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Leading Climate & Social Justice Organizations Rally Around Make Polluters Pay Plan

The Polluters Pay Climate Fund would force fossil fuel companies to pay for their climate pollution

Washington, D.C. -- Some of the nation's leading environmental, climate, and social justice organizations are applauding the news that Senator Chris Van Hollen will be introducing a "Make Polluters Pay" bill that would force fossil fuel corporations to pay a fee associated with their share of historic emissions.

The Polluters Pay Climate Fund would require major fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron to pay an annual fee that corresponds with their share of historic carbon dioxide emissions. As proposed, the plan would generate \$500 billion over 10 years, money that could be used to combat the climate emergency, advance environmental justice, and more.

Advocates were quick to stress that the Polluters Pay Climate Fund is just one of the ways that polluters need to be held accountable. The fee established under the fund only accounts for a small share of the costs fossil fuel corporations have inflicted on the public, especially on Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. The plan is intentionally written to leave the door open for ongoing and future lawsuits, legislation aimed at forcing fossil fuel companies to pay an even larger fee for climate damages, and regulations to limit polluting emissions.

Here's what groups are saying about the proposal:

"My family lost everything to Superstorm Sandy. Now, the skies are darkening, subways are flooding, and the heat is relentless. Meanwhile, the Democrats who run all three branches have talked themselves blue, no pun intended, about the importance of climate action. Making polluters pay is an obvious step towards getting the real money we need to confront the climate emergency. It's time to get serious: don't delay, make them pay," said **Rachel Rivera, a survivor of Superstorm Sandy and member of New York Communities for Change.**

"Polluters should pay their fair share for the damage they cause, period," said **Sara Chieffo, LCV Vice President of Government Affairs.** "This is especially true when it comes to the catastrophic costs of the climate crisis -- from extreme heat, fires, droughts, storms and floods to long-standing environmental injustice, the actions of polluters are having devastating impacts. We commend Senators Van Hollen, Markey and Sanders for the Polluter Pays Climate Fund -- an important addition to the debate going on right now in Congress."

"Look around and you can see our planet burning, melting, and flooding in real-time -- and it's hitting Black and brown working-class communities the hardest," said **Natalia Salgado, Director of Federal Advocacy at the Working Families Party.** "It is past time for the multinational companies responsible for all this suffering to pitch in and help clean up their mess."

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"It's no secret that major oil companies have profited obscenely by dumping climate change impacts on vulnerable states like Maryland and our Chesapeake Bay. Senator Chris Van Hollen's new bill -- the 'Polluters Pay Climate Fund' -- will at last bring \$500 billion worth of overdue compensation to us and citizens nationwide," said **Mike Tidwell, Director, Chesapeake Climate Action Network and CCAN Action Fund.**

"For decades, oil and gas giants lied about their role in causing climate change while taking billions in subsidies from taxpayers, often paying little or no taxes themselves," said **Richard Wiles, Executive Director of the Center for Climate Integrity.** "With hundreds of lives lost in climate-fueled disasters this year alone, polluters need to pay their fair share to help the nation speed the transition to clean energy."

"Oil companies knew for decades their product was killing the planet. We need both litigation and legislation to address these crimes against humanity. Senator Chris Van Hollen's bill -- the 'Polluters Pay Climate Fund' -- is a \$500 billion step in the right direction on the legislative side," said **Rev. Lennox Yearwood, CEO of the Hip Hop Caucus.** "It prioritizes investments in disadvantaged communities hit hardest by runaway global warming. While this bill won't fully solve the climate crisis, it's an overdue first step toward full justice."

"Communities are grappling with severe climate impacts, including stronger hurricanes, extreme flooding, and more devastating wildfires—burdens almost impossible for disadvantaged communities to bear," said **Kathy Mulvey, the fossil fuel accountability campaign manager at the Union of Concerned Scientists.** "Making fossil fuel polluters fund a comprehensive federal response to climate change is an important step toward holding these companies accountable for blocking climate action for decades and toward foiling their deception and greenwashing campaigns."

"Sen. Van Hollen's bill is a key part of our country's emergency climate response," said **Kassie Siegel, director of the Center for Biological Diversity's Climate Law Institute.** "With devastating evidence of the climate crisis all around us, this bill would make fossil fuel polluters pay for a small portion of the ongoing damage that oil, gas and coal are causing to our planet. President Biden and everyone who wants a livable future should throw their full support behind this common sense legislation."

"The need to stop, undo and fix the impact that air pollution has on the health and future of our planet couldn't be more urgent, particularly for communities of color who continue to suffer the most from inaction," said **Dianne Enriquez, Co-Director of Community Dignity Campaigns at the Center for Popular Democracy.** "We need legislation that holds polluters accountable and supports the work of leaders and communities that are fighting for environmental justice. It's time big polluters pay to address the devastating damage they've caused to our people and our planet. 'The Polluters Pay Climate Fund' is one important step toward less toxic air and healthier communities."

"Every year climate polluters kill hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and over nine million people world wide. Polluters must pay for all the pain and suffering they cause our communities," said **Kaniela Ing, Climate Justice Campaign Director with People's Action.** "Every Democrat, Republican, and Independent learned at some point that 'if you make a mess, you clean it up.' This idea is neither controversial nor partisan. It deserves widespread support

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among members of Congress, especially as members obsess over finding more 'pay-fors' to fund the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework and the American Jobs Plan."

"It is common sense to make polluters pay for the destruction they have caused to our planet and communities," said **Natalie Mebane, Associate Director of U.S. Policy at 350.org**. "Fossil fuel companies are the reason we are experiencing climate chaos from heat waves to wildfires, stronger storms and hurricanes to winter freezes, and they continue to sow misinformation and lies about their role. With the window of opportunity closing for meaningful climate action it is imperative that they foot the bill for the urgent transition we need to a country powered by renewables. We fully support Senators Van Hollen, Markey, and Sanders in establishing the Polluters Pay Climate Fund."

"When you break something, you pay for it. When you make a mess, you clean it up. Fossil fuel companies need to be held to the same standards that we hold our children. Companies like Exxon, Chevron, and Shell are most responsible for the climate emergency we are living in today and should pay for the damages they caused," said **Janet Redman, Greenpeace USA Climate Campaign Director**. "Making polluters pay for the recovery of our communities and planet from the damage they've caused is an important first step towards holding a morally-bankrupt industry that has harmed our health and destroyed our environment to account."

"It is encouraging to see policymakers heed the growing demands of people across the US and the world to make Big Polluters pay for fueling the climate crisis," said **Swetha Saseedhar, Senior Climate Organizer, Corporate Accountability**. "For millions of people, the climate crisis has already arrived. Action taken to hold Big Polluters liable can and must be used to fast track a just transition off fossil fuels and provide reparations for the communities most affected. Elected officials must hold polluters accountable for harms and end their license to pollute—including by investigating and suing this abusive industry."

"In July, scores of organizations called on New York's Congressional delegation to make climate polluters pay for the damages that they have caused to our planet," said **Liz Moran, Environmental Policy Director of NYPIRG**. "Senator Van Hollen's bill turns that call into groundbreaking Congressional legislation. Now the eyes of the nation turn to Senate Majority Leader Schumer: Can he make the oil and gas industries pick up the tab for the messes that they have created?" [Letter from NYS groups attached.]

An Open Letter to the Members of the New York State Congressional Delegation

July 12, 2021

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of our organizations, we write you to request that any infrastructure plan approved by the Congress include a mechanism that forces the fossil fuel industry to contribute more to cover the costs of the climate crisis – a crisis they caused.

President Biden has advanced a proposal – *The American Jobs Act* – which seeks to invest substantial sums in the revitalization of the nation’s infrastructure. An important component of the Act is to respond to the extraordinary costs resulting from climate change. As the Plan states,¹

Millions of Americans feel the effects of climate change each year when their roads wash out, airport power goes down, or schools get flooded...In 2020, the United States endured 22 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters, costing \$95 billion in damages to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure.... Building back better requires that the investments in this historic plan make our infrastructure more resilient in the face of increasingly severe floods, wildfires, hurricanes, and other risks. Every dollar spent on rebuilding our infrastructure during the Biden administration will be used to prevent, reduce, and withstand the impacts of the climate crisis.

The President’s plan hinges on an across-the-board increase in corporate tax rates of seven percent. There is no longer a credible debate that the climate crisis is real, and the world will face extraordinary costs to mitigate and adapt to a rapidly warming planet, but why should the fossil fuel industry – those most responsible for this rapidly unfolding catastrophe – be treated like all other corporations?

We think that they should not.

The President’s Plan should require that the oil, gas, and coal industries pay additional assessments, beyond any overall corporate tax increase, to help pay for the costs, especially in frontline environmental justice communities, of mitigating and adapting to a climate crisis that the fossil fuel corporations caused.

Our communities, New York State – and the nation – face an existential threat posed by a rapidly heating planet. The climate changes resulting from the burning of fossil fuels could cost New Yorkers tens of billions of dollars in damages caused by more powerful storms, more intense and frequent heat waves, and an increase in pollution.

Climate change from burning fossil fuels has already had severely adverse effects on New York, especially frontline environmental justice communities, including extreme weather events that cost New Yorkers’ lives and caused billions of dollars in damages. For example, in recent years, “Super Storm Sandy” caused

¹ The White House, “Briefing Room Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Plan,” March 31, 2021, Statements And Releases, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/>.

\$19 billion in damages in New York City.² Hurricane Irene devastated the state, resulted in ten deaths and in excess of \$1.3 billion in damages.³ Tropical Storm Lee brought drenching rains that caused more than \$1 billion more in damages.⁴

Extreme heat is the number one weather-related killer in the United States, responsible for more than 130 deaths in New York City per year, a number that could increase to more than [3,300 deaths](#) annually by 2080 if action is not taken. The impacts, once again, are most severe in frontline environmental justice communities; for example, more than 50% of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents live in the city's highest heat risk neighborhoods, based on information from the official [NYC Heat Vulnerability Index](#). Already the number of days reaching 90°F or more is skyrocketing from 18 per year on average between 1971 and 2000 to as many as 33 days per year by the end of the current decade.⁵ This extreme heat necessitates urgent investments in mitigation and will lead to a substantial increase in medical costs, ER visits, and deaths.

Researchers have estimated the potential economic costs of climate change impacts. **“Climate change costs in New York State for the sectors analyzed in this report may approach \$10 billion annually by mid-century.”**⁶ The researchers estimated *annual* costs of impacts: water resources, \$116-203 million; ocean coastal zones, \$44-77 million; ecosystems, \$375-525 million; agriculture, \$140-289 million; energy, \$36-73 million; transportation, \$100-170 million; communications, \$15-30 million, and public health \$2,998-6,098 million.⁷

There is no longer a credible debate about whether or not human activity, primarily the use of fossil fuels to create energy, is warming the planet: “Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic [human-caused] emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems.”¹

It is clear from historical records that for the better half of the late 20th Century, oil companies knew that burning fossil fuels was warming the planet. For example, according to corporate documents obtained by the *Los Angeles Times*, **a leading Exxon researcher told an audience of engineers at a conference in 1991 that greenhouse gases are rising “due to the burning of fossil fuels. Nobody disputes this fact.”** The

² 2014 New York Hazard Mitigation Plan, New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (January 4, 2014) at 3.12-12, www.dhss.ny.gov/oem/mitigation/documents/2014-shmp/Section-3-12-Hurricane.pdf.

³ Hurricane Irene One Year Later: Storm cost \$15.8 in Damage from Florida to New York to the Caribbean, *The Associated Press*, August 27, 2012, www.nydailynews.com/new-york/hurricane-irene-year-storm-cost-15-8-damage-florida-new-york-caribbean-article-1.1145302.

⁴ Tier Flood Damage \$1 Billion, Jennifer Micale, *Press-Sun Bulletin*, February 1, 2012. www.pressconnects.com/article/20120201/NEWS01/202010330/Tier-flood-damage-estimate-1-billion.

⁵ The City of New York, “A Stronger, More Resilient New York: Climate Analysis,” http://www.nyc.gov/html/sirr/downloads/pdf/final_report/Ch_2_ClimateAnalysis_FINAL_singles.pdf.

⁶ ClimAID Annex III, “An Economic Analysis of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations in New York State,” Authors: Robin Leichenko, David C. Major, Katie Johnson, Lesley Patrick, and Megan O’Grady 1 Rutgers University, <http://www.rilin.state.nj.us/commissions/fsrcomm/commdocs/NY%20state%20report%20on%20economic%20risks.pdf>.

⁷ ClimAID Annex III, “An Economic Analysis of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations in New York State,” Authors: Robin Leichenko, David C. Major, Katie Johnson, Lesley Patrick, and Megan O’Grady 1 Rutgers University, <http://www.rilin.state.nj.us/commissions/fsrcomm/commdocs/NY%20state%20report%20on%20economic%20risks.pdf>.

senior Exxon researcher went on to add that there was no doubt those levels would double by the middle of the 21st century.

Nevertheless, starting in the 1980s, the industry championed climate change denial and opposed regulations to curtail global warming. The industry funded organizations critical of climate change treaties, undermined public opinion about the science that global warming is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Their successes in bamboozling the public have pushed the planet to the brink.

Thus, it makes no sense to treat these industries as just another cluster of corporations. The oil, gas, and coal industries must foot more of the bill. They should be on the hook for a significantly greater share of the nation's costs of mitigating and adapting to climate changes. We urge that you advocate for measures that will ensure that the fossil fuel industries take the lead in paying for the nation's climate-related infrastructure needs.

Sincerely,

12th Street Block Association, NYC, NY

350.org

350Brooklyn

350NYC

Alliance for a Green Economy

Big Reuse

BK ROT

Capital Region Interfaith Creation Care Coalition

Catskill Mountainkeeper

CBH Global Development and Design

Church Women United in New York State

Citizen Action of New York

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Clean Air Coalition of Greater Ravena Coeymans

Climate Change Awareness & Action

CNY Solidarity Coalition Climate Justice Committee

Coalition for Outreach, Policy,, and Educationne

Coalition to Protect New York

COPE--Coalition for Outreach, Policy, & Education

Dryden Residents Against the Pipeline

Dryden Resource Awareness Coalition

Environmental Advocates NY

Environmental Justice Ministry of First Unitarian

Fossil Free Tompkins

FrackBustersNY

Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement

Gas Free Seneca

Grassroots Action NY

Grassroots Environmental Education

Green Education and Legal Fund

GreeningUSA

Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Little Lakes Sustainability Network

Long Island Progressive Coalition

Metro NY Catholic Climate Movement

Mid Hudson Valley DSA

Mothers Out Front New York

Mothers Out Front Tompkins County

Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club

New York Communities for Change

New York Youth Climate Leaders

New Yorkers for Clean Power

Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson

North American Climate, Conservation and Environment(NACCE)
North Country 350 Alliance
NYC H2O
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
Peace Action New York State
People for a Healthy Environment
PJIC Office, Sisters of Charity of New York
Pratt Sustainability Coalition
Protecting Our Waters
Putnam Progressives
Queens Climate Project
ROAR (Religious Organizations Along the River)
Seneca Lake Guardian, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate
ShaleshockCNY
SIRDN
Sisters of Charity Federation
Sisters of Charity of New York
Sixth Street Community Center
Solarize Albany
South Shore Audubon Society
Stop theAlgonquin Pipeline Expansion (SAPE)
Sunrise NYC
SUNY Environmental Task Force
SUNY New Paltz Environmental Task Force
Syracuse Peace Council
TIAA-Divest! from Climate Destruction
United for Action
Upper Hudson Green Party
Weather Medic Inc
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
Western New York Environmental Alliance
Women Against War