

## **Linking Climate Protection and Peace**

The Fort Collins Sustainability Group/FCSG was formed back in 2005. We've spend the last 14 years focusing on climate action at the local level. We've also been involved with coalitions that focus on regional and state level climate action. The names of those organizations are Northern Colorado Partners for Clean Energy and the Colorado Coalition for a Livable Climate, respectively.

What does local climate action look like? It's included advocating for setting ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals for the City of Fort Collins. If those goals had been adopted worldwide back in 2007 and then implemented, we could have met the target of limiting the average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C. At the regional level, it's included advocating for getting the utility that provides electricity to Fort Collins, Longmont, Loveland, and Estes Park to set a goal of providing us with 100% carbon free electricity by 2030. It's also included advocating for programs like incentive payments from Ft. Collins Utilities to make existing homes and businesses more energy efficient, and to help residents and business owners install solar panels. We're proud of what we've accomplished, and I hope that you have a chance to visit our table before you leave to learn more about us and think about whether and how you might want to get involved in this work.

However, we have recognized since our inception that local climate action will not be enough to address the climate crisis – even if all the cities in the world were to successfully follow the example of Ft. Collins. That's because there are so many greenhouse gas sources and sinks outside of cities. Think, for instance, of where things like industrial agriculture, industrial meat production, oil and gas extraction, and the protection and expansion of forests take place.

Reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and establishing new carbon sinks quickly enough to meet the 1.5 degree C target will require a major international effort, led by those countries that have historically emitted the most

greenhouse gases. Why is that? For one thing, those are the countries that have the resources commensurate with what's needed for solving this problem. For another thing, the most significant greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, remains in the atmosphere for hundreds and hundreds of years after it's been released. So the carbon dioxide that was emitted when the U.S. was developing into the industrial powerhouse that it is today is still around, contributing to Earth's intensifying fever.

The FCSG is therefore very excited about the push that began earlier this year for a Green New Deal. That push originated with young activists in the Sunrise Movement and their newly-elected allies in Congress, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Northern Colorado's Joe Neguse. They have since been joined both by more established organizations, including 350.org, Greenpeace, and locally, by the FCSG. They have also been joined by more established elected officials, including many of the current Democratic candidates for President. All of these organizations and officials understand that an effort on the scale of the original New Deal is what's needed to address the U.S.'s very significant contribution to the climate crisis.

For many years I was active in both the FCSG and Strength Through Peace, another local organization that formed shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center and other targets by Saudi nationals back in 2001. Strength Through Peace, which continued its work through 2018, advocated for taking a legal approach to bringing the perpetrators of 9/11 to justice, and vehemently opposed the invasions and occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq.

As a former and in all likelihood future peace activist, it's not difficult for me to wrap my head around the connection between peace and protection of the environment. For one thing, a society confronting or preparing for organized state violence is generally not able to focus much attention on less immediately pressing matters like reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. Think, for instance, of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, for whom life under the continuous violence and humiliation imposed by the Israeli occupation of their

land is enormously difficult. How much attention can anyone be expected to pay to the relatively long-term problem of climate change when daily life is an endless struggle? Think also of the Israelis, who put a great amount of energy into keeping the Palestinians under their control. They also have little time and attention left over for dealing with climate change.

Part of the reason that Fort Collins, other communities in Colorado, and the State government itself have been able to make at least some progress in addressing climate change is that we are not living under military occupation, and are not at a significant risk of being attacked militarily. We have the space, the time, and the resources to at least contemplate doing something about the climate crisis.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower recognized the ways in which war and preparations for war limit social development and justice eloquently in what is often referred to as his “cross of iron” speech. I want to quote from that speech and then put it in the context of the climate crisis that we are facing today.

In 1953, Eisenhower said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, [and] the hopes of its children.”

Eisenhower then went on to compare the cost of various pieces of military hardware to other things that governments provide, such as hospitals, schools, roads, and power plants. Updating that approach, we could compare the cost of modern military equipment to the cost of wind turbines, solar panels, homes insulated, and trees planted. A comprehensive Green New Deal is anticipated to cost in the neighborhood of 1.0 to 1.5 Trillion dollars per year. Military spending costs us around \$750 Billion per year, or 50% to 75% of Green New Deal costs. Imagine diverting even half of the military budget to the Green New Deal. That’d be a whole lot of new windmills!

Eisenhower concluded his speech as follows: “This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.” The stakes now are even higher than they were back then. In the 1950s and ever since, we have been able to avoid the calamity of nuclear war. But we shall not be able to avoid the calamity of climate breakdown in the coming decades if we do not begin to act decisively now to wean ourselves off fossil fuels entirely and reduce all of our greenhouse gas emissions to net zero in the next 15 to 20 years.

Many other nations also spend quite extravagantly on their militaries. However, the U.S. spends nearly as much on its military as all other nations combined. Given the dire threat that climate change poses to all nations, we need to reduce our collective military spending dramatically and pool our resources in order to achieve both the emissions reduction goals that are needed and to make our societies more resilient so that we can survive the climate change impacts that we already know are coming. It is at last time to heed the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who said over 50 years ago that “We must learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] or perish together as fools.”

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