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Recycling Will Not Save Us

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Recycling is not going to save us, and neither is avoiding plastic straws, or reducing single-use plastics, or carpooling.

The solar panels sitting on my roof offer about as much comfort to our melting ice caps as thoughts and prayers.

I say this not out of denial, I say this not out of pessimism, and I certainly do not say this out of a reluctance to recycle. I say this because climate change is ultimately the result of centuries of economic injustice and social inequality.

Because when 100 companies contribute towards 71% of all fossil fuel emissions, what the hell is any one high schooler supposed to do? What is any high school, city, or county supposed to do? When the U.S. Department of Defense, one of the biggest polluters in the world, receives over \$700 billion dollars a year, what can I, or any member of my generation, do?

We can hope.

We can take that hope, and use it to fight for a world that we can live in. At the end of the day, the solution to climate change is not going to be found in some lab. It isn't going to be found in some groundbreaking new technology. The solution is going to be found in the people. It's going to live in each step marched down a street, it's going to breathe through each piece of legislation passed, and it's going to thrive through every ounce of grief and anger caused by rising sea levels and worsening catastrophes.

Climate change is a symptom of a larger, underlying disease caused by centuries of economic disparity, social prejudice, and political inequality. While we may be the first generation to feel the effects of climate change, we are most certainly not the first generation to feel the causes of climate change. In the 21st Century, environmental policy is economic policy. This means that any systemic transition towards renewable energy

sources must include the voices of working-class Americans and people of color, two groups that have traditionally been the most marginalized during this debate, despite being hurt the most.

It is this realization that has inspired me to begin work as a Green New Deal organizer. Starting last winter, I began to work with the Sunrise Movement, the youth-led, grassroots organization advocating for the Green New Deal. As a member of Sunrise's People Power team, my work has been focused on both involving and coordinating new volunteers into the movement, and planning and taking part in various protests, including the protest at Senator Harris' rally that prompted her to endorse the Green New Deal. We are the last generation that can do something about climate change— and as a member of the last generation, I'm not willing to watch my planet die without trying to save it first. In order to confront an issue caused by inequality, one must address the inequality that caused it in the first place.

References

U.S. Dep. of Defense is world's largest polluter-- report by DoD's head of Environmental Programs, Maureen Sullivan, says that there is over 19 million acres of contaminated soil in the United States alone.

100 companies account for 71% of all emissions-- found in a study by Carbon Majors Report, published in collaboration with the Climate Accountability Institute

Climate change impacts low-income and communities of color hardest-- report by the Fourth National Climate Assessment