

Draft of Statement of Principles for the Labor Convergence on Climate

1. We seek a sustainable future for the earth and its people. We believe that all people have a right to make a living on a living planet.
2. Climate change represents a mortal threat to working people, the labor movement, and society at large. According to the U.S. government's definitive 2014 National Climate Assessment, "Climate change is happening now" due to "human-induced emissions of heat-trapping gases," mainly from "burning coal, oil, and gas."¹ According to the World Bank, climate change is "a fundamental threat to development and the fight against poverty." Without bold action now, "the warming planet threatens to put prosperity out of reach of millions and roll back decades of development."² Climate protection is not an optional issue for labor. As the pace of climate change worsens, the labor movement's fundamental principle of solidarity requires us to take the lead on climate. At the same time, addressing the climate crisis provides the labor movement an opportunity to reach help organize and mobilize the great majority who are affected by both climate change and by economic degradation, inequality, and injustice.
3. We know what must be done. We have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fast. We have to recognize and achieve the targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction that climate science requires. Nearly three decades of climate change denial have us at the precipice. The time for slow, careful, cautious approaches is long past. The window for taking action grows smaller with each passing year. The current U.S. government plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions fall seriously short of what most climate scientists say is necessary.
4. An "all-of-the-above" energy policy that perpetuates the burning of fossil fuels is tantamount to climate change denial. Minimizing climate catastrophe requires a planned elimination of coal, oil, and natural gas emissions, as well as emissions from agriculture, waste, and other sources. It requires a rapid movement toward 100% renewable energy. That requires a planned, rapid construction of renewable energy infrastructure on a massive scale, comparable to the economic mobilization that the United States undertook during World War II. The market will not provide such a transformation; it will require public planning and investment designed to protect the climate for the public good. Climate protection demands a democratically-controlled, sustainable, demilitarized, equitable, and just economy that uses our resources not for greed or military domination but to meet the needs of people and planet.

¹ <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights#submenu-highlights-overview>

² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/overview>

5. As the threat of climate change mounts, the challenge of income inequality also continues to grow. The rich continue to get richer, the poor are getting poorer, and working people get slammed. Fortunately, we can address both the climate crisis and the inequality crisis with the same set of policies. As a labor movement we need to re-center our priorities around these challenges.

6. Climate protection must serve as a means to challenge environmental, racial, and gender injustice. The jobs created by climate protection must be open and accessible to those who have been excluded from and discriminated against in the labor force. Climate protecting energy policies must reduce rather than add to pollution in frontline environmental justice communities. The labor movement must recognize and support the struggles of those communities.

7. Labor's climate policy should insist on the basic principle of fairness that the burden of policies that are necessary for society—like protecting the climate—shouldn't be borne by a small minority who happen to be victimized by their side effects. A labor plan for climate protection should insist from the outset that any transition away from fossil fuels includes protection for the wellbeing of workers and communities whose jobs may be threatened.

8. Full employment and economic security for all must be a central part of a labor program for climate protection because the threat of unemployment forces workers and unions to accept any jobs, even those that are destroying their own futures. Climate protecting jobs must provide a decent income, benefits, and the basic right of workers to speak, organize, and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing.

9. We recognize that the changes that are necessary to provide a secure future for people and planet challenge the structures and values of our society. This Convergence will encourage climate protection advocates to organize locally and nationally in their own unions; encourage climate solidarity with workers around the world; build cooperation among climate protection advocates and caucuses in different unions; educate labor's leadership and rank and file on the realities of climate change; transform the discourse and ultimately the policy of the labor movement; and bring local labor unions and activists into engagement with climate and climate justice organizations and activists in their own communities. As workers and trade unionists we will either initiate change or be the victims of it. We hereby resolve to use our power to reshape the economic, political, and social system in the interests of all the world's people who are threatened by climate change.