

THE CLIMATE MOBILIZATION



Rising to the Challenge of Our Time, Together

By Margaret Klein
with Ezra Silk

Climate change presents us each with a fundamental choice. Will we watch passively as our climate and our civilization collapse around us? Or will we mobilize and fight back? To avoid total catastrophe, the United States must respond on a scale comparable only to the World War II home-front mobilization. At present, this is politically impossible. In order for such a mobilization to occur, a social movement must first fundamentally alter the political landscape.

*This paper introduces *The Climate Mobilization*, a political platform and social movement strategy. *The Pledge to Mobilize* is an organizing tool that can facilitate a collective awakening. Signers pledge their support to political candidates who have signed the *Pledge* and, in doing so, publicly supported the *Climate Mobilization* platform. *The Pledge* calls on the federal government to commence a five-year *Climate Mobilization* that both cuts American carbon emissions by at least 25 percent per year for five years and creates a *Climate Mobilization Corps*, tens of millions strong, to lead the transition to post-carbon energy and agricultural systems and implement adaptation and mitigation measures. It also demands that the U.S. pressure other nations, through nonviolent economic and diplomatic measures, to inaugurate similar climate mobilizations.*

The Pledge provides structure to an issue that can be overwhelmingly complex and calls on individuals to mobilize their skills, creativity and networks in unique ways. *The Pledge* does not spread online, but rather from person to person, often in the context of existing relationships. This has the power to bring climate change into living rooms across America, and to the forefront of the national conversation. Variations of the *Pledge* will launch in other countries, providing a bridge between the hyper-local, the national and the global. *The Pledge to Mobilize* empowers each of us to rise to the challenge of our time.

Marching Towards Catastrophe

The climate is changing. The earth has warmed 1.5°F since the industrial revolution, and human emissions of greenhouse gases are the predominant cause.¹ The Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that if carbon dioxide emissions continue their unrestricted growth, the earth will warm between 3.6°F to 10.8°F by 2100.² These may seem like relatively small temperature increases, but they are enough to cause the extinction of 18% to 37% of the species on Earth and to end the Holocene, the 12,000-year geological era that facilitated the development of civilization.³

Business as usual is ending. It's easy to think that we exist outside the natural world, but our global food and energy infrastructure – the foundation of the complex system that we call civilization – is utterly dependent on natural resource abundance and climatic stability. Ecological strains much milder than the climate crisis have caused past societies to completely collapse.⁴ Droughts, floods, severe weather, wildfires, invasive species, and vector-borne disease are already damaging agriculture and infrastructure, and creating tens of millions of displaced people.⁵ These harsh climatic conditions, as well as a historic oil price shock, have sent food prices skyrocketing.^{6,7} Food price spikes in 2008 and 2011 almost certainly contributed to the successive waves of civil unrest that have recently swept the globe, toppling governments and unleashing violent sectarian tensions.⁸

The arrangements that we rely on are unraveling. In the estimation of the U.K. government's chief scientist, humans face a “perfect storm” of energy, food and water crises by 2030.⁹ These crises will be severely exacerbated by rapid climate change. This gathering storm, driven by the explosive growth of populations and economic activity, is homing in on our shoreline. California languishes amidst a historic drought. Superstorm Sandy floods the New York City subway system. The price of gasoline hovers around \$3.50. Climatologist James Hansen, the former head of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, describes the climate crisis in the starkest terms:

Planet Earth, creation, the world in which civilization developed, the world with climate patterns that we know and stable shorelines, is in imminent peril. The urgency of the situation crystallized only in the past few years...The startling conclusion is that continued exploitation of all fossil fuels on Earth threatens not only the other millions of species on the planet, but also the survival of humanity itself – and the timetable is shorter than we thought.¹⁰

American leadership is failing. In the face of this unprecedented danger, the United States government is paralyzed. The majority of our elected representatives live in a trance of denial, narcissism and complacency. Domestically, the U.S. has failed to place a price on carbon emissions or even end billion-dollar annual subsidies to the big oil companies. As taxpayers, we are subsidizing the destruction of the climate that biologically sustains us. In international negotiations, the United States has modeled how to delay action by shirking responsibility and blaming others. In 2001, our country abandoned the Kyoto Protocol – the only binding international treaty on emissions reductions ever passed – providing cover for Australia and Canada to opt out of the treaty, as well. Today, more than 25 years after Hansen's groundbreaking discussion of the greenhouse effect in the Senate chambers, no binding international treaty limits global emissions.¹¹

Our country is becoming a pariah on the international stage. Our leaders have justified their obstruction by contending that “the American way of life is not negotiable.”¹² But responding forcefully to climate change is our only chance to preserve the best aspects of the American tradition. Throughout our history, Americans have treasured our country’s remarkable record of social stability and political freedom. But climate change and resource exhaustion is already damaging those ideals. Instead of confronting the climate crisis head-on, the state, facing a crisis of legitimacy, is launching unconstitutional assaults on whistleblowers, journalists and the American public, at large. We must realize that the logical endpoint of our current energy regime, which increasingly benefits only a small fraction of the global population, is a future of tyranny, catastrophic social breakdown and unprecedented human suffering.

The future is in our hands. And so the fate of humanity falls to us. As our leaders delay and prevaricate, will we continue to watch passively as civilization unravels? Or will we build a social movement, reclaim our fallen democracy and mobilize our society to fight climate change? The decisions we make in the coming months and years are of momentous consequence for the fate of humanity and the natural world. We must rise to the challenge of our time, together.

The Mobilization Imperative

We have done it before. The Axis powers posed an existential threat to the United States, but Americans denied this threat for years, imagining that we could stay out of the war. Pearl Harbor shattered our collective denial, and woke America up to the truth that we were in terrible danger and had to mobilize immediately. Under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt, we did so — with stunning success.

Twelve years after World War II, as part of an official US Army history of the war, Elberton Smith described the mobilization that allowed the Allies to prevail:

The task of harnessing a nation's economic potential for war has come to be known as “economic mobilization.” Its basic purpose is to insure the procurement of finished munitions — the sum total of equipment, supplies, and services required by the armed forces — while at the same time supplying the essential needs of the civilian economy. The demands of modern technological warfare, when suddenly thrust upon a nation lacking the specific equipment for war, are so novel, so complex, and of such magnitude that their fulfillment requires a nationwide industrial and social revolution. Such a revolution does not automatically “occur” when a nation goes to war. It must be planned, directed, and carried out in a manner which will accomplish its objectives with a minimum of hardship and dislocation.¹³

This “industrial and social revolution” that the U.S. underwent after Pearl Harbor was staggering. Conservative business titans joined in common cause with labor leaders and liberal bureaucrats — after ten years of bitter acrimony over the New Deal — to redirect and refocus America’s industrial might against the Nazis. Factories rapidly shifted from producing consumer goods to producing tanks, guns and planes, shattering all historical records for war production. Scientists and universities pumped out research on behalf of the war effort — leading to huge technological and intellectual breakthroughs. Young men sacrificed their lives fighting for their country. Women worked in factories and planted “victory gardens” that supplied 40% of America’s vegetables during

the war. More than 10% of the population relocated, often across state lines, in order to find a “war job.”¹⁴ All hands were on deck. All Americans worked toward a common purpose.

This is precisely the level of focus, cooperation and planning that we need if we are to counter the destructive force of climate change. Smith’s comments regarding the novelty, complexity, and magnitude of the demands of modern warfare absolutely apply to the challenge posed by the climate crisis. The conclusion that the United States must mount a WWII-level mobilization to protect ourselves from climate change has support from top scientists, environmental analysts and even national politicians.¹⁵

A Climate Mobilization would allow our country “to adapt to what we can't avoid, and avoid what we can't adapt to.”¹⁶ As in World War II, all Americans would contribute. Industry would transform to maximize energy efficiency and to produce the hardware needed for our post-carbon energy infrastructure. Universities would research methods to improve existing renewable and post-carbon energy technologies, increase energy efficiency, and maximize the resilience of our energy, transportation and agricultural systems, in anticipation of the coming ecological disasters. Farmers would bind massive quantities of carbon into the soil and learn to implement techniques that are more resistant to floods, droughts and invasive species. Existing government agencies, including the military, would shift their focus toward this super-ordinate goal. Citizens would plant trees, reduce energy use at home and take part in community adaptation and mitigation projects. We would grow community gardens, install solar panels and prepare low-lying areas for increased flooding. We would build bike lanes and paint roofs white to mitigate the summer heat that grows more relentless each year.

But how do we get there? A society-wide mobilization requires, at minimum, the consent and cooperation of the population. In 1941, Americans were staunchly isolationist, hoping and imagining that it might be possible to avoid the war. The surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, which decimated much of our naval fleet, changed the mood of the country. Isolationism evaporated overnight and Americans threw themselves behind the war effort.

Various writers have held out hope that a catastrophic natural disaster will be the Pearl Harbor of climate change. Yet we have already been struck by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy, and ravaged by wildfires in Colorado and droughts across California and the Midwest. No spontaneous awakening has occurred. It is up to us to rise to the challenge of our time. Although the government must coordinate the mobilization, the social momentum needed to drive the mobilization onto the agenda will not originate in Washington. Those of us who grasp the extent, immediacy and horror of the threat must build a social movement that wakes Americans up to the necessity of an immediate climate mobilization.

The Pledge to Mobilize

The Pledge to Mobilize is an unblinking declaration of reality, and a platform for a social movement. It is a tool for spreading the frightening truth of climate change from person to person, as well as a means to reclaim our democracy. Wielding the pledge, citizens can demand that elected officials both acknowledge the scope of the climate crisis and mobilize to fight it accordingly. The Pledge states:

Climate change is already causing immense human suffering as well as untold damage to the natural world. It threatens the collapse of global civilization within this century. Preventing the worst effects of this gathering crisis is the great moral imperative of our time. This mission must be our nation's preeminent priority.

I call on the United States federal government to commence a five-year mobilization to preserve a climate that is safe, stable and supportive of human civilization. This nonviolent campaign will be waged on a scale comparable to the American World War II mobilization. It will be carried out in accordance with the United States Constitution, and will guarantee that the essential needs of the civilian economy are met throughout this time of transition.

The federal government shall:

*§ Enact policy programs that both reduce national carbon emissions by at least 25 percent each year for five consecutive years and ensure that the United States does not emit more than its fair share of the remaining fossil fuel carbon budget.**

§ Create a Climate Mobilization Corps, tens of millions strong, which will implement adaptation measures and rapidly expand our post-carbon energy infrastructure and agricultural systems.

§ Exert international diplomatic and economic pressure to enlist allied nations in this heroic fight against social, economic and environmental chaos.

I will:

§ Donate time and money exclusively to political candidates on the local, state and national level who have signed this pledge.

§ Vote for candidates who have signed this pledge over those who have not.

§ Mobilize my skills, resources and networks to spread the stark truth of climate change and the hope of this pledge to others.

* "Fair share" is defined as a percentage of the post-2013 global carbon budget no greater than our share of global population on Jan. 1, 2014. This translates to roughly 4.5%, or 5.4 billion tons, of the post-2013 global carbon budget, which is approximately 120 billion tons of fossil fuel carbon emissions, according to [Hansen, et al. \(2013\)](#).

Mobilizing Individuals and Communities

The Pledge to Mobilize is designed to spread in a unique way. An individual will not be able take the Pledge online – it can only be taken *in person*, and it must be given by someone who has *already signed* it. This requirement will create new ways of interacting around climate change. The Pledge signer will combine the roles of teacher, mentor and missionary.¹⁷ Those who sign the Pledge will approach people they respect and care for, and invite them to sign. When friends and family are dubious, the Pledge signer will engage them in an educational process about the stark reality of the ecological crisis, encouraging them to read articles, watch videos, and attend meetings about climate change. This process is designed to repeatedly disrupt the culture of silence and willful ignorance that allows us as individuals and as a society to minimize and ignore the growing climate crisis.

Though the Pledge must be taken in person, its spread will be registered and tracked through the Climate Mobilization website, which is currently in development. This will allow signers to monitor how many people they have recruited to sign the Pledge, both directly and indirectly.

One of the Pledge's primary strategic virtues is its flexibility. We hope that signers will use their creative instincts and unique skills to spread the Pledge. Signers can host events at their homes, or in the community. Using Meetup.com, signers can organize local lectures and discussions about the climate crisis and the Climate Mobilization. Religious people can spread the Pledge in their communities of worship, and climate educators can offer the Pledge after their presentations. The Climate Mobilization can have booths at farmers' markets, staffed by Pledge signers, who will offer frank conversation about climate change, the need for a mobilization and the Pledge as a tool to get us there.

The Pledge to Mobilize is a platform for a collective awakening. It is a platform on which conversations can be initiated and the cultural consensus of denial and passivity can be transformed into a culture that expects active engagement from every individual in response to the climate emergency. It does not preclude the use of other tactics, including demonstrations, lawsuits, Internet memes and local adaptation measures. On the contrary, we hope that signing the Pledge can serve as a launching pad to further engagement. Online discussion forums, as well as local groups, will serve as places where Pledge signers can develop creative, humane ways to respond to the unfolding crisis. For example, Pledge signers could combine political demonstration with direct relief in areas hard-hit by storms; coordinate social media campaigns to pressure journalists to cover climate change with greater seriousness; or plant community victory gardens. Once people pledge to mobilize, they will find myriad ways to effectively channel their energy and talents.

Successful Movements Fight Denial and Show the Way Forward

In the face of political paralysis, many environmental groups have invoked the Civil Rights movement and resorted to tactics of protest and civil disobedience in opposition to fossil fuel infrastructure projects. Although these admirable and heroic efforts have led to significant victories and captured the imagination of many young people, they have not yet succeeded in mobilizing the country for immediate action.

Civil disobedience was a powerful tactic because it fought denial of a terrible status quo *while simultaneously demonstrating the solution*. Before the Civil Rights Movement, the majority of white Americans minimized and ignored the brutality of the Jim Crow South. This consensus of denial was facilitated through racist beliefs, such as the idea that African-Americans were violent and needed to be controlled. When African Americans sat at “whites only” lunch counters, they courageously withstood slurs and violence. These confrontations, which were televised nationally, demonstrated the protestors’ dignity and restraint while highlighting the brutality of segregation, striking repeated blows against the culture of racist denial.¹⁸ Through these acts, African-American protesters also initiated the process of racial integration and equality. White protestors bolstered these efforts by demonstrating a different way of relating to African-Americans — as equals and allies.¹⁹

Inventor Buckminster Fuller wrote, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” The Civil Rights activists demonstrated the need to make the Jim Crow system obsolete, while enacting the new way of life — integration and equality — that could replace it. White Americans could no longer pretend that race relations did not concern them. They were given a choice between the brutal past and a future that, because of civil disobedience, they could begin to visualize.

So far, civil disobedience, protests and the popular approach of “climate change education” have not offered a clear way forward for the individual or society. When confronted with a huge, complex problem that appears to have no solution, most people feel terror and helplessness, and unconsciously insulate themselves with a variety of defensive techniques, including willful ignorance, numbing, repression, denial, and demonization of the messenger.²⁰ When information about the climate crisis is not paired with ways that individuals can participate in heroic *and* effective political action, many of us feel helpless and overwhelmed, and fail to integrate the startling reality of climate change into our everyday lives.

What happens if — rather than continuing its *tactics* — we adopt the deeper lessons of the Civil Rights movement? What if we build a movement around the knowledge that atrocities persist because people ignore and deny them; that people of conscience must fight this consensus of denial emotionally as well as intellectually; and that the solution — a clear, compelling path to a better world — must be central to the movement itself?

After years of becoming increasingly alarmed and despondent about climate change, I decided to tackle those questions. I decided to stop being a passive victim of climate change, and to mobilize my skills to fight for humanity. A Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology at Adelphi University, with an A.B. in cultural anthropology from Harvard — my entire academic career has been devoted to understanding people and cultures in depth. More specifically, I have focused on processes of psychological change and growth. I decided to develop a psychologically, anthropologically and historically informed social movement strategy that would help us achieve this badly needed mobilization.

I was drawn to pledge-based strategies because of the colossal complexity of climate change. A clear solution, it seemed, must be written down. I was also impressed with the impact of pledges on contemporary American politics. Grover Norquist has achieved substantial influence over the

Republican Party through his “Taxpayer Protection Pledge,” and the Koch brothers have persuaded 169 Congressmen and women, including the entire Republican House leadership, to pledge not to institute a tax on carbon.^{21 22} I examined past pledge campaigns that had spurred rapid social transformation, such as the anti-foot binding pledge that ended a thousand-year-old Chinese practice in a generation, without the benefits of modern communications technology. Pledges can be effective tools for fighting collective denial because they are public declarations; people courageously put themselves on the line for their cause. The anti-foot binding pledge shifted foot binding from a symbol of nobility and honor to a symbol of backwardness and shame.²³ I also examined Occupy Wall Street. Would it be possible to harness the creativity, passion, and local responsiveness that Occupy brought to bear, while avoiding the pitfall of lacking clear demands and a plan for realizing them?

This Climate Mobilization strategy was borne of this effort. I developed a plan, and published it on my blog, *The Climate Psychologist*.²⁴ Other thinkers, scholars and concerned citizens have refined and improved upon this plan. Ezra Silk, a Maine-based reporter and author, has been particularly involved, working tirelessly to help turn these ideas into reality. We aim to launch *TheClimateMobilization.org* and begin spreading the Pledge to Mobilize in the spring of 2014.

Envisioning the Mobilization

Our most difficult task was to determine the precise content of the Pledge to Mobilize. In order to show the way forward, we needed to outline the solution before launching. Calling for a “WWII-style mobilization” was too vague. A variety of political programs could theoretically fall under the rubric of a climate mobilization. We needed *specific demands*, and the implementation of those specific demands needed to lead to a safe and stable climate. Furthermore, since we aim to expand internationally, we needed criteria that could be applied to climate mobilization pledge movements in other countries.²⁵

After consulting with Dr. Erica Thompson, a climate scientist at the London School of Economics, we decided to structure our pledge demands on the carbon budget released by James Hansen and 17 others in a December 2013 study.²⁶ The Hansen carbon budget sets a cumulative, global carbon emissions target that would “keep climate close to the Holocene range to which humanity and other species are adapted.” Hansen’s calculations for the post-2013 carbon budget (~120 billion tons) are right in line with carbon budgets put forward by Meinshausen et al. in 2009 (~118 billion tons) and the Grantham Research Institute/Carbon Tracker Initiative (~133 billion tons).^{27 28} We decided to use Hansen’s budget to structure the pledge since it is the most up-to-date and it is justified in a detailed analysis. Yet, our use of the Hansen budget should not imply that we make the same assumptions about rapid carbon sequestration (see Appendix A for a more thorough description of the reasoning behind this choice).

We decided that each country should use, at most, *the percentage of the remaining carbon budget equal to its share of current global population*.²⁹ What we found was that a five-year mobilization that reduces emissions by 25 percent per year would reduce American emissions quickly enough to meet the prudent, conservative target set out by the Hansen team. If the United States leads the world with a mobilization on this scale, and other nations enlist in this effort, we can stay within the carbon budget.

This strategy is scientifically and ethically sound and provides a measure of simplicity to an issue that often drowns people in confusing details and exotic jargon. By introducing the concept of “The 99%,” Occupy Wall Street activists concisely captured the problem of inequality, and made a complex, decades-long economic story relatable. The Pledge can accomplish this for the climate change “debate.” Our message is that the United States must lead the world in the heroic fight against climate change. We need a five-year mobilization, like we had on the home-front during World War II. Each year, we must cut our emissions by at least 25 percent. It won’t be easy, but together, we can achieve victory.

There is no question that a reduction target of at least 25 percent per year represents a tremendously ambitious, soaring goal. Current U.S. energy policy calls for our national emissions to be reduced by only 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020.³⁰ David Roberts has described humanity as stuck “between the impossible and the unthinkable.”³¹ A five-year climate mobilization that will transform the United States energy infrastructure, agriculture and foreign policy, while employing tens of millions of Americans, is our answer to this predicament. As Winston Churchill put it, “It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required.”

Some will argue that such reductions in emissions would devastate the economy, but this argument ignores the fact that the American carbon-powered economy is currently stagnating due to daunting oil supply constraints related to the steeply decreasing energy return on investment for global oil production.³² The 2008 crisis was exacerbated, at the very least, by the rising cost of oil. Since the financial crash, millions of Americans have suffered from the devastating consequences of layoffs, stagnant wages and foreclosures. This process is almost certain to continue; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has forecast a doubling in the price of crude oil by 2020 – an event that would devastate the world economy.^{33 34}

A rapid, government-coordinated transition away from fossil fuels offers Americans a chance to actively and creatively transform the economy, while maintaining the climatic conditions to support human civilization. However, the transition will temporarily add to the disruptions in the economy.³⁵

The Climate Mobilization Corps will ease and enhance this economic transition. Americans involved in this historic initiative will work together to install renewable energy systems, transition and localize agriculture, construct public transit networks, conduct research, insulate homes, plant forests, manage wetlands and provide assistance to other national energy transitions abroad. The jobs created during the mobilization will boost the prospects of tens of millions of struggling Americans, at the very least. World War II demonstrates that structuring a massive labor mobilization through a combination of direct hiring and public-private partnerships can lead to widely-shared prosperity.³⁶

The expenses of WWII were financed primarily through selling war bonds and income tax increases, especially for top earners.³⁷ The Climate Mobilization could be financed through various measures, including mobilization bonds, a carbon tax, a financial transactions tax, Superfund payments or tax hikes on large corporations and high earners.

The Pledge does not specify precisely how the Mobilization will be accomplished. Given that we were designing a tool for a social movement, rather than a governmental policy, we decided not to

lock ourselves into inflexible policy prescriptions. This allows us to focus attention on the crucial issue: The need for an emergency response to climate change. We hope to avoid a situation in which people of good faith are pitted against each other over traditionally divisive issues, such as whether the future energy mix should include nuclear power, or whether economic growth is an outdated model. The Climate Mobilization should encompass people with a range of viewpoints, and differences can be explored through ongoing discussion. We stand a chance only if we allow our shared purpose — fighting for humanity’s future — to transcend the squabbles that presently consume us.

There are a wealth of partial and comprehensive mobilization and decarbonization plans that we can draw upon in the months and years to come (a non-exhaustive list can be found in Appendix B). As the Pledge to Mobilize spreads, experts across many relevant fields as well as active citizens will take part in mobilization discussions, refining existing plans and offering new ones. When the federal government, under immense pressure from Americans, finally kicks into full mobilization mode, we will have prepared extensive plans to guide them.

Some may agree that we must cut emissions as quickly as possible, but argue that it is poor strategy to advocate for this publicly, particularly when a highly specific plan is not being advocated. Perhaps they might feel that reducing U.S. emissions at least 76.27 percent in five years will sound too drastic, and that many Americans will feel alienated by the Pledge and reject climate action in general.

This, we disagree with. Few Americans would sign the Pledge to Mobilize today, but that is the point. Our culture is mired in denial, silence and willful ignorance.³⁸ The process of spreading the Pledge will create a sea change in the public perspective. Successful social movements fundamentally alter how a society understands and, ultimately, governs itself.

Nightmarish problems require heroic responses. Too often climate change is presented as a gargantuan problem with a pathetically inadequate solution: “Want to prevent the collapse of civilization? Turn off your lights when you leave the room.” This is experienced as inauthentic and can cause people to emotionally disengage. Americans ought to be addressed as citizens, not electricity consumers. To bring our country out of denial, we need to offer a solution commensurate in scale to the problem itself. To create a social movement, we need to show the way forward, honestly.

Pledge-Spreading as Collective Awakening

When a society’s governing myths become too deeply estranged from reality, the truth holds tremendous transformational potential. But to transform society this truth must not merely be *known*. It must be *lived*. That was Vaclav Havel’s key insight — a message that guided the people of Czechoslovakia through a bloodless revolution against the Soviet Union. Czechs had long been cynical about the Soviet state, privately believing that the government was corrupt. Still, they outwardly complied with state rituals and ceremonies for years, fearing social isolation and state persecution. It was only after citizens started to *live* their values outwardly — by refusing to display Soviet propaganda, vote in sham elections or self-censor conversations — that they caused a revolution.³⁹ “Living in truth,” as Havel called this strategy, derives its power from humanity’s

social nature. We evolved in tribes, and developed brains that are highly attuned to the attitudes, emotions, and appraisals of others. We abhor standing apart from the group, especially if we risk being shamed or ostracized.⁴⁰ By acting publicly on their political convictions in their day-to-day lives, Czechs implicitly invited others to join them in challenging the state. They drew strength from each other.

The Pledge invites and challenges ordinary citizens to engage meaningfully and publicly with the greatest issue of our time. Civil disobedience brought the issue of civil rights to the forefront of the collective American consciousness. Every American had to decide where they stood on civil rights and many activists made their involvement central to their identity. Through the vessel of the pledge, we can accomplish this for climate change. We can force people to make a conscious choice: Do you stand with human civilization, or do you favor collapsing into deprivation, war, and chaos?

The Pledge strategy responds innovatively to the current technological and cultural moment, as successful social movements have historically done. Martin Luther utilized the printing press to spread his message.⁴¹ More than four hundred years later, his namesake coordinated civil disobedience that was broadcast on television, bringing the struggle for civil rights into almost every American home.⁴²

Today, we are bombarded by information and stimulation from computers, smartphones, video games and hundreds of television channels. This virtual blitzkrieg triggers a trance-like state in which we dissociate and screen out most information. This makes it all too easy to ignore the terrifying reality of the climate crisis and those seeking to draw attention to it through protests, civil disobedience, media outreach and traditional lobbying. The Pledge to Mobilize can break through the high-speed, fragmented media landscape, since it relies on personal appeals between people with pre-existing relationships. These personal appeals will be supported by an online platform where signers can network, discuss strategies and share stories and best practices. The Pledge connects the personal with the technological, and the hyper-local with the global.

The Climate Mobilization campaign can foster networks of highly engaged, articulate and organized citizens that will act as a countervailing force to the fossil fuel lobby and others that stand against the safety of human civilization. As the Pledge spreads virally, political candidates will feel increasing pressure to sign the Pledge and begin to publicly acknowledge the scope of the threat. Municipal and state-level officials who sign the pledge will fiercely advocate for a war-like response to the climate crisis, as they simultaneously implement regional adaptation and resilience measures. As politicians, journalists, and pundits are pressured to sign, the media discourse will shift from, “Does this candidate believe in climate change?” to “Does this candidate have the courage and strength of character to face the climate crisis and fight back?”

Launch is At Hand

This Climate Mobilization is almost ready to go. We are now building the website — the final step before launch. There are several ways to get involved in this project, but two are especially pressing at this point. First, we are seeking highly dedicated recruiters and organizers to become involved

before the launch. This way, when our website is ready, we will have a small group of original signers who will host local Pledge events and disseminate the Pledge through their personal networks. This group will set the tone of the movement, so each member must be dedicated to fighting climate change with respect, focus, honesty and courage. If you are interested in being an original signer, or in contributing your skills and energy in some other way, [please let us know](#).

We also need financial backing. The Pledge strategy is highly cost-effective. We will be able to launch on a national scale for less than \$20,000. So far, I have been funding the initial web design and database steps, and I will match donated funds up to \$5,000. Your donation will finance the construction of The Climate Mobilization website and help launch the Pledge to Mobilize. Donations can be made via [Paypal](#). If you are able to support us, it will make a meaningful difference in our ability to launch as quickly as possible.

Climate change is an unprecedented challenge. Never before has humanity marched in such lockstep towards the destruction of our global civilization. We have the opportunity, and the moral duty, to make a meaningful difference in the course of human history. We must face this growing crisis with courage, dedication and resolve. Let us first mobilize as individuals who will transform our culture of silence and denial into a culture of active emergency response. Only then can we mobilize as a society to fight climate change, itself.

About the Authors

Margaret Klein lives in Brooklyn, New York. She is a therapist turned advocate and organizer. Margaret graduated in 2008 from Harvard and is two months away from earning her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the Derner Institute of Adelphi University. She is the author of [The Climate Psychologist](#) and the founder of the Facebook group [Climate Change: It's Personal](#).

She can be reached at Margaret@TheClimateMobilization.org.



Ezra Silk lives with his girlfriend, Amy, in Portland, Maine. In 2010, he graduated from Wesleyan University, where he majored in history and was the editor of *The Wesleyan Argus*. Ezra has reported for *The Hartford Courant*, *The Bar Harbor Times* and *The Lakes Region Weekly*. His forthcoming book, *Carnival of Dissent: The Voices of Protest, from Zuccotti to Athens*, relates the story of his travels through the United States, Spain and Greece, at the height of the Occupy movement.

He can be reached at Ezra@TheClimateMobilization.org.

The Climate Mobilization logo was designed by [Katharine Woodman-Maynard](#).

The header photo, "[Raising Sustainability On America](#)," was designed by Joseph Durago.

Appendix A: Reasoning behind five years of 25 percent cuts

120 billion ton remaining carbon budget, post-2013. The Hansen team found that humans should not emit more than roughly 130 billion tons of fossil fuel carbon emissions after the year 2012. The Global Carbon Project has estimated that humans emitted approximately 10 billion tons of fossil fuel and cement-derived carbon emissions in 2013.⁴³ That leaves approximately 120 billion tons of fossil fuel carbon in the remaining, post-2013 carbon budget.

Given that global cumulative emissions continue to increase every year, humanity is on track to exhaust the remaining 120 billion ton budget within eight to nine years, assuming a continuation of current emissions rates. We do not necessarily endorse Hansen’s assumptions regarding rapid reforestation and carbon capture and storage sequestration measures. The Climate Mobilization would allow the United States and the globe to meet the most conservative mainstream carbon budgets, such as Hansen et al., Meinshausen et al., and the Grantham Research Institute/Carbon Tracker Initiative 1.5°C budget. It would also allow us to meet the IPCC’s more lenient 2°C carbon budget with room to spare.⁴⁴ When the fate of civilization and the natural world is on the line, we think it prudent to aim high and fight like hell.

Share of budget based on population. In 2014, the United States’ share of global population is approximately 4.5%. Under our framework, the U.S. would emit, at most, 5.4 billion tons of fossil fuel carbon after 2013, or 4.5% of the remaining 120 billion ton carbon budget. Given that our country emitted roughly 1.467 billion tons of fossil fuel carbon in 2013, we are on track to exhaust our national share of the remaining global carbon budget at some point in 2017, assuming a continuation of current emissions rates.⁴⁵

Timelines. If we project that the U.S. initiates the Climate Mobilization on January 1st, 2015, thereby reducing emissions at least 76.27 percent by January 1st, 2020, we would have used up, at most, approximately 4.88 billion tons, or 4.07%, of the remaining global carbon budget — a share roughly concordant with our population. (This would constitute about 4.14% of the Meinshausen budget, and about 3.7% of the Grantham Institute/Carbon Tracker 1.5°C budget.)

A 2015-2020 mobilization would leave us, at most, some 520 million tons of fossil fuel carbon — or, just over a third of 2013 annual emissions — left in our budget. The United States could then decarbonize the economy in 2020 or 2021. Or we could follow a low-emissions path for another five years, emitting an average of 104 million tons per year, and then decarbonize on Jan. 1, 2025.

If the U.S. federal government initiates the mobilization on Jan. 1st, 2016, thereby reducing emissions at least 76.27 percent by Jan. 1st, 2021, we would have used up, at most, approximately 6.36 billion tons, or 5.3%, of the post-2013 carbon budget. Again, this projection is based on the Energy Information Administration’s national emissions forecast.⁴⁶ It is clear that the later the mobilization starts, the steeper the reductions necessary.

Possibilities for steeper reductions. Of course, some may argue that the United States should use less than 4.5% of the post-2013 carbon budget. To make up for past emissions, we should cut more steeply, some may say. That is why the Pledge to Mobilize demands that reductions must be *at least* 25% per year. “At least” leaves open the possibility for more drastic reductions.

The United States was responsible for 26% of global fossil fuel emissions from 1870 to 2012 – the highest percentage of any country or economic bloc (The E.U. was responsible for 23%, and China 11%).⁴⁷ Although China is currently the leading emitter in the world with 26% in 2012, the U.S. was the second greatest emitter, at 14%. China was responsible for 23% of consumption-based emissions, while the U.S. was responsible for 17% of consumption-based emissions in 2012.⁴⁸

Simplicity of Communication. The 25% reduction threshold goes beyond Occupy Wall Street’s “We are the 99%,” in that it introduces an easy metric to gauge the effectiveness of the extraordinarily complex efforts necessary to combat climate change. What if Occupy Wall Street had generated a simple metric to assess the effectiveness of various poverty and inequality reduction programs?⁹

For example, many citizens were forced to rely on environmental experts in order to determine whether President Obama’s 2013 Climate Action Plan was “enough.” Leading environmentalists praised the plan, while stressing, rather vaguely, that it was not enough. In some quarters, it was suggested that Obama’s proposed regulations on coal-fired power plants would reduce national carbon emissions by 10% per year.⁴⁹

Non-experts concerned about climate change were forced to consult environmental and progressive experts in order to understand whether President Obama’s plan was “adequate.” If the pledge had been widely disseminated at that time, regular people concerned about climate change could have demanded that Obama provide a clear projection of how much his plan would reduce emissions *this year*. “We need to cut emissions by a quarter now. Mr. President, how quickly does your plan cut emissions this year?” The widespread introduction of the per annum framework could democratize environmental expertise, and introduce an inclusive, yet scientifically informed, public discussion about the necessary scope and scale of rapid emissions reductions.

Appendix B: Rapid Decarbonization Schemes and Mobilization Plans

[The One Degree War Plan](#) *Gilding and Randers*

[Plan B 4.0, Mobilization to Save Civilization](#), *Brown*

[Global Climate Stabilization Studies](#), *Clean Air Task Force*

[Post Carbon Pathways: Towards a Just and Resilient Post Carbon Future](#), *Wiseman, Edwards and Luckins*

[The Solutions Project](#), *Jacobson*

[U.S. Climate Plan](#), *Weber, Lichtash and Dorsey*

[Governing Rapid Climate Mitigation](#), *Delina and Diesendorf*

Endnotes

¹ [IPCC, 2013](#), summary for policy makers.

² [IPCC, 2013](#) The IPCC provides a range because climate is a complex, non-linear system, which means that it is impossible to make exact predictions about how much warming will occur and when.

³ [Thomas et al.](#), 2004

⁴ Ecological problems leading societies to collapse: [Diamond](#), 2004; NASA 2014.

⁵ Damage to agriculture: [Gillis](#), 2013; [US Department of Agriculture](#), 2012.

Damage to infrastructure: [McKibben](#), 2010; [US Department of Energy](#);

Civil wars and climate refugees: [US Department of Defense](#); ([International Displacement Monitoring Center](#), 2009); [International Organization for Migration](#), 2013.

⁶ Oil and Food Prices. [Baffes and Dennis](#), 2013.

⁷ Climate and food supply. [Perez](#), 2013.

⁸ Food prices and unrest. [Lagi, Bertrand, and Bar-Yam](#), 2011.

⁹ “Perfect storm” of crises. [Beddington](#), 2009.

¹⁰ Hansen, 2009.

¹¹ The 2009 Copenhagen Accord, a *non-binding* international agreement, commits the United States to a very weak target that would have us reduce emissions 17% below 2005 levels by 2020.

¹² Rio Summit. [Vidal](#), 2012.

¹³ [Army and Mobilization](#). [Smith](#), 1957.

¹⁴ For more on the inspiring history of the mobilization on the home-front during WWII, see [Goodwin](#), 1995.

¹⁵ A WWII Mobilization is advocated by [Al Gore](#), [Bill McKibben](#), [Lester Brown](#), [Joe Romm](#), [Paul Gilding](#), [David Roberts](#), and many others. [Hillary Clinton](#) alluded to the WWII mobilization in a 2007 campaign speech on climate and energy issues, saying “For this generation of Americans, climate change is our Space Race. It is our home-front mobilization during World War II and it is our response to the Great Depression.” [Bryan Walsh](#) of *Time* published a cover story in 2008 that called for a WWII-style “[War on Global Warming](#).” There is also a contingent of climate writers and advocates, including [Jill Stein](#) and [Thomas Friedman](#), who prefer the historical metaphor of the New Deal.

¹⁶ [Schneider 2013](#)

¹⁷ [See Ganz, 2010](#) on the importance of building relationships and encouraging engagement for the success of social movements.

¹⁸ See [Morris](#), 1999 for a thorough discussion of denial-fighting power of civil disobedience and [Bodroghkozy](#), 2012 for the role of television in particular.

¹⁹ See [McAdam](#), 1988 for a vivid demonstration of this process.

²⁰ For an elaboration of how psychological defenses function on an individual level, see [McWilliams](#), 2011; for how cultures and societies defend against overwhelming information, see [Cohen](#), 2001.)

²¹ [Taxpayer Protection Pledge. Americans for Tax Reform, 2009.](#)

²² No Climate Tax. [Americans for Prosperity](#).

²³ See [Appiah](#), 2010 for a case history of the anti-foot-binding movement, and an examination of how shame and honor shape social movements.

²⁴ The Climate Psychologist. [Klein](#), 2013-2014.

²⁵ The Pledge can be adapted and utilized in any country with an elected government, and modified to work within countries where citizens are not granted the right to vote. There are already allies planning Pledge to Mobilize campaigns in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

²⁶ [Hansen, et al](#), 2013.

²⁷ GHG emissions targets. [Meinshausen et al](#), 2009.

²⁸ Unburnable Carbon; 1.5°C carbon budget. [Carbon Tracker Initiative](#), 2013.

²⁹ Inspiration for this carbon distribution scheme comes in part from the Contraction and Convergence movement in the UK.

³⁰ U.S. 2020 emissions target. [Spross](#), 2014.

³¹ [Roberts](#), 2013.

³² EROI and growth prospects. [Murphy](#), 2013.

³³ Oil price forecast. [Fournier](#), 2013.

³⁴ Peak oil. [Ahmed](#), 2013.

³⁵ Certain sectors of the economy will be hit particularly hard. For example, fossil fuel corporations will be encouraged to rapidly shift into producing post-carbon forms of energy and relinquish their efforts to subvert the democratic process. If they refuse to move into the future, the government will serve as employer of last resort for their laid-off employees.

³⁶ During WWII the government directly hired millions of people—most prominently in the Armed services. However these direct hires were supplied through networks of private enterprise that partnered with the government, often utilizing “cost plus profit” contracts.

³⁷ See Goodwin, 1995 or the National WWII museum’s [America Goes to War](#).

³⁸ See [McWilliams](#), 2011 to understand how denial operates among individuals, for how cultures and societies deny see [Cohen](#), 2001. For a discussion of how denial functions specifically in climate change, see [Norgaard](#), 2011.

³⁹ See Havel (1978).

⁴⁰ For an outstanding elaboration of humanity’s social nature, see E.O. Wilson’s (2013), “[The Social Conquest of Earth](#).”

⁴¹ For more on Luther’s innovative use of the printing press, see: [Standage](#), 2011.

⁴² See [Thomas](#), 2004 and [Bodroghkozy](#), 2012 for the role of television in in the Civil Rights Movement.

⁴³ 2013 global emissions projection. [Global Carbon Project](#), 2013.

⁴⁴ Carbon budget comparisons. [Climate Nexus](#).

⁴⁵ National emissions data/forecast. [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#), 2014.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ Historical cumulative emissions by country. [Global Carbon Project](#). 2013.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ NRDC Plan. [Chait](#), 2013.

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