

A Framework for Climate Action in the U.S. Congress

Set Scientific
Targets for
Greenhouse Gas
Neutrality by
2050

A Clean U.S.
Economy Must
Be Strong,
Competitive &
Fair

Invest in
America's
Sustainable
Economic
Future

Deliver a Just
& Equitable
Transition



Protect
Low-Income
Households

Empower
State, Local,
Tribal &
Territorial
Governments

Build Stronger
Community
Resilience to
New Climate
Realities

Create
Stable &
Predictable
Policies

Congressman Paul D. Tonko

Chair, Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Environment & Climate Change

116th Congress, First Session

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Environment & Climate Change Subcommittee
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
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Dear Friends,

Americans are living, and dying, in the path of unprecedented flooding, raging wildfires, and battering storms driven by Earth's changing climate. Regardless of the origins of our predicament, we have inherited these conditions. It falls to us to set aside past disagreements and rise together to meet this challenge.

We agree that climate change is real. We agree humans are driving it. We agree that we need to build solutions that meet the scale and urgency of the crisis we face. The principles outlined in this document are meant to provide a framework that moves the lines of our agreement forward and helps us build a comprehensive national climate action plan together.

As we assess the ideas before us, no options should be off the table. Rather, I submit that any climate proposal we consider should be measured against the principles enclosed here. They reflect extensive conversations with Members of Congress and stakeholders. I present them to you for your consideration, reflection, and feedback.

Yours,



Paul D. Tonko

Outline of Common Principles for National Climate Action

1. Adopt Science-Based Targets for Greenhouse Gas Neutrality by Mid-Century

Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is an economic, public health, environmental, and national security necessity.

Americans are already experiencing the costs and consequences of climate change. According to the overwhelming scientific consensus, many serious harms caused by climate change will intensify as a result of continued warming. Under the Paris Agreement, nations of the world responded to this growing crisis by developing individual action plans and set a goal of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius.

Congress must enact policies that set certain and enforceable targets to put the United States on a path toward achieving net zero emissions by no later than mid-century.

2. A Clean U.S. Economy Must Be Strong, Competitive, and Fair

The United States can lead the world in clean energy, creating new jobs and industries that carry added benefits including exporting American technologies, skills, and services to countries around the world.

Millions of Americans work in clean energy industries today. Federal climate action doubles as an opportunity to grow the economy through investments in research, development, and deployment of technologies that will create millions of additional clean energy and advanced manufacturing jobs. Similarly, a significant number of quality jobs, if coupled with strong labor and procurement standards, will be created through building and modernizing America's infrastructure in order to support the clean energy transition.

Congress must ensure emerging clean energy industries provide fair wages and safe working conditions. It must also protect America's energy-intensive and trade-exposed industries from anti-competitive behavior by nations that have not taken significant steps to combat climate change or enforce meaningful labor and environmental standards.

3. Climate Action Should Invest in America's Future

Federal climate action requires Congressional support for innovations in technology, policy, and finance to accelerate the clean energy transition and bring down costs of economy-wide decarbonization.

These investments should encourage energy efficiency; research, development, and demonstration in clean energy technologies including carbon capture, utilization, and storage; increased electrification across all sectors of the economy; deployment of cleaner transportation options as well as clean and renewable electricity resources supported by a modernized, smart, and flexible electric grid; carbon dioxide removal technologies; and natural climate solutions including improved management of forests, soil, and land use. Investments in public lands, watersheds, and oceans can support additional economic opportunities while sequestering significant amounts of greenhouse gas emissions and creating more resilient communities and ecosystems. The federal government must dedicate the resources necessary to make a sustained commitment toward achieving ambitious mitigation goals.

4. Climate Action Should Deliver a Just & Equitable Transition

Confronting the climate crisis offers an opportunity to address historic environmental injustices and create pathways of opportunity for all Americans.

Low-income communities, communities of color, and indigenous peoples are already suffering disproportionate harm from climate change. Federal climate policy should respond to that hardship by investing in opportunities and support for communities in high-pollution and climate-exposed areas, as well as working to reduce dangerous co-pollutants that can significantly impact public health. Federal climate policies should encourage community-based solutions by seeking public engagement and participation with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Federal policies should also direct investments in deindustrialized and rural communities to help spur economic development and diversification. To the extent that economic changes displace workers and erode community-supporting revenue streams, especially in communities and regions historically dependent on traditional energy industries, the federal government should provide transition assistance in the form of guaranteed pensions and benefits, education and job retraining, relocation benefits, community reinvestment, and support for other new opportunities to share in the benefits of the growing clean energy economy.

5. Climate Action Should Protect Low-Income Households

Federal climate policy should avoid disproportionate burdens on vulnerable people.

Low-income households spend a greater portion of their incomes on energy-related expenses. To the extent that climate policies might impact low- and fixed-income Americans, federal policy should offset any potentially regressive impacts on these households.

6. Climate Action Should Strengthen Community Resilience to Better Withstand New Climate Realities

Federal climate policies should ensure that all Americans are protected from climate-related harms, regardless of where they live.

Americans are already being harmed by the consequences of climate change. While steps must be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent further long-term damage, federal climate solutions should also strengthen the resilience of infrastructure and help communities adapt to the increasing occurrence of natural disasters and extreme weather events, spread of diseases, and other impacts that threaten the public's health and livelihoods. Investments that reduce the risk of these harms will more than pay for themselves over time.

Congress should also apply science-based adaptation policies to help ecosystems, fisheries, and wildlife threatened by climate change. Every agency and level of government must consider best practices to manage and minimize the risks posed by climate change when making investments in built and natural infrastructure, while recognizing that the long-term success of an adaptation strategy is diminished without a complementary mitigation strategy.

7. Climate Action Should Empower State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Governments

State, local, and community leaders are often in the best position to enact innovative policies to manage or prevent climate damage—and many already have.

Each state and region faces unique climate challenges. While some approaches may require federal implementation, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments should receive the financial support, technical assistance, and flexibility necessary to pursue policies that help achieve national climate goals through specific means that are best suited for local conditions and implementation.

8. Climate Action Should Avoid Harm to First Movers

Many entities have already taken steps to confront the growing climate crisis.

Federal climate policy should, to the extent possible, complement work already being done by states, municipalities, businesses, and individuals. Whenever possible, it should avoid penalizing entities that have taken early action.

9. Climate Action Should Create Stable and Predictable Policies

Every stakeholder engaged in climate action, whether public, private, or non-profit, needs to know that federal climate policies are durable and predictable.

Long-term climate progress requires policy certainty, which needs to come through statute and therefore requires action by Congress. Federal climate action must create steady, credible, and politically durable policies, send strong investment signals, and deliver long-term certainty to allow for proper planning and implementation while minimizing compliance costs. Regulators should have the flexibility to undertake periodic scientific reviews of goals, respond to changing conditions, and accommodate new developments in best practices and emerging technologies.

If you have comments, questions, or feedback regarding the content outlined in this document, please contact the Office of Congressman Paul Tonko.

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