are told that there is still a sizable global "carbon budget" left to burn for the next three to five decades, even though the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere today is enough to cause climatic catastrophe, and eventually lead to global warming far above levels that could plausibly be considered safe[2]. Further, it is incredibly rare to hear climate leaders and experts acknowledge what James Hansen calls humanity's "[Faustian Bargain](#)"—the fact that aerosols from coal plants have temporary cooling effects and are *masking* warming. As we phase out coal—which we must if we hope to avoid catastrophe, the planet will experience rapid warming of [roughly 1 degrees Celsius](#)[3], unless cooling interventions, which bring their own risks, are undertaken.

We are told to worry for "our grandchildren," implying that we, ourselves are not in danger. Sometimes we are given the baffling message that climate change is an acute, global crisis – the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced - but that the solution will – no, must - be cheap, easy, and painless! We are told that changing our individual consumer decisions is a meaningful response to the crisis, and that gradual carbon-pricing policies can solve climate change on their own while allowing business as usual to continue.

Even groups such as 350.org, Greenpeace, and the Solutions Project champion the United States ending emissions by 2050. In other words, the U.S. should continue emitting heat-trapping gases for the next 35 years!

Distorting the truth and severity of the climate crisis is a strategy consciously embraced by some advocates for climate action. Columbia University's popular CRED Guide to Climate Communications, for example, contains a section, "Beware the Overuse of Emotional Appeals" in which they caution presenters to avoid telling the whole truth about the climate crisis, as this would cause "emotional numbing." So presenters are given strategies including choosing a specific, "portfolio of risk," to communicate—such as the link between climate and disease—rather than the whole, frightening truth.

Anyone who spends time in the world of climate activism will frequently hear similar arguments - that "fear doesn't work as a motivator" so we shouldn't "make people" afraid. I have had the uncanny experience of advocating that a climate event adopt the ambitious "net zero by 2025" timeline, to be told by others on the planning committee, "We agree with you! We totally agree that is what needs to happen. But we can't say that—it will turn people off!"

That we are in an acute crisis, and need an emergency response, similar to how we mobilized to meet the emergency of WWII, is considered unspeakable. Americans are considered too weak, ignorant, and ideologically rigid to be able to handle the truth. Instead, messages are tested on focus groups and refined in order to achieve a desired level of comfortable acceptance. Pope Francis decries this attitude and communication style, which he calls "the rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness."

The fact that this communications approach has become normative in American politics does not make it less harmful. Philosopher Harry G Frankfurt describes this way of relating to the truth, which is the premise of his book, “On Bullshit”:

“Bullshitters, although they represent themselves as being engaged simply in conveying information, are not engaged in that enterprise at all. Instead, and most essentially, they are fakers and phonies who are attempting by what they say to manipulate the opinions and the attitudes of those to whom they speak. What they care about primarily, therefore, is whether what they say is effective in accomplishing this manipulation. Correspondingly, they are more or less indifferent to whether what they say is true or whether it is false.”

This patronizing approach is doomed for failure. While acknowledging that people who discuss climate change in this truth-bending style probably mean well, we must also realize that they are making a critical error. These cheerful, euphemistic communicators are unintentionally perpetuating “pluralistic ignorance^[4]”—the psychological phenomena in which people look to each other in order to assess the level of threat, and since all seem calm and collected, the threat is discounted.

We are in an emergency. We need an emergency response. We cannot possibly hope to achieve one without complete honesty. In a building on fire, should we coax people to leave through euphemistic half-truths — “It’s getting hot in here, let’s go outside where it’s nice and cool?” — or should we tell them the truth, and direct them to safety?

Further, there is a fundamental difference between telling the truth and distorting it. The difference can be heard and felt by the listener. Even if one’s intentions in bending or avoiding the truth are good — subtle dishonesty is perceived by the recipient, whose “bullshit detector” goes off.

Considering that most of what Americans are told about climate change is either euphemistic understatement or outright lies, is widespread apathy really surprising? Is it any wonder that so many Americans conclude that everyone has an agenda and therefore choose not to engage with the climate crisis?

If we are to succeed in mobilizing millions of people for emergency climate action — we must give up the prevarications and build our movement on rock solid truth.

Reaching Beyond “Realistic”

The most common criticism we have received about the Pledge’s demands is that it is not “politically realistic” to demand a 100% reduction of U.S. net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025.

These critics recommend that we weaken our demands in order to be more mainstream. Of course, anyone who has studied climate change knows that rapidly reaching net zero emissions will give us our best chance of saving civilization. Critics don’t argue that the Pledge doesn’t state the truth; they argue that the truth needs to be avoided! Stating the truth plainly — both of the extent and immediacy of the crisis and the enormous scale of the needed solution — makes them too uncomfortable.

Joe Uehlein, Executive Director of the Labor Network for Sustainability rebutted this position in a Facebook discussion of the Pledge’s ambitious timeline and the need for a WWII-scale mobilization:

I totally understand your criticism (that the Pledge’s emissions timeline is unrealistic). It's just that 30 years of realism, realistic approaches, reaching for what's achievable got us exactly nowhere. Even if all the countries do what they pledge to do in terms of carbon emissions, we still fail. That reality has to be emphasized so people will reach beyond realistic. I believe this is the only path to winning the war. At least that's what my experience tells me - 15 years on the UN Commission on Global Warming, and 40 years in the labor movement. We're losing the climate fight, and we're losing the workplace justice and income inequality fight. This is why "that's not realistic" does not resonate with me any longer.”

Joe has given up on political “realism” that cannot deliver protection from climate change, and embraced climate truth. We need a massive solution to a massive problem, and to accomplish it we need to reach beyond defeatist “realism” and reclaim our ability to make revolutionary, system-wide change. We need to unleash the transformative power of truth.

The Mobilization Movement

The good news is, it's working. The Pledge to Mobilize has been signed by more than 3,000 Americans and International allies including [leaders in the academic and environmental community](#). We are starting to find champions in the [political arena](#) as well. As of February, 2016, 7 State legislators have signed the Pledge, along with 5 candidates for US Congress, and a handful of local officials, including the Mayor of Des Moines. Most of these Mobilized elected officials and candidates are from Iowa, where we focused our organizing efforts in the run up to the Iowa Caucuses.

More impressive than The Climate Mobilization's total size, however, is the dedication of our supporters. Several in The Climate Mobilization have left their jobs, or gone to part time, in order to commit as much of ourselves as possible to the cause. Mobilizers undertake a wide variety of actions, including: Organizing their friends, families, and communities for Mobilization, pressuring the other groups they are involved with to embrace Mobilization, giving presentations on the climate crisis and need for Mobilization, lobbying local elected officials, tabling with the Pledge, and more. On June 14th, 2015 we held the first ever National Climate Mobilization Day hosting 15 events across the country, as well as in Paris and Tulum, all demanding Mobilization.

And it's not just The Climate Mobilization! In the summer of 2015, we were thrilled to see a coalition of individuals and organizations form that advocate emergency climate mobilization rather than carbon gradualism. For example, Reverend Lennox Yearwood and Tom Weis, leaders in the climate movement, published, "America's Zero Emissions Imperative" which echoed TCM's call for the US to reach net zero emissions by 2025.

"Some will no doubt call this bold national goal unrealistic, but they would underestimate the innovative genius and social conscience of the American people. America has a long and proud history of overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds (consider World War II, Apollo program and Abolitionist movement). What is unrealistic is thinking we can put off for decades action that is desperately needed now to ensure our survival as a species."

Tom Weis followed up on his article by writing an open letter to President Obama, calling on him to set reducing US emissions to net zero by 2025 — through an "all hands on deck societal mobilization at wartime speed" as the American commitment at the Paris climate talks. Signers included even more experts and leaders including, The Global Catholic Climate Movement, authors Lester Brown and Terry Tempest Williams; actors Mark Ruffalo and Ed Begley, Jr.; environmentalists David Suzuki, Tim DeChristopher and Yeb Saño; filmmaker Josh Fox; musician Moby; and scientist Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, a coordinating lead author for the IPCC's 5th Assessment Report.

The World Shifts Towards Mobilization

The world is, reluctantly and unevenly, waking up to climate truth, and the need for mobilization.

Probably the most impactful thing to come out of COP 21, the UN climate meetings held in Paris in 2015, was the rejection of the 2°C target as the "safe limit" to warming. The disastrous 2°C target has probably been the single most destructive piece of climate communications "bullshit" - embraced *until the Paris Agreement* by movement leaders Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein - and its unexpected demise is a real cause for celebration. It also provides a chance for the climate movement and civil society to evaluate what precisely it would take to achieve the lower target of 1.5°C enshrined in the agreement that has been celebrated by so many within the climate movement.

In a [front page story](#) the day after the agreement, *The New York Times*'s Justin Gillis reported that global net greenhouse gas emissions would need to end by 2030: "A serious campaign to meet the more ambitious (1.5°C) goal would mean that in less than two decades, the nations of the world would likely have to bring an end to gasoline cars, to coal- or gas-burning power plants in their current form, and to planes or ships powered by fossil fuels."

Climate scientist Glenn Peters has [projected](#) that meeting the 1.5°C heat limit would require a global fossil fuel phase-out between 2025 and 2030, as well as a large-scale effort to remove excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Similarly, a group of scientists [writing](#) in *The Hindu* found that developed countries such as the U.S. would need to reach net zero emissions in "the next 5-10 years" for a 50 to 66 percent chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C.

In other words: *the governments of the world have unanimously adopted a target that only emergency climate mobilization can deliver*^[5]. However, this is not acknowledged by world leaders, leading climate organizations, and the public, who are still in the thrall of carbon gradualism.

Emergency Mobilization Vs. Gradualism

Philip Sutton has been an environmental campaigner and researcher for many years. He wrote in his excellent paper, "[Striking Targets.](#)"

"Over those last 27 years, while all the research, activism and negotiation has been going on, the climate has actually become dangerous. So, the key goal now must be to provide, at the 11th hour, real protection for the vulnerable people, species and ecosystems of the world. The principal struggle must shift, from the clash between no action and some action, to the crucial struggle between those who want to constrain reform to levels that are not too disruptive and those who want action that will provide highly effective and timely protection."

In other words: "Climate action" such as a carbon tax, or the Clean Power Plan, or even reaching net zero emissions by 2050, are no longer sufficient. Perhaps if we had implemented these measures 20 or 30 years ago, they would have made a sufficient difference. But that time has passed, and only emergency action—a mobilization of our entire economy and society—will protect us now.

The Civil Rights Movement also struggled against the forces of gradualism—which Martin Luther King Jr. called a "tranquilizing drug." King went so far as to wonder whether the gradualist, the white moderate, was the greatest obstacle in the struggle for equality:

"(The white moderate is) more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season."

Carbon gradualists are more devoted to not disrupting the prevailing political and economic order than they are to providing effective protection against climate change. They paternalistically believe that the public "can't handle the truth" and choose euphemism over honesty. Gradualists live by a "mythical concept of time" in which we have decades left to continue emitting greenhouse gases.

We must realize that it is not merely "deniers" who distort climate truth and stand in the way of the climate mobilization that we need, but anyone who privileges political or financial "realism" over scientific reality and moral responsibility, clings to false-optimism, or advocates "politically fashionable carbon gradualism."

Gradualists contribute to the misinformation and confusion around the climate crisis, keeping the public calm and disengaged, when they should be clamoring for emergency action.

The leaders of the climate movement, and its citizen activists must realize that things we have advocated in the past are no longer sufficient, and update their demands and language to bring them in alignment with the truth.

The Association for the Tree of Life is an example of how an organization can shift from gradualism to mobilization. The ATL was focused on their "Ask Philanthropy" campaign, in order to pressure philanthropists to fund the climate movement. They always used urgency in their language, but stayed with the pack in terms of calling for a 35-year transition to zero emissions through carbon pricing. When their leadership encountered The Climate Mobilization, however, they realized that mobilization will give humanity and the natural world the greatest chance of survival—and thus is the advocacy that best fits their deeply held values. The ATL and TCM have become close allies, and are working together to build a Climate Mobilization Coalition composed of other truth-based climate organizations. Check out ATL's [website](#) and see a sterling example of how organizations can also be transformed by the power of climate truth.

Bringing Climate Truth to Politics

In 2016, our country will elect a new Congress and President, who could lead us through the mobilization. The Climate Mobilization is bringing climate truth to the public, and into politics.

In Iowa, Ed Fallon offered the Pledge to Mobilize to [every presidential candidate](#), and we hosted the [Climate Emergency Caucus](#) in advance of the Iowa caucuses, which drew considerable media attention to The Climate Mobilization and the need to select a leader who can successfully mobilize the country.

Mobilizers across the country are building power in their communities and pressuring their elected officials and candidates to sign the Pledge to Mobilize, and we are opening our first lobbying office on Capitol Hill.

The Challenges of Climate Truth

Climate truth is rare because it is hard. It makes us feel immense fear, grief, guilt and anger. Speaking climate truth means that we inspire these feelings, and defenses against them, in others. Climate truth has radical implications, for our society and for us as individuals. Personal change is best when it occurs gradually, so that a person can maintain their core identity, and “stay the same while changing.”^[6]

Climate truth challenges us, and our sense of identity, to the core. Should we change careers? Move to the country and start a farm? Donate our retirement fund to the climate movement? Climate truth makes us doubt ourselves: We worry that we don’t have it in us; that we won’t measure up; that we will lose.

Fighting climate change requires deep, sustained commitment, rather than a brief burst of passion. We would like to make it our absolute top priority. Yet we also need to pay our bills and raise our families. There are only so many hours in a day—how many should be spent fighting climate change? Mobilizers report that this problem—balancing the workload of their personal mobilization with life’s other demands—is the hardest part of participating. Every person who embraces climate truth and the need for mobilization must find their own solutions to these issues, their own sustaining balance.

Climate truth also offers interpersonal challenges. We are messengers of painful, challenging news. It elicits fear—even terror, grief, and a crisis of conscience. When we speak climate truth, we convey to others, “The life you thought you were living, with big plans and a bright future, a life in which your main responsibility is to pursue your own satisfaction, is over, or at least on hold until the climate crisis is solved. We are in a global crisis, and to live a moral life, you must respond.”

When we speak climate truth, we are sometimes met with blank stares, recoiling, or even hostility. The people we are speaking to might become anxious, which makes us feel guilty — as though the painful feelings the listener is experiencing are our fault, as though speaking climate truth is mean-spirited, rather than absolutely necessary. In order to stay in denial, some people might prefer to avoid us or ridicule what we are saying. We may find ourselves feeling alone.

The Rewards of Climate Truth: We Must be Heroes

Climate truth is not easy news to receive or deliver, and it takes fortitude to integrate it into one’s self, and to bear the responsibility of acting on and spreading that truth. However, it is a message that people are increasingly ready to hear. Mobilizers are often surprised by how well people respond to discussions of climate truth, especially when structured through the lens of the Pledge to Mobilize. People are frequently grateful and relieved to talk — climate anxiety had been weighing on them — and they had previously found little opportunity to discuss it with others. People also express gratitude and respect for our efforts. Nothing is more gratifying, or more strengthening to a relationship, than when someone joins you in climate truth, as a champion of civilization and the natural world.

Further, taking on the mantle of climate truth gives individuals a strong, clear sense of meaning in life. It expands who we are and how we think about ourselves. It makes us feel alive, engaged, and gives our lives a deep sense of meaning.

Fred Branfman dedicated his life to humanity, and to truth. As a young man he exposed America’s secret bombing campaign of Laos during the Vietnam War. Decades later, he helped develop The Climate Mobilization concept, and would have been one of our co-founders had he not become terminally ill and passed away a few days after the People’s Climate March. The other co-founders of The Climate Mobilization, including myself, are in our twenties.

We feel viscerally afraid of how climate will wreak havoc in the coming decades—we fight not only for “future generations” or for the natural world, but also for our own safety and security. Fred, in a totally different stage of life, did not worry about his own safety in regards to climate change. Rather, he spoke about the opportunity for great and enduring heroism:

“We have clearly arrived at an evolutionary watershed: the first time that our species is heading toward species- suicide by its own hand. If we act politically to try and save it we will know a heroism that none before us have experienced. Our inner desire to live lives of meaning will be remembered for all time to come, as long as humans in whatever number still walk this earth....We have thus been offered the most sublime human opportunity of all: To participate in a heroic movement to preserve all human achievement and make possible its continuation for all human time to come.”

Pope Francis echoes these sentiments, stating that, “Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities.” Pope Francis also comforts us by reminding us of our innate capability for good, “For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love.” And that we can indeed be effective on a global scale: “All it takes is one good person to restore hope!”

Our “sublime opportunity” for heroism faces its next great phase in the run-up to the 2016 elections, in which we will elect a new President and a new Congress. Let all of our motivating desires — to be safe, to protect our loved ones and the extended human family, now and in the future, to protect the glorious natural world, and to be remembered—push us to sustained, heroic organizing and activism in the coming months.

Rather than discussing whether candidates “believe in” climate change, we must make them answer whether they understand that climate change poses the greatest challenge we have ever faced, and whether they have the competence and strength of character to lead us in mobilization.

This is what The Climate Mobilization, and the growing Mobilization Coalition is dedicated to achieving. Our goals reach beyond the “realistic” to what is necessary and true.

We hope you join us.

About the Author

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Margaret is the Founder and Director of The Climate Mobilization. She was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She earned her BA in Social Anthropology from Harvard and her PhD in clinical psychology from Adelphi University. Her life plan was to be a psychoanalyst in private practice, a writer, and have a family. Those plans began to feel less appealing as the reality of the climate crisis increasingly broke through her defenses. She began writing about psychology and climate change on her blog The Climate Psychologist. She developed the Pledge to Mobilize strategy with the cofounders of The Climate Mobilization and allies around the world. She feels energized by The Climate Mobilization’s growth and success and is determined to give her all in the coming months and years of mobilization.