



Earth Day: Fighting climate change requires political collaboration and immediate action

By John Kerry and Ernest Moniz

Forty-nine years ago, [twenty million](#) Americans came together on the first Earth Day and launched another first: putting environmental issues front and center on the national political agenda. The message: policymakers at all levels of government will be held accountable by voters for their records on environmental stewardship and protection.

No matter what any of us might think about the key players or their politics, the elected leaders across the 1970 political spectrum — from Gaylord Nelson to Richard Nixon — ultimately ensured a cleaner environment with a strong economy and improved health. We are all beneficiaries of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, establishment of the EPA, and much more.

Fast forward five decades. Sixty-nine percent of Americans say that they are [“worried”](#) about climate change. The scientific and [national security](#) communities warn us about its destabilizing impacts and enormous costs. In a burst of activism wonderfully similar to the original Earth Day, thousands of [young people](#) are walking out of their classrooms to protest inaction on climate change.

We need to unite America’s “grassroots” with its “grasstops” — to awaken a broad climate change voting majority that not only

includes young people with passion, but businesses, the military, labor, farmers, energy providers, and subject matter experts alike. Only by linking these disparate groups — then broadening the coalition even further to include global leaders and citizens everywhere — can we galvanize action, command accountability, and unleash a clean energy transformation that will mitigate climate change and assure economic progress at the same time.

There is no Planet B to go to after this

We must act together to secure the one planet we have — because there is [No Planet B](#). We must act because, in the very near future, the costs of inaction will far exceed those of acting.

And we can act because, since 2009, the cost of solar energy is down [88%](#), and wind is down [69%](#). These cost reductions are reflected in our choices for power generation: wind and solar made up [more than half](#) of new generating capacity in recent years.

But we must also be pragmatic. We must guarantee the reliability and resilience of the electricity system, at the same time we are working on its transformation. This means that efficiency, natural gas, advanced nuclear, carbon capture, smart grids and negative carbon technologies will all play important roles in our future grid, indeed



enabling the continued rapid , renewables. And, of course, other sectors beyond electricity that are more difficult to decarbonize — transportation, industry, buildings, agriculture — will need practical, low-carbon technology options as well.

As we advance deep decarbonization of our economy, we must also promote justice and fairness. Those who can [least afford it](#) — the poorest Americans and the world's developing countries — will be economically hit worst and first. They will continue to pay the steepest price for climate change unless low-carbon technology innovation is accelerated and accompanied by policy innovation for a just transition. We must minimize stranded physical assets and stranded workers and communities.

Magical thinking is harmful, we need action

Magical thinking is both self-indulgent and dilatory, at a time when we need accelerated action and a pragmatic roadmap to a low carbon/no net carbon global economy by [mid-century](#), when scientists tell us the planet must approach carbon neutrality. There are no “silver bullet solutions” for which one-sized policies and technologies are supposed to fit all.

Instead, we need to support a range of solutions that respect regional and local economies with their energy resource mixes and associated infrastructures. If we do so, we can move more rapidly towards a low carbon/no net carbon economy, while creating millions of good jobs, growing our manufacturing base and modernizing our infrastructures.

To achieve all of this, we must build as big and broad a coalition as possible. Unlikely

united and moved from the sidelines into the solution space, joining today's environmental organizations, energy experts, and grassroots activists. Military leaders have described climate change as “a [threat multiplier](#) for instability.” Former Republican Secretaries of State have joined with conservative Bush Administration economists to advocate for a carbon [emissions tax](#) with a progressive dividend to all Americans. Major [fossil fuel companies](#) have endorsed the Paris Climate Agreement and the nuclear industry offers zero-emissions energy with next generation technologies. And just this month the US Chamber of Commerce issued a new policy position that “Inaction is [not an option](#)”. They must all be part of this coalition.

Our collective job is to analyze, measure, define and help make practical all those policies and technologies that will enable us to meet the 2050 target for deep decarbonization. But we will be successful only if we also spend time forging a new, broad and deep political coalition — a disparate but clear-eyed alliance that “Planet A” needs America's grassroots and grass-tops to come together to demand political accountability at the ballot box in 2020.

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