



Climate Action Is Up to the Rest of Us Now

With Trump in the White House, “there is no time to waste” on fighting climate change.

BY EMILY SCHWARTZ GRECO | NOVEMBER 29, 2016



Federal studies suggest the energy jobs of the future are not in coal mines, but jobs like those held by these workers, securing solar panels to a rooftop during a SolarCity Corp. residential installation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (Photo by Sergio Flores/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

Responsible Americans can't give up on shrinking the nation's carbon footprint while a climate denier and his fellow travelers have their way with the federal government. And while it's true that market forces will probably help continue to reduce the nation's carbon footprint, there's still a lot of work to be done if Trump makes good on his plans to abandon our climate commitments. With Greenland's ice sheet thawing out, hottest-year-on-record temperatures set on an annual basis and increasingly dangerous and frequent bouts of extreme weather, the world needs to stay focused on fighting climate change in the next four years. As The UN Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon](#) has said, “there is no time to waste” here in the real world.

Who will fill the void when the federal government shirks its duty to shield people, places and the planet from the damage oil, gas and coal inflicts? Maybe you. Here are four constructive courses of climate action.

No. 1 — Move your money out of fossil fuels

Most fossil-fuel financing comes from the private sector, including stocks and bonds belonging to individuals and big institutions such as universities, hospitals and foundations. Ethical investors have long shunned tobacco, weapons and porn. If you don't want to profit off the warming of the planet, isn't it time to rid your own investment holdings in oil, gas and coal?

Taking this step is strategic as well as altruistic: In the [long run](#), it will protect any financial portfolio. The value of oil, gas and coal financial assets will eventually shrivel, either from a loss in demand as renewable energy outcompetes dirtier options or because of policy efforts taken by every world leader whose last name does not rhyme with frump. ([Trump is alone](#) on the world stage in disputing the science of man-made climate change and its repercussions.) To a degree, this has begun already. According to [many benchmarks](#), fossil-free investment practices have already increased returns.

Only [half of Americans](#) own shares in any companies or funds, either directly or through retirement funds like 401(k)s and IRAs. But even if you have no shares to divest, there are other ways to join the fossil-free investment movement: Advocate that the pension funds of your alma mater or local government go carbon neutral.

It has never been easier. The number of low-fee exchange-traded funds, or ETFs, without oil, gas or coal exposure [is growing](#), with choices offered by State Street Global Advisors, [BlackRock](#) and other big-league investment houses. You can even invest in a [low-carbon version](#) of the S&P index if you prefer.

Don't assume mutual funds meet this standard just because they're designated as "socially responsible." Instead, run the funds through an [online tool](#) created

by As You Sow, a group that presses for corporate responsibility. The tool makes it easy to spot fossil-fuel exposure and identify greener options.

[Fossil Free](#), a 350.org project, estimates that \$3.4 trillion is held by institutions that have pledged to divest altogether or at least in part (such as eschewing coal or tar sands oil or both). Individuals with another \$5.2 billion in their personal portfolios have made the same commitments. If you're ready to add to that bundle and move some of your money into climate solutions, consider taking the [Divest-Invest pledge](#) to make your choice known.

“We are seeing an uptick in interest in divesting as well as looking at the 401(k) plans in general,” says Timothy Yee, the chief retirement specialist and co-founder of the Green Retirement, Inc. investment firm. He attributes the curiosity to multiple factors, including a new rule “causing 401(k) plan sponsors to look at their plans and ask if they are being well-served,” previous groundwork done by groups like As You Sow and Divest-Invest, and the orange elephant that just barged into the room. “The POTUS-elect’s denial of climate change is helping bring light back to the need to divest from fossil fuels,” Yee said.

No. 2 — Adopt green-energy alternatives

Worried about what a “basket of deplorables” will do to the climate? Do what you can personally to expand what energy consultant [John Licata](#) calls “a basket of renewables.” If you own your home, see if you can [afford to go solar](#) — independently or through a cooperative. Costs vary depending on where you live and what your local utility dictates, but the time it takes for an investment to pay off is probably shorter than you think. Many people who don't own their homes or whose houses are in the shade can still do their part. There are opportunities to participate in [community solar](#) by investing in a nearby array, although more regulatory action is needed to topple barriers to that promising avenue to renewable energy. (If that's holding you back, you can also urge your lawmakers to make this option available.)

[Businesses large and small](#) are increasingly doing their part, and not necessarily because of climate fears. On average, commercial property owners are seeing their monthly electricity bills drop by [75 percent](#) when they go solar, according to data from the [EnergySage](#) online solar marketplace. Wherever you live, encourage local employers and utilities to swap out power from fossil fuels for juice from [the sun](#) or [the wind](#).

You can also make sure you vote when energy questions land on the ballot. The defeat of an [anti-solar ballot initiative](#) in Florida bankrolled by utilities on the heels of the approval of a [pro-solar amendment](#) to the state's constitution in August will empower Floridians to cut their carbon footprint. It also showed that, even in a state that backed Trump, voters support renewable energy. Find out about ballot initiatives and new legislation at your state at [BallotPedia.org](#).

Going solar is only one example of how you can “starve the fossil fuel beast,” says Garvin Jabusch, chief investment officer and co-founder of the fossil-free Green Alpha Advisors investment firm. “Do what you can: Get an EV (electric vehicle), get solar panels, use more public transport and ride your bike, and insulate more.”

No. 3 — Resist new fossil-fuel ventures

If engaging in civil disobedience directly or expressing solidarity with frontline protesters is your thing, you have ample opportunities to exercise your First Amendment rights. Exhibit A: The mass resistance the [Standing Rock](#) Sioux tribe is leading against the Dakota Access Pipeline. It followed mobilizations that blocked [oil, gas and coal](#) export facilities along the West Coast and other bodies-on-the-line actions around the country, such as the campaigns to block the [Spectra natural gas lines](#) in Massachusetts and a [gas storage](#)

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— JAMIE HENN, 350.ORG

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[depot](#) beneath the Seneca Lake hillside in New York State. Given the Trump administration's stated hostility to carbon reduction, similar actions around the country could become business as usual for fossil-fuel ventures.

"We'll protest every pipeline, march against every mine and fight every fracking well," vowed [Jamie Henn](#), a co-founder of 350.org who serves as the climate-action organization's communications director. "We were able to turn out hundreds of thousands of people when Obama was in office," he said. "Imagine how many more will be willing to protest when Trump gets going."

Resistance can take many forms and come from unusual places. [Lawsuits filed by landowners](#) and [environmental groups](#), already surging without an unabashedly pro-fossil White House, are bound to become even more common during the Trump administration.

Caveat protestor: Not all big infrastructure projects are equal, cautions Daniel Cohan, a Rice University associate professor and atmospheric scientist who studies the relationship between climate and energy. Cohan says that some "electric grid enhancements would be a huge boon for renewables," pointing to Texas as an example. Massive investments in the Lone Star State's [transmission lines](#) spurred a wind rush and an incipient solar boom.

No. 4 — Support climate organizations and media

Another way to counteract the next administration's refusal to address climate-related risks: philanthropy. Give a few bucks to a worthy cause and, voila, you'll be a better philanthropist than the president-elect between 2009 and the spring of 2016. As *Washington Post* reporter David Fahrenthold revealed, Trump [didn't donate a penny to charity](#) during those years. Let the thought of out-giving a cheapskate in a gilded penthouse spike your generosity.

Who deserves your cash and elbow grease? Scour the [US Climate Action Network's roster](#) of more than 150 groups ranging from the Alaska Wilderness League to Young Evangelicals for Climate Action to find the cause that best aligns with your concerns. Want to spread awareness about where lawmakers

stand on global warming? You can donate to the [Climate Congress Wikipedia Project](#). Want to see more and better media coverage of these issues? Contribute to specialized nonprofit online outlets like [Grist](#), [InsideClimate News](#) and other media the [Society of Environmental Journalists](#) recommends “to stay current.” You can also express your commitment to climate change education and information by subscribing to the mainstream and alternative newspapers and websites you rely on for high-quality climate-related news and analysis. Robust news coverage will matter more than ever during an administration led by the purveyors of [fake news](#) and [anti-science propaganda](#).