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10 Principles for Just Climate Change Policies in Minnesota

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These ten principles were modified by the Climate Justice Working Group, derived from the 10 Principles originally developed by the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative (www.ejcc.org).

The Environmental Justice movement has demonstrated that pollution's effects often fall disproportionately on the health of people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities.

The effects of climate change, which is caused in large part by fossil fuel emissions, are no exception. Climate change, in fact, could have broader and more severe impacts. For example, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities are the first to experience negative climate change impacts like heat death and illness, respiratory illness, infectious disease, and economic and cultural displacement. New, "green" economic opportunities to come from innovation in response to this crisis must consider such issues of equity.

Climate policy must protect *and* involve our most vulnerable communities. Here are 10 Principles for Just Climate Change Policies in Minnesota:

1. Stop Activities that are Changing the Climate

Global climate change will accelerate unless we can seriously slow the release of heat-trapping gasses into the atmosphere. To protect vulnerable people and ecosystems, we must find alternatives for those human activities that cause global climate change.

2. Ensure Just Transition for Workers and Communities

Reaching the necessary level of emission reductions will require a fundamental shift in the operation of our society. A just transition must incorporate equity into every step. A just transition compensates for job loss, increases in energy prices, loss of tax base, and other negative effects disproportionately felt by displaced workers, low-income, Native and communities of color. A just transition creates opportunities and access for all people and communities to participate and co-facilitate the development of the new, clean energy economy.

3. Ensure a Just New Energy Economic and Social Order

In order to reach these reductions we must acknowledge that it will require a societal transformation and a new economic order. The energy social order should not mirror the existing centralized system of consolidated wealth and infrastructure. We should strive for a more democratic and locally-based economy. Large Hydropower that flood Native nations, carbon offsets that appropriate land, and reinvestments in nuclear power are NOT Just solutions to climate change.

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4. Provide Resources for Those Already Being Impacted by Climate Change

With the level of emissions that are already in the atmosphere, Minnesota will be experiencing the initial onset of climate change. We must move forward with strong emission reductions, AND we must also acknowledge that we are now working within a climate that is already showing signs of change. Low-income workers, people of color, and Indigenous Peoples are the most impacted. We must provide funding and analysis so these frontline communities are able to effectively deal with this new reality.

5. Require Meaningful Community Participation

At all levels and in all realms, people must have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Communities most affected must be engaged as decision-makers in the policy process. The U.S. federal, state and local governments must be accountable to these communities, practice inclusiveness in the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

6. Support Local Efforts and Actions

Support community vision, community education, community actions such as green zones, and other locally based efforts.

7. Take Responsibility

The U.S. is four percent of the world's population but emits 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. Of these emissions, it is largely the upper and middle class consumptive, growth-oriented lifestyle that is the dominant contributor. Historically, the U.S. has also used up a large part of the atmosphere's carbon sink. We must take responsibility for these historic and current emissions when looking at other countries and within communities here domestically. All people should have equal rights to the atmosphere.

8. Stop Exploration, Mining, and Use of Fossil Fuels and Uranium

Presently known fossil fuel and uranium reserves will last far into the future. Fossil fuel and uranium exploration destroys unique cultures and valuable ecosystems (i.e. Alaska and the U.S. western States). Exploration should be halted as it is no longer worth the cost. We should instead invest those public dollars in renewable energy sources, energy conservation, and community scale renewable energy systems.

9. Act Now, not Later

No amount of action later can make up for lack of action today.

10. Plan for Future Generations

The greatest impacts of climate change will come in the future. We must make policy decisions on the basis of their impacts on future generations. We must enact policies for our children, our children's children, and seven generations beyond. Our future generations must have the same rights to the atmosphere and the same opportunities for a sustainable and meaningful relationship to Mother Earth.