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The Green New Deal Is Touching Up Its (Grass)roots

By Justine Calma, Grist 13 January 19

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Elizabeth Warren. Beto O'Rourke. Those are just a few of the high-profile names either leading the development of or jumping to endorse today's environmental cause célèbre, the [Green New Deal](#). Inside congressional halls, at street protests, and, of course, on climate Twitter — it's hard to avoid the idea, which aims to re-package ambitious climate actions into a single, wide-ranging stimulus program.

The Green New Deal is being promoted as a kind of progressive beacon of a greener America, promising jobs and social justice for all on top of a shift away from fossil fuels. It's a proposal largely driven by newcomers to politics and environmental activism (and supported, however tentatively, by several potential presidential candidates and members of the Democratic political establishment). The plan aspires to bring together the needs of people and the environment, [outlining](#) “a historic opportunity to virtually eliminate poverty.”

But within the broader environmental movement, not everyone was initially gung-ho on the Green New Deal — at least not without some stipulations.

To understand the debate surrounding the Green New Deal, you need to look beyond its recent prominence in Beltway political circles to the on-the-ground organizations that make up the environmental justice movement. Newcomers like Ocasio-Cortez may be leading the charge, but grassroots leaders who have spent years advocating for low-income families and neighborhoods of color most impacted by fossil fuels say their communities weren't consulted when the idea first took shape.

For all the fanfare, there isn't a package of policies that make up a Green New Deal just yet. And that's why community-level activists are clamoring to get involved, [help shape the effort](#), and ensure the deal leaves no one behind.

Something Old, Something New

Although the term “Green New Deal” has [evolved over time](#), its current embodiment as a complete overhaul of U.S. energy infrastructure was spearheaded by two high profile entities: progressive darling and first-term Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the Sunrise Movement, an organization formed in 2017 by young people hellbent on making climate change the “it” issue.

In November 2018, Ocasio-Cortez, with support from Sunrise, called for a House select committee to formulate the package of policies. More than 40 lawmakers signed on to support the draft text. Then shortly before the end of the year, Nancy Pelosi, now the speaker of the House, announced the formation instead of a “Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.”

It wasn't exactly a win for the leaders of the new environmental vanguard. Sunrise tweeted its displeasure at the committee's pared-down ambition, taking umbrage with its lack of power to [subpoena](#) (a [condition](#) for which Ocasio-Cortez had advocated) and the fact that politicians who take money from fossil fuel interests would not be excluded from sitting on it.



The fuss over who gets a say in the formation of the Green New Deal goes back further than Ocasio-Cortez's or Sunrise's friendly-feud with establishment Democrats. The Climate Justice Alliance, a network of groups representing indigenous peoples, workers, and frontline communities, says its gut reaction to the Green New Deal was that it had been crafted at the “grasstops” (as opposed to the grassroots).

Shortly after Ocasio-Cortez put out her proposal for a select committee, the alliance released a [statement](#) largely in support of the concept, but with a “word of caution”: “When we consulted with many of our own communities, they were neither aware of, nor had they been consulted about, the launch of the GND.”

Leaders at the alliance surveyed its member organizations — there are more than 60 across the U.S. — and put together a list of their concerns. Unless the Green New Deal addresses those key points, the alliance says, the plan won't meet its proponents' lofty goal of tackling poverty and injustice. Nor will the deal gain the grassroots support it will likely need to become a reality.

“What we want to do is strengthen and center the Green New Deal in environmental justice communities that have both experience and lived history of confronting the struggle against fossil fuel industries,” Angela Adrar, executive director of the alliance, told Grist.

Grist asked several indigenous and environmental justice leaders: If the Green New Deal is going to make good on its promises, what will it take? Here's what they said.

A more inclusive and democratic process that respects tribal sovereignty

As details get hashed out on what a Green New Deal would actually include, longtime environmental justice organizers say their communities need to be the ones guiding the way

forward. “The way that the plan was developed and shared is one of its greatest weaknesses,” Adrar says. “We want to be able to act quickly, but we also want to act democratically.”

She adds that involving the grassroots is especially important in the wake of the 2018 midterm elections, which ushered in many new congressional members pledging to focus on the underrepresented communities they come from. The Climate Justice Alliance is calling for town halls (with interpreters for several languages) to allow communities to help flesh out policies to include in the Green New Deal.

Some of the disconnect could be generational, says Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Many of the leaders espousing the Green New Deal are young people. He says that he and his colleagues were caught off-guard when they saw the plan on social media and that when his network reached out to its members, there was little familiarity or understanding of the Green New Deal.

“Maybe the way of communication of youth is different than what we’ve found in the environmental justice movement and our native movement around the value of human contact — face-to-face human contact,” he says. “We’re asking that leadership of the Green New Deal meet with us and have a discussion how we can strengthen this campaign with the participation of the communities most impacted.”

Any retooling of America’s energy infrastructure will undoubtedly venture into Native American tribes’ lands, where there are already long-standing battles over existing and proposed pipeline expansions, as well as fossil fuel facilities. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples calls for “free, prior, and informed consent” from tribes before developers begin any project on their land. So indigenous environmental groups say there needs to be respect for tribal sovereignty and buy-in from tribes for a Green New Deal to fulfill its promise of being just and equitable.

Green jobs should be great jobs

There has been a lot of talk in Green New Deal circles about uplifting poor and working-class communities. Advocates have floated ideas ranging from a job-guarantee program offering a living wage to anyone who wants one to explicitly ensuring the rights of workers to form a union.

But as workers’ rights organizations point out, energy and extractive industries have provided unionized, high-paying jobs for a long time — and they want to make sure workers can have the same or a better quality of life within green industries.

“There’s been a long history of workers that have been left hanging in transition in the past,” says Michael Leon Guerrero, executive director of the Labor Network for Sustainability, which has been working to bridge divides between labor and environmental issues. “For that reason, there’s quite a bit of skepticism in the labor sector.”

Joseph Uehlein, who founded the Labor Network for Sustainability, adds that there needs to be more than just the promise of jobs to entice labor to support a Green New Deal. “Every presidential candidate in my lifetime talks about job creation as their top priority,” he says. “Over the last 40 years, those jobs have gotten worse and worse. A lot of jobs are not so good, requiring two or three breadwinners to do what one used to be able to do.”

Uehlein hopes an eventual Green New Deal will ensure not just jobs that guarantee a living wage, but will go one step further. “We always talk about family-supporting jobs,” he says. “It’s not just about living, it’s about supporting families.”

Do No Harm

Any version of a Green New Deal would likely ensure that the U.S. transitions away from fossil fuels and toward renewable sources of energy — with Ocasio-Cortez setting the bold target of the nation getting 100 percent of its energy from renewables within 10 years.

But defining what exactly [counts as “renewable energy”](#) has been [tricky](#). There are plenty of sources of energy that aren’t in danger of running out and don’t put out as many greenhouse gases as coal or oil, but are still disruptive to frontline communities. [Garbage incineration](#) is considered a renewable energy in some states, but it still emits harmful pollutants. And when it comes to nuclear energy or large-scale hydropower, the associated [uranium extraction](#) and [dam](#) construction have destroyed indigenous peoples’ homes and flooded their lands.

The Climate Justice Alliance is also pushing to exclude global warming interventions like [geoengineering](#) and [carbon capture and sequestration](#), which they believe don’t do enough to address the root causes of global warming. Both technologies have to do with re-trapping or curbing the effects of greenhouse gases after they’ve been produced. “Carbon capture and sequestration, it’s a false solution from our analysis,” Goldtooth says. The focus needs to be on stopping greenhouse gases from getting into the atmosphere in the first place, he and other critics argue.

As the alliance sees it, a future in which the planet survives requires a complete transition away from fossil fuels and an extractive economy, and toward a regenerative economy with less consumption and more ecological resilience.

Goldtooth and his colleagues are calling for solutions that rein in damaging co-pollutants on top of greenhouse gases. And they support scalable solutions — like [community solar](#) projects — that are popping up in some of the neighborhoods that are most affected by climate change.

A good start

Even though the Green New Deal faces many political obstacles, its proponents are still [pushing forward](#) at full speed. “We are calling for a wartime-level, just economic mobilization plan to get to 100% renewable energy ASAP,” Ocasio-Cortez [tweeted](#) on New Year’s Day.

Scientists recently estimated that the world has only [12 years](#) to keep average global temperatures from increasing beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) — the upper limit which many agree we can't surpass if we want to avoid a climate crisis. The urgency around the latest climate change timeline has brought a lot of new advocates to the table.

According to John Harrity, chair of the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs and a board member at the Labor Network for Sustainability, the labor movement is becoming more willing to engage on ways to address climate change. “I think the Green New Deal becomes a really good way to put all of that together in a package,” he says. “That evokes for a lot of people the image of a time when people did all pull together for the common good.”

Elizabeth Yeampierre, steering committee co-chair of the Climate Justice Alliance and executive director of the Brooklyn-based grassroots organization, UPROSE, which works on issues cutting across climate change and racial justice, calls the Green New Deal “a good beginning for developing something that could really have lasting impacts and transformation in local communities and nationwide.”

Since the alliance put out its recommendations, Yeampierre says she's been in regular contact with both the Sunrise Movement and Ocasio-Cortez's office. “To their credit they were responsive and have made themselves available to figure out how we move forward in a way that doesn't really step over the people,” she explains.

Yeampierre, Goldtooth, and other representatives of the Climate Justice Alliance met with Representative Ocasio-Cortez on Thursday. In a [video](#), Ocasio-Cortez said the purpose of the meeting was to figure “how we can bring the direct communities impacted into the space of leadership so they can draft and lead a Green New Deal.”

“We need to be able to trust that communities can govern themselves and I'm so excited to have heard and uplift those solutions,” she said.

The language in Ocasio-Cortez' draft proposal has already changed — it now includes clauses to “protect and enforce sovereign rights and land rights of tribal nations” and “recognize the rights of workers to organize and unionize.” The document has doubled in length since it was put out in November (at time of publication, it is 11 pages long) and will likely include new edits in the coming days.

Varshini Prakash, a founding member of the Sunrise Movement (and a 2018 [Grist 50 Fixer](#)), says she agrees with the Climate Justice Alliance's recommendation that a Green New Deal prioritize the needs of workers, frontline communities, communities of color, and low-income communities. “Their critiques,” Prakash tells Grist, “are fully valid, and I appreciate what they're bringing.”

The broad overview of a Green New Deal in Ocasio-Cortez's proposal for a select committee, Prakash says, was hashed out quickly after the representative's team approached Sunrise late last year. (Ocasio-Cortez did not immediately respond to Grist's inquiry). “This was very rapid fire, it happened on an extremely tight timescale,” she says. “We didn't have a lot of time to do the broad consultation we wanted.”

But Prakash, Yeampierre, and other leaders in the movements for environmental and climate justice are working to make sure there are more folks on board moving forward.

“Climate change isn’t just going to threaten our communities — it’s also going to test our solidarity, it’s going to test how we build relationships with each other,” Yeampierre says. “So I think the Green New Deal can be used as an opportunity to show that we can pass that test.”

[Gavin Newsom appoints Oakland man to lead Natural Resources Agency](#)
[By Nico Savidge, Mercury News, 1/12/19](#)

Gov. Gavin Newsom appointed the leader of an Oakland water philanthropy to be the next secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency. Wade Crowfoot will lead the agency that oversees state parks, the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife, among other offices, Newsom announced Friday.

[Wade Crowfoot - Public Policy Institute of California](#)
<https://www.ppic.org/person/wade-crowfoot/>

Wade Crowfoot is CEO of the Water Foundation, a strategic philanthropy focused on transforming water use in California and the American west. The foundation ...

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[Q&A with Wade Crowfoot, Water Foundation CEO - WaterPolls.org](#)
<https://waterpolls.org/wade-crowfoot-water-foundation/>

Nov 16, 2017 - My interview with *Wade Crowfoot*, CEO of the Water Foundation, which recently commissioned a major poll on water issues in the American ...

[Wade Crowfoot | GreenBiz](#) **<https://www.greenbiz.com/users/wade-crowfoot>**

Wade Crowfoot is the Environmental Defense Fund's West Coast political director. Before joining EDF, he served as director of climate protection initiatives for ...

NEWS RELEASE **January 15, 2019, Las Vegas, NV**

The Western Shoshone Nation made a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee for the 2020 Periodic Review of the USA. The submission updates the UN body on the status of USA human rights and provides information of ongoing and current treatment of the Shoshone people under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The submission reminds the UN that the USA has failed to respond since the issue of mistreatment was submitted in 2005 under the Human Rights Committee Early Warning procedure. In the past the UN body has issued Concluding Observations and ICCPR Legal Framework (2006 & 2008), "While noting the explanations provided by the State party with regard to the situation of the Western Shoshone indigenous peoples, considered by the

Committee under its early warning and urgent action procedure, the Committee strongly regrets that the State party has not followed up on the recommendations contained in paragraphs 8 to 10 of its decision 1 (68) of 2006 (CERD/C/USA/DEC/1) (art.5).”

Additional issues made in the latest submission include:

- Environmental racism in site selection of Yucca Mountain;
- Ownership of Yucca Mountain;
- Ruby Mountain fracking;
- Tonopah uranium mining;
- Religious bias of Supreme Court doctrine of discovery;
- Illegal use, occupancy and expansion (military and civilian);
- Secretary of Interior rewriting regulations to limit freedom of information;
- Genuine breach of trust and failure of fiduciary responsibility by US intent to defraud the Shoshone people of their property;
- US media acting as propaganda conduit and not reporting or under reporting US abuse and instead publicizing American use and occupancy as positive, when in fact they are illegal use and occupancy.

Steve Newcomb characterized the submission as, *“An effort to call the US to account for the violation of the fundamental rights of the Western Shoshone base on the doctrine of Christian discovery and domination.”* The film, *Doctrine of Discovery* is available at www.38plus2productions.com.

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**International Webinar to Preserve the INF Treaty**

United for Peace and Justice is pleased to invite you to join an international webinar organized by the [Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons](#), Thursday, January 17, 2019: 10 - 11:30 am California; 1 - 2:30 pm New York; 6 - 7:30 pm.

Presenters from the U.S., Russia, Germany and the UK will discuss the history and significance of the INF Treaty and the importance of working to preserve it. [Click here to register](#).

On October 20, 2018, President Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has stated that the U.S. will suspend implementation of the treaty in early February

The INF Treaty is an historic agreement reached in 1987 between the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, and to utilize extensive on-site inspections for verification of the agreement.

If the Treaty is dissolved, it opens the door for nuclear-armed missiles returning to Europe, and could further stimulate the current nuclear arms race.

Join this webinar to learn more about the INF Treaty, the risks if we lose it, and what civil society can do to protect the Treaty and prevent the development and deployment of new nuclear weapons.



**Presenters:**

- \* Andrew Lichterman (USA), Western States Legal Foundation
- \* Regina Hagen (Germany), Abolition 2000 Germany Section
- \* Dave Webb (UK), Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- \* Pavel Podvig (Russia), United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

**Thursday, January 17, 2019:** 10 - 11:30 am California; 1 - 2:30 pm New York; 6 - 7:30 pm UK; 7 - 8:30 pm Central Europe. ([international time zone converter](#))

[Click here to register.](#)

Contact: Jackie Cabasso [wslf@earthlink.net](mailto:wslf@earthlink.net)

**Background documents:**

Renew Nuclear Arms Control, Don't Destroy It. By Andrew Lichterman and John Burroughs. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2019/01/renew-nuclear-arms-control-dont-destroy/>

Parliamentary action to preserve the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. <http://www.pnnd.org/article/parliamentary-action-preserve-intermediate-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty>

**Take action: U.S. citizens: Tell Congress to Save the INF Treaty**

International actions to be announced

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*I wonder what their take on Article I, Section 8 of the US Constitution is.....*

**What's the difference between a norm and a law? What does it mean to circumvent a norm, and is that even a problem? What can we trust in one another to do, and what do we need to codify?**

Join Nevada Humanities for *The Salon: Norms and Why They Matter* as we pose these and other questions to a lawyer, a political scientist, and a rhetorician. Moderated by Katharine Schweitzer, assistant professor in Philosophy at the University of Nevada, Reno, these panelists will discuss political norms and conventions and how they play a pivotal role in sustaining the American Constitution. Join us on Friday, January 18 at 6 pm at Sundance Books and Music in Reno. Light refreshments will be served.

Guest panelists will include:

**Lieutenant Richard A. Andrews** is the Command Judge Advocate at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada. He was commissioned into the U.S. Navy's Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps in 2014, following a judicial clerkship for the Honorable Philip Pro at the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada. He has worked as both a prosecutor and defense attorney, and now serves in a role similar to a general counsel, advising military commanders on ethics, investigations, and other matters of military and federal law.

**Ian M. Hartshorn** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania. He is a former co-chair

of the Labor Politics Group of the American Political Science Association and a member of the Middle East Studies Association. His work has appeared in Political Research Quarterly, Terrorism and Political Violence, and Global Governance. His interests are in comparative political economy, labor movements, and transnational migration, and his current research looks at speech acts in the Middle East and refugee resettlement in the United States.

**Amy Pason** is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. Dr. Pason received her PhD from the University of Minnesota in 2010. She studies persuasion and advocacy, and teaches courses in democratic deliberation and facilitation, public speaking, social movements, and recently taught a course on persuasion related to political campaigns. Her expertise is related to norms of democratic public spheres as well as First Amendment and free speech laws and norms.

**Katharine Schweitzer** is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research interests include moral disagreement and how democratic citizens and institutions ought to respond to it. She received her PhD in philosophy from Emory University in 2014, and

her dissertation research focused on when political compromise is morally justified. At UNR she teaches classes such as Philosophy of Law, Global Ethics and Justice, Bioethics, and Ethical Theory.

*This program is a part of the “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” Initiative, administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils. We thank The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their generous support and the Pulitzer Prizes for their partnership*

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[KOMO News](http://www.komo.com): January 10 Hula dance is being taught in San Quentin State Prison for reform — and it's working. <https://cir.ca/2ACux08>

[Science Channel](http://www.sciencechannel.com) **October 24, 2018**.

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