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California's Real Climate Leaders: Frontline Communities

California's climate leadership has a national and international spotlight, but it's everyday residents on the frontlines who are the real heroes.

They are fighting for real climate solutions every day, borne out of their daily struggles and a vision for a just, sustainable world. They are living and working next to polluting factories, oil drilling and fracking sites, industrial agriculture, freeways, rail yards and freight facilities, refineries, and power plants—and fighting for the right to clean air, water and land, and a future that isn't further jeopardized by climate catastrophes. They are standing up to industry, from Big Oil to natural gas companies, who stand in the way of their health, sustainability and justice. In doing so, environmental justice (EJ) communities are leading the way for us all.

This year, there is a lot of talk about climate leadership in California. From the elections for Governor to the Global Climate Action Summit in September, it's time to be clear about what it takes to be a *real climate leader*.

While the global climate crisis is deepening, almost everyday we see attacks from the Trump administration on communities of color, the environment, and climate science. In order to lead the resistance and be the leaders that our communities and planet need right now, all our decision-makers and prospective leaders must do more. Just recently, our sister organization, [CEJA Action](#), hosted a forum to hear about where some of the 2018 gubernatorial candidates stand on environmental justice. [Check out our report back here.](#)

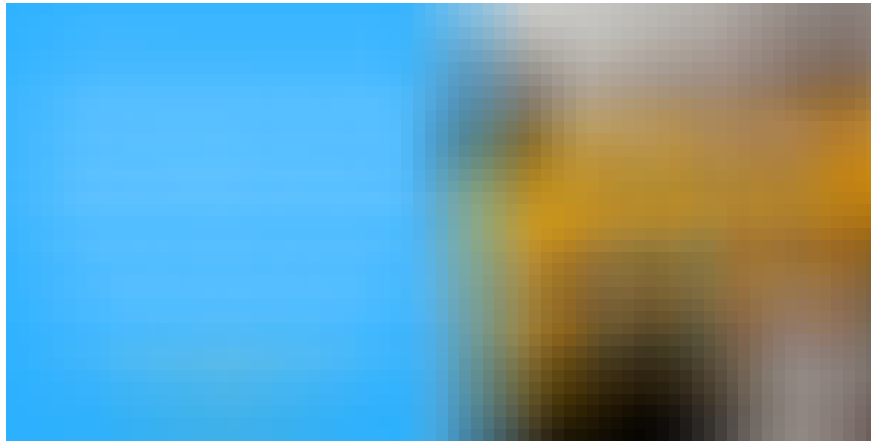
So what are the key issues our real climate leaders need to act on?

Frontline communities across California share their visions and solutions:

1. **Protect Communities, Not Corporations**
2. **Phase Out Fossil Fuels**
3. **Create a Just Transition and Build Local, Living Economies**
4. **Achieve 100% Renewable Energy Now**
5. **Transform Transportation**

Protect Communities, Not Corporations

Across California, the largest climate polluters are disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color, which have the fewest resources to fight back and adapt. These refineries and factories don't just release greenhouse gases, but they also release a range of other toxic pollutants that harm community health and quality of life. Richmond residents are fighting back against the Chevron Refinery in their backyard.



Over the last several years, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and community members in Richmond have worked tirelessly with a broad coalition on a local policy to cap refinery emissions and reduce the risk of future health and safety disasters related to refining heavier, dirtier crude at Bay Area refineries. Unfortunately, in 2017, Big Oil pushed through a disastrous measure in a big climate bill, AB 398, which limits the ability of local agencies to pass tighter rules on greenhouse gas emissions. It remains to be seen just how far-reaching this preemption will be. The Bay Area campaign continues, and we hope to see new rules on refinery emissions.

Last year, the extension of California's most promoted climate policy, cap and trade, included numerous loopholes for Big Oil and other polluters. Industries can continue to buy their way out of reducing emissions locally or simply invest in cheap projects out of state that have dubious climate benefits. Right now, the state is setting up rules for the market to operate from 2020–2030, and it's still unclear if those rules will even be tight enough to achieve the greenhouse gas reduction targets that the state has set for 2030.

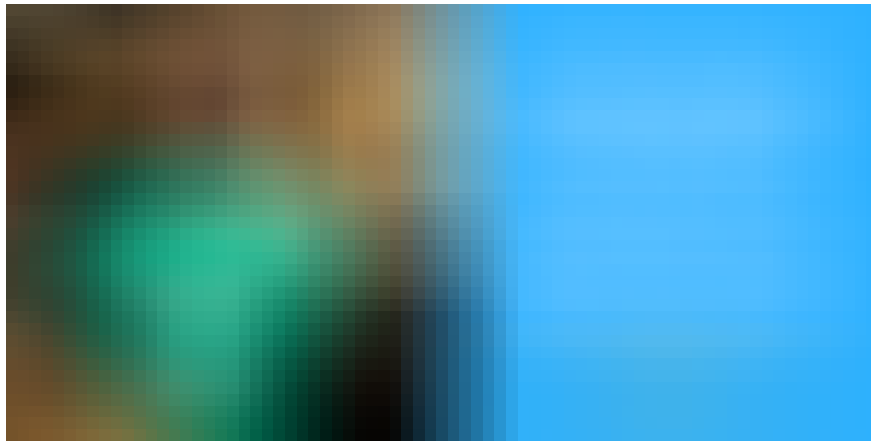
It's time to create climate policies that put people and planet, not Big Oil, first.

Phase Out Fossil Fuels

The climate science is clear: in order to halt the most disastrous impacts of climate change, we must stop extracting fossil fuels. California continues to be one of the nation's largest oil and gas producers, operating and permitting new oil drilling and fracking sites in some of our most vulnerable communities already overburdened by pollution. Oil production sites emit toxic chemicals that are known carcinogens and endocrine disruptors that are harmful to multiple organ systems. Residents living close to oil operations suffer from headaches, burning eyes and throats, increased respiratory illness, birth defects, nausea, and nosebleeds. The impacts of these activities are on top of ongoing issues with water contamination, some of the worst air quality in the nation, and high rates of poverty and unemployment.

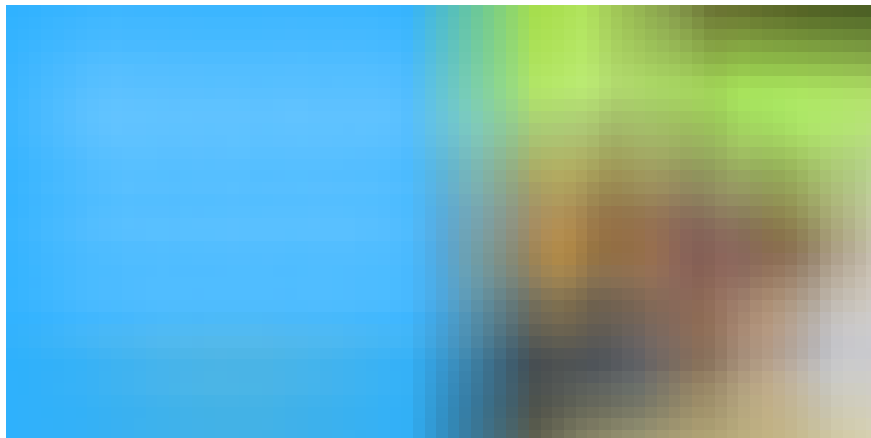
Fracking overwhelmingly occurs close to schools that serve predominantly Latino populations. There are 485 active oil and gas wells within one mile of a school. Statewide, Latino students are over 34% more likely to attend a school within a mile and a half of a stimulated well (another term for fracking) than non-Latino students.

There are two clear epicenters of oil drilling and fracking in California: Southern San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles. The 11 school districts with the highest well counts are located in the San Joaquin Valley, mostly in Kern County and just north in Fresno. Taft Union High School District, with the highest well count in the state is host to 33,155 oil and gas wells, and Kern Union High School District is host to 19,800 oil and gas wells.



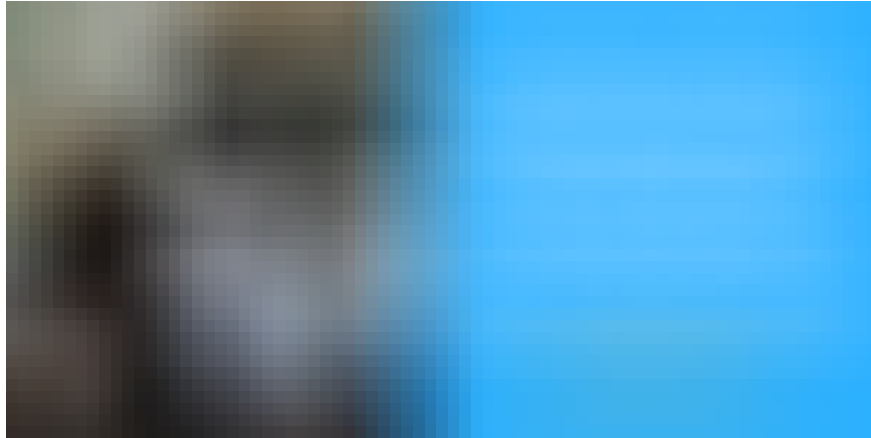
In Los Angeles, oil wells are scattered throughout low-income communities and communities of color, where they cause serious health problems. 580,000 L.A. residents currently live less than a quarter mile from an active oil well. Individuals living next door to these sites have no control over these dangerous operations, including tanker truck traffic, use of chemicals and acids for drilling, and the release of pollutants into the air. As the supply of easily accessible fossil fuels in Los Angeles dwindles, drillers increasingly resort to extreme and dangerous methods to extract oil, even in residential neighborhoods.

In 2015, an unprecedented environmental and civil rights lawsuit on behalf of Youth for Environmental Justice against the City of Los Angeles challenged the rubber stamping of oil drilling projects in neighborhoods, resulting in the City's issuance of a robust administrative guidance policy that provides environmental and anti-discrimination protections.



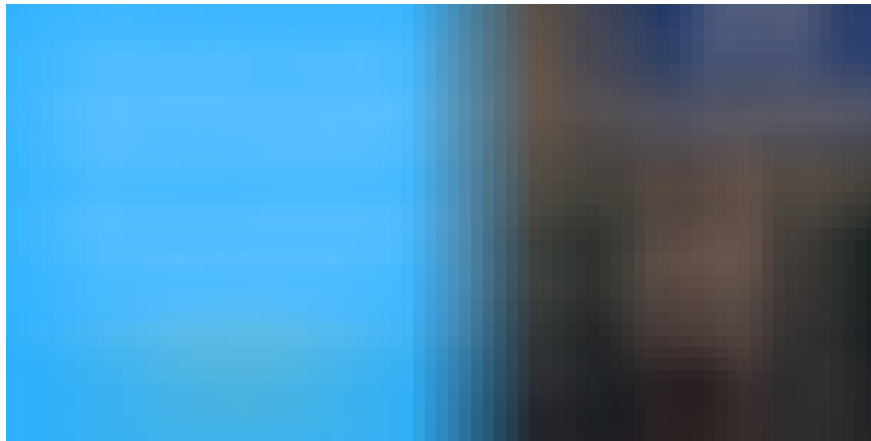
Create a Just Transition and Build Local, Living Economies

A Just Transition centers the power of frontline communities to build strong and resilient communities and a regenerative, non-extractive economy with energy democracy, food and land security, health and improved air quality, local ownership, and inclusive democratic governance.



Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) is fostering community control of resources and projects, through a range of innovative initiatives like helping establish capital funds to support locally-owned cooperatives as well as community-driven land use planning.

These forms of community governance and management not only develop local capacity and assets to build climate resilience, but they can also be safeguards against unintended negative consequences of neighborhood-level transformation. CBE is leading efforts to advance a Just Transition away from an extractive and exploitative economy to a local and living economy that supports the wellbeing of families, empowers people, cleans the environment, and creates safe and healthy neighborhoods.

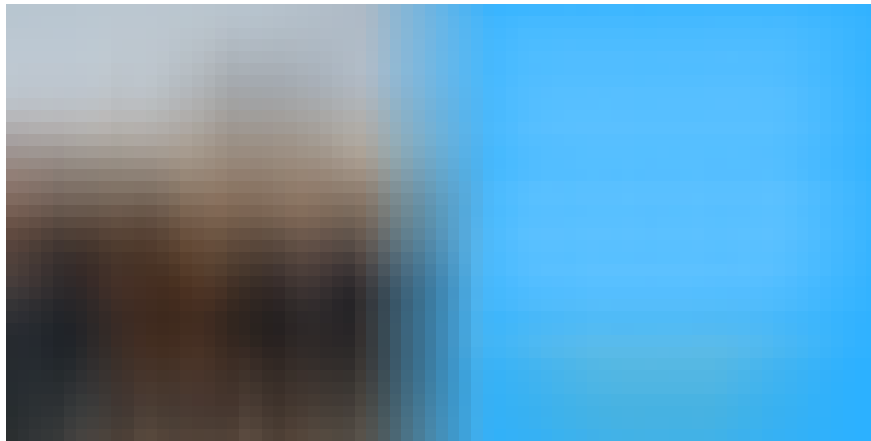


People Organized to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER) and local residents have been organizing to reclaim public lands for neighborhood assets such as parks and open space, affordable housing, urban agriculture, and worker/community cooperatives. For PODER, building neighborhood assets and fostering equitable development also includes creating innovative, community-based models for meeting economic needs that simultaneously build networks of support.

EJ communities are fostering people-powered equitable development that benefits local residents and nurtures a healthy economy. These are the local, living economies we need to build resilience in the face of our climate crisis.

Achieve 100% Renewable Energy Now

California must unplug corporate polluters and power up our communities with clean, renewable energy. Our state must chart a pathway to fully transition off fossil fuels to achieve the public health and economic benefits of local renewable energy for all Californians. Environmental justice communities across the state have paid the highest price for dirty energy. Natural gas is just another dead end fossil fuel that poisons our communities and pollutes the climate. We want a just transition away from all fossil fuels and that means investing in local, 100% clean energy.

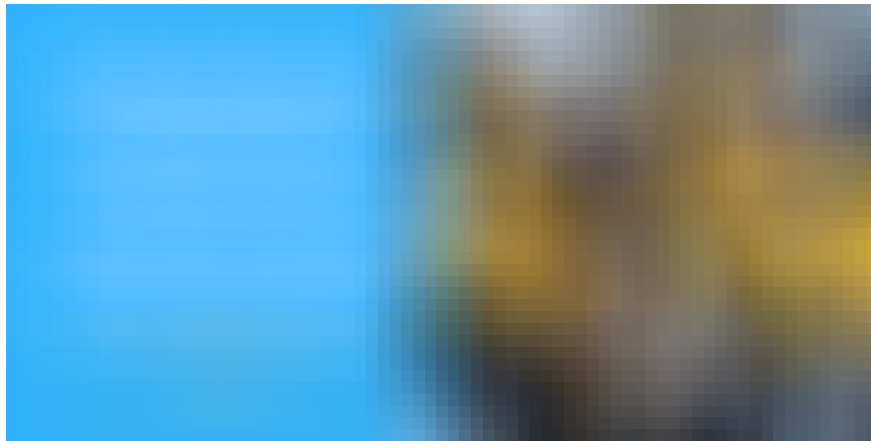


Low-income communities and communities of color need to see the environmental and economic benefits of equitable, clean, renewable energy, and they should be first in line for local clean energy and good jobs. California's newest solar program for low-income renters, the Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SOMAH) program, will bring \$1 billion in rooftop solar to low-income renters over 10 years. The new program is intended to fund 300 megawatts of new solar projects with the potential to serve over 150,000 low-income renters at over 2,000 affordable housing properties across the state.

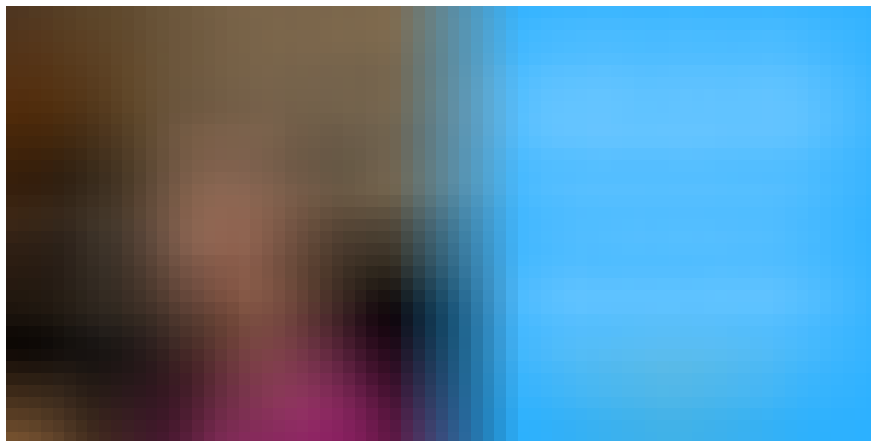
Programs like SOMAH will build a thriving local economy and support workers with job training for local jobs that are good for people and the planet.

Transforming Transportation

California's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation, which clogs the lungs of communities living next to California's biggest freeways, ports, rail yards and warehouses. Our state needs a transportation system that is truly climate resilient. This means accessible, affordable, zero-emission transportation options for all, including urban and rural communities, starting with an aggressive effort to regulate and phase out dirty diesel trucks on our roads. It also means massive investments in public transit and active transportation options and re-shaping our land-use planning to promote investments without displacement and move away from a car-centered culture.



Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability has been advocating for affordable and accessible clean transportation and mobility options and improved land use planning in rural communities in the Central Valley. These communities have the dirtiest air in the United States, and they urgently need zero-emission transportation options. Recently, the City of Fresno was awarded \$70 million through the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) program to create bike pathways and street improvements, and electric vehicle-sharing programs for cars, van pools and bikes. In addition, the TCC funds will build affordable housing near a future high-speed rail station and energy efficiency projects, residential solar, and other energy improvements for homes, as well as urban greening projects such as tree planting.



Unfortunately, not all communities have the same access to healthy, safe, reliable and affordable transportation options, such as public transit and biking and walking paths. That means some people don't have access to the same quality of life, just because of where they live.

Transportation justice is the equal access of all people to the transportation they need for a better quality of life.

Environmental Health Coalition is leading the effort for transportation justice in San Diego. They played a leading role in helping to pass AB 805 last year, which will ensure that San Diego's Association of Governments (SANDAG), the primary decision-making body on planning and transportation issues, will represent community needs and invest in accessible and affordable transit, pedestrian, and bicycling infrastructure. Just recently, under the new voting system enacted by AB 805, new leaders were elected to the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) board of directors, including long-time EJ advocate Georgette Gomez. There are now new opportunities to make improved transportation options a reality, which will mean less worry about long commutes to jobs or grocery stores, as well as reduced air pollution that will lead to less children with asthma and fewer greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

These are just some of the issues that the next Governor of California will have to address to be a real climate leader for our state. By protecting the communities most impacted by pollution and poverty, we can create a healthier environment for all Californians. Only climate policies and solutions that place equity at the center by addressing existing climate and pollution realities of the most vulnerable communities will achieve our vision for a healthy, sustainable future.

