

Two Decades of Climate Action

Allis Druffel – revised February 14, 2026

This brief overview of climate action in the last two decades is from the point of view of one California Catholic active in the faith/climate realm since 2003. It goes year by year and includes a mixture of experience of local, state, federal, and global climate issues and policy.

It has taken a mere two decades for the world in large to begin recognizing the dangers of climate change and to now feel its fury in worsening storms, droughts, floods, and wildfires. The effects of climate change are everywhere – and is on a trajectory fast outpacing humanity's response. Billions of people, as well as cities, municipalities and regulatory agencies around the world have taken action to reduce pollution emissions. 200 countries committed to the rapid de-escalation of carbon emissions. In 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which committed the [single largest investment](#) in clean energy and job creation.

At the same time, forces continue to thwart successful action forward, such as the politicization of climate change, massive funding from the fossil fuel industry, and plain obstinance from those who resist changes to the status quo. A new presidential administration, which has called climate change a "big hoax", continues to roll back many public health- and planet-protecting policies.

The overall question now is: will humanity make the changes necessary to stave off the worst of disastrous climate effects?

The issue of pollution, the basis of climate change, came front and center in several ways in the 20th century. Communities around the nation experienced severe toxic water and air pollution events. Incidents of [severe smog in Los Angeles](#) dating from the 1940's led to the creation of the California Air Resources Board in 1967. In 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire for the thirteenth time due to oil spills. This incident, and the public outcry for action, inspired the birth of the bipartisan-supported [Environmental Protection Agency in 1970](#). The first national "Earth Day" launched the same year that spurred the U.S. citizenry into action.



Man selling fresh clean desert air for 50 cents a balloonfull in front of Loew's State Theater in Los Angeles, Oct. 22, 1954. Photo credit Herald-Examiner.

The United Nations organized an official international kickoff for global climate action with its [1992 Earth Summit](#) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In 2000, Interfaith Power & Light was created, the largest country-wide organization focused on the faith/ecology nexus. By 2003, the issues of climate change and sustainability had not, by and large, permeated the U.S. national consciousness, despite a growing number of scientific reports, linking a changing climate to fossil fuels. At the time, many who recognized the threat thought that much of the damage would happen mid-century.

In 2002 the California legislature threw down the climate policy gauntlet and [passed then-Assembly Member Pavley's AB 1493](#), which inspired the creation of less-polluting cars and light trucks. It took until 2009 for the [U.S. EPA to grant California a waiver](#) to set its own standards for clean cars, and "The Pavley Standards" has been a trend-setting policy for automakers and other states since then.

In 2004, as Director of Community Services for a large Catholic parish, our church was a snapshot of the understanding of climate change. Presentations on environmental stewardship were new and crucial in educating the faithful. One such forum featured high-level experts and theologians but was not well attended. The environmental "choir" was present but there was little interest otherwise, other than a handful people who perceived it as a "political" issue. Attempts at creating an Environmental Ministry at our church failed, because of a fear of donations going down. Thus, a weekly "eco-tip of the week" in the church bulletin between 2003-08 educated the faithful on water and energy conservation, electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids, and state climate policy.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit. It took 1,836 lives and remains the [costliest natural disaster in U.S. history](#). The images from Katrina were heartbreakingly eye-opening. And they

brought about a burgeoning awareness - those under-served areas, often inhabited by lower-income and/or communities of color, suffer "first and worst" from weather disasters. More than a million people were initially displaced from their homes, and some 200,000 never returned to their communities. [Hurricane Katrina's aftermath continues](#) to this day.

2006 was revolutionary in terms of climate legislation in California. Increased advocacy for energy efficiency standards, renewable energy use, and protection of at-risk communities [led to the passage of Assembly Bill 32](#), The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. This bill focuses on reducing pollution, protecting public health, and creating clean energy jobs. The documentary, ["An Inconvenient Truth"](#), shown in multiple U.S. congregations and theaters all over the world, brought a new level of awareness to and scientific understanding of climate science, as well as a sense of urgent action. This film, in addition to multiple books linking scientific reports and projections, expanded the environmental consciousness of millions around the world.

While 2006 brought an explosion of understanding, it also brought to light a continued systemic pattern of climate change denial from the fossil fuel industry, which continued to cast doubts on reports linking greenhouse gas emissions to climate change. Tim Flannery's [The Weather Makers: How Man Is Changing the Climate and What It Means for Life on Earth](#) described, for example, the efforts by Exxon-Mobil to present climate science as "debatable to keep their profits intact."

In 2007 faith and justice leaders increased their action on climate change and more faith/climate organizations were started. The [Catholic Climate Covenant](#) launched, inspiring Catholics to respond to those most affected by the climate crisis. More houses of worship, with the leadership of concerned clergy and faith leaders and Interfaith Power & Light, continued energy efficiency, educational and advocacy efforts. In California, heavy-duty legislative action began on the implementation of AB 32.

In **2008**, a committed and concerned group of Catholics commenced monthly meetings to formulate a Catholic Archdiocesan "Green Team" in Los Angeles, which aimed to provide practical resources on the theology of the faith/climate nexus, energy efficiency measures, and education and advocacy options for both parishes and Catholic households. The monthly planning meetings were well attended with 15-20 people present at each meeting. The attendees were steeped in both the science of climate change and [Catholic Social Doctrine](#). The then-head of the L.A. Archdiocese was devoted to education and action on social justice matters, including protection of the environment.

2009 was a defining year in the climate crisis politically and socially, which increased the motivation and action coming from the U.S. faith community and millions of advocates from various sectors. Now on staff with California Interfaith Power & Light, I watched with national colleagues, in real-time via the Internet, as the House of Representatives passed H.R 2454, the [American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009](#). The bill focused on reducing pollution, creating clean energy jobs, and investing in communities hard hit by regional climate change. Many

environmental and faith advocates experienced a sense of hope, especially since adoption of federal climate legislation would lend significant U.S. credence at the International Copenhagen Climate Talks later that year. The glimmer that 'another world is possible' looked promising.

Sadly, other forces expressed themselves almost simultaneously. The environmental community was split on which type of market mechanism would be used in the gathering of revenues by large polluters. An extremely vocal movement called for an overall reduction of the federal government and regulations. And, massive pushback by the fossil fuel industry, which exploited the 2008-09 recession and high unemployment all combined to [prevent the bill being taken up in the Senate](#).

Ahead of the UN Climate Talks in Copenhagen -- the first year that this "Conference of Parties (COP)" permeated the American consciousness in a real way -- a group of business leaders [took out a full page ad in the New York Times](#) urging swift action. In part, it stated, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." Among the signers, Donald J. Trump, who would work for the opposite goal during his two terms as president.

The international talks proved to be a disappointment. [Rather than a strong agreement committed to accelerated far-reaching action](#), consensus was reached to limit global temperature rise to 2-degree Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) from the pre-industrial level by 2100; recognize that sustainable growth be the prevailing economic model going forward; and to review progress in ensuing annual meetings.

A disputed point in the talks was the role of developing and developed countries. Developing countries that had historically little responsibility for the carbon in the atmosphere and which were most vulnerable to climate impacts, such as those belonging to the [Alliance of Small Island States](#) (AOSIS), asserted their right to grow their infrastructures with little limits for carbon emissions. Already-developed countries, such as the U.S. and European-Union nations, which were responsible for the majority of pollution, needed to strongly cut back on their fossil fuel use, as well as provide funding for vulnerable nations suffering from extreme weather events. The issues of global climate justice and "loss and damage" hit the spotlight.

After the challenging and disappointing year of 2009, **2010** started off on a hopeful note for Catholics active in the faith/ecology nexus. On January 1, Pope Benedict XVI, (dubbed "The Green Pope" by some) delivered his International Day of Peace address, entitled "[If you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation.](#)" California remained a leader in legislation, increasing its renewable energy goal to 33% by 2020. Locally, after two years of meetings and with the blessing of the cardinal, the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles kicked off the Creation Sustainability Ministry officially, with Masses focused on Creation in all five of its regions.



A Mass focused on God's Creation was held at Holy Family Church, South Pasadena, and celebrated by the local bishop - October 2010. Photo: Allis Druffel

In California, two large Texas oil companies, Valero and Tesoro, sponsored a proposition that would halt implementation of Assembly Bill 32 until unemployment reached 5% or lower. In response to Prop 23, organizations and individuals from the faith, equity, environmental justice, public health, and policy sectors joined together in a huge effort to defeat it. The campaign was successful, [Prop 23 was defeated](#), and AB 32 continued its march toward clean energy, protection of public health, and job creation.



"Renewal L.A." event held on April 30, 2010, at St. John's Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, highlighted scenes from the documentary ["Renewal"](#), a call against Prop 23, and an interfaith prayer service for Creation. Photo: Allis Druffel

Despite these positive signs, frustration from the national faith community and multiple partners grew with the growing politicization of the climate issue. The issue continued to divide, generally along liberal/conservative ideology. This polarization unfortunately put to the side any sane conversation of three realities of a changing climate: one, a changing climate affects all people regardless of personal, social or political beliefs; two, there is an intimate connection

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between climate, poverty, health, immigration, and all major justice issues; and, three, a changing climate affects the lives and livelihoods of those most vulnerable locally and globally.

In 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) appeared poised for action based on its 2009 "[Endangerment Finding](#)", which found that [heat-trapping pollutants are a danger](#) to public health and the climate. It began regulation plans for new power plants, mercury, ozone, and other air toxics. The then-Republican led House of Representatives pushed back hard despite the growing mound of scientific reports that pointed to needed action. Meanwhile, public understanding and action of the climate crisis continued to grow.

Also in 2011, a key battle came to a head: the proposed construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which aimed to carry hundreds of thousands of barrels of the dirtiest form of oil from Alberta, Canada to Texas. Citing [threats to underground water](#) and exploitation of land, First Nations peoples led massive demonstrations with varied supporters such as ranchers, environmentalists, and people of faith. [Hundreds were arrested in a two-week rally](#) in front of the White House. The Keystone XL issue, like Hurricane Katrina in 2005, furthered the understanding of the climate crisis from a global, somewhat vague future to one that had real and practical implications for people's health, lives, and livelihoods.



Rev. Albert Cohen (left) and a friend were two of the oldest people [arrested in front of the White House](#) protesting the Keystone XL Pipeline

It can safely be said that **2012** was the year that climate change as both a real and present reality intensified in the American public consciousness. Amidst the continuing rancor and bitterness over the issue in still-inactive Congress, [Hurricane Sandy hit](#), leaving a path of death and destruction from Jamaica and Cuba to the East Coast of the U.S. This devastating event brought home one other, increasingly obvious truth of a changing climate: the time to act on a global scale was long overdue.

Locally, the gains made by Catholics in the Los Angeles region were overturned by a new Archdiocesan leader. The new archbishop returned to a restricted view of the 'protection of life'

focusing primarily on abortion. Many faith leaders of all major religions, including Catholic, had expanded their view of the protection of life to 'womb to tomb.' [This includes the protection of all Creation, especially when threatened by climate change and pollution effects.](#) The Los Angeles Archdiocese's turn to 'abortion-only' disappointed Catholics in the region that had been active for years on the link between the care for Creation and Catholic values.

Meanwhile, frustration and disbelief with Congressional inaction reached a high point, resulting in the time-honored tradition of ultimate civil action: non-violent rallies and arrests, including those from the faith community. One such example was the first-ever climate rally and civil disobedience from the faith community demanding climate action in Los Angeles in February 2012.



February, 2012 witnessed the first-ever faith climate rally and "die-in" in Los Angeles, highlighting the tragic consequences of a warming planet brought on by continuing over-reliance on fossil fuels. Seven were arrested.
Photo: Rev. Megan More

Two false assertions continued to dominate cable "news", Congress, and public discourse: that climate change science was still "under debate," and that the U.S. could address climate change only at the expense of a healthy economy. The first assertion has been proven false by multiple scientific reports. One of these, from the [International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook in 2011](#) (p.40), stated that, unless dramatic action was taken by 2017 to reduce pollution emissions, a 2 degree Celsius rise would be inevitable by 2100. The second assertion was also proven false by both economic studies and reality. In California, Environmental Defense Fund reported that, from 1995 to 2010, [employment in the clean energy sectors increased by 109%](#), compared to a 12 percent increase in the overall state's economy.

As **2013** came and went, many who worked on climate change issues came to the realization that [we were coming closer to a climate "tipping point"](#) where, no matter our actions to reduce pollution on a massive scale, it would be too late to turn the tide. Indeed, it had been known for years that humanity would not be able to stop climate change; it was just a matter of how bad it

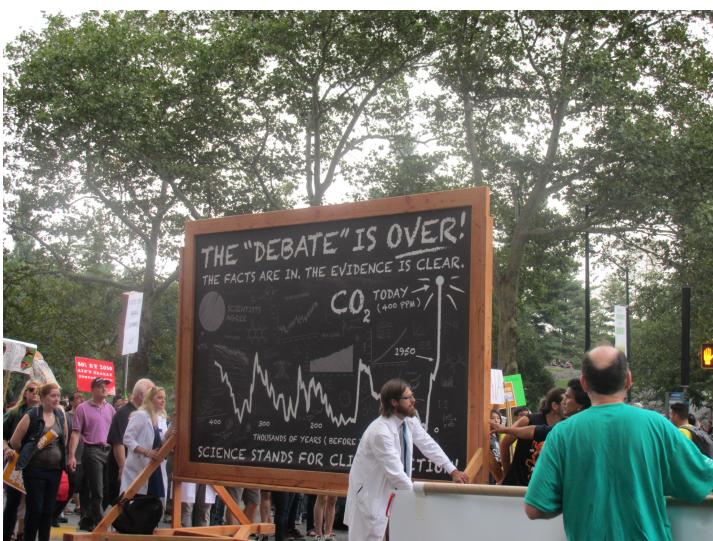
would get. For those of us working on this issue, we were challenged with a growing sense of despair, which, ironically, flew in the face of tireless action and belief in a loving Creator.

Many of us became aware of "[solastalgia](#)" - a feeling of depression caused by changes or damage to our natural ecosystems. We forged ahead, knowing that the only viable responses were advocacy and empowerment of individuals, houses of worship, and communities. Anxiety and grief about our situation is still present and has become a companion in our actions.

The end of **2014** brought with it no lack of significant worrying signs: 2014 was the hottest year globally on record [with 14 of the 15 hottest years on record occurring since 2000](#); carbon dioxide concentration surpassed 400 parts per million (ppm) in contrast to an average of 280 ppm for the past 800,000 years at least; Congressional members continued to reject the science of a changing climate and any attempts to reduce the problem; and the U.S. and other countries continued to use massive amounts of coal, oil and gas.

As if climate and nature advocates needed any more reason to feel depressed, Elizabeth Kolbert published "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History." In it, she outlines the growing dominance of humanity over the natural world, with human-made climate change threatening to [eliminate 20 to 50 percent of all species](#) within the 21st century.

At the same time, there were a plethora of hopeful signs: many countries and U.S. states and cities formulated [Climate Action Plans](#); the EPA continued work on the Clean Power Plan; and 400,000 people rallied at the Peoples Climate March in New York. The 400,000 march, with Indigenous and climate justice communities in the lead, was the largest ever to demand swift national climate action and included an estimated 50,000 people of faith. [Faith organizations were a key coordinator](#) of the event.



One highlight of the 400,000 strong Peoples Climate March in New York in 2014.

2015 witnessed a growing chasm in the divide between great hope and anxiety. The U.S. Clean Power Clean Plan, which aimed to reduce carbon pollution by 32 percent from 2005 levels, was finalized. The Mercury and Air Toxic Standards (MATS), that required coal- and oil-burning power plants to reduce life-threatening emissions, was proposed by the EPA. Then-President Obama rejected the Keystone XL Pipeline. [Pope Francis' very influential encyclical on ecology, 'Laudato Si'](#), as well as major faith/climate statements from Jewish and Muslim leaders, were released and [permeated local and global communities](#). And events such as the 2014 Peoples Climate March remained a beacon of light signaling a shift to a healthier world.

Yet, persistent signs were discouraging: votes in Congress to stall the EPA Clean Power Plan and [pushback from governors in six states](#) signaled a seemingly willful denial of needed action; the global use of coal and natural gas was still rampant; and renewable energy investment and infrastructure was not fast enough to keep up with the pace of devastating climate change impacts.

As the global community headed into International Climate Talks in Paris, then, there was an [expectation that things would change](#) - that international governments would heed the demand of their citizens and climate scientists, and formulate a binding agreement that would avert disastrous climate effects. Proven technologies such as wind and solar power were on the rise, there was a greater push for transportation electrification, and research and development into battery storage was seen as a strong working solution.

[The resulting Paris Agreement](#) was a non-binding commitment, ultimately signed by 197 countries. The signers pledged to reduce carbon pollution and keep global warming to well under 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels and develop National Determined Contribution (NDCs) for pollution targets. A Green Climate Fund was set up to assist countries hardest hit by severe weather events. While the Paris Agreement was celebrated, it was also recognized as a "good start", in need of strengthening and implementation.



Pope Francis relies on his Pontifical Academy of Sciences for the latest research and reporting on climate change and other environmental threats. A gathering of the PAS in May 2014 yielded the comment from Dr. Veerabhadran Ramanathan of the Scripps Institute that, when it comes to climate change, "...the poorest 3 billion people are going to suffer the worst consequences."

2016 demonstrated a real and present danger to environmental progress. With a new president elected to the White House who was opposed to life-saving regulations, faith and climate justice advocates knew that federal climate policies were on the chopping block. Anxiety and fear for the future were common sentiments. Faith leaders and those involved in climate advocacy served as voices of comfort and listening ears to all experiencing extreme uncertainty.

At the same time, state and local municipalities kicked into higher gear and celebrated victories. One example: after a multi-year battle, the Republican mayor of San Diego, the country's eighty-largest city, announced the city's intention to [transition to 100 percent renewable energy](#) by 2035.

2017 began with a [four-year series of serious setbacks for federal climate action](#), including an [announcement that the U.S. would withdraw](#) from the Paris Agreement and the Green Climate Fund, which provided crucial investment in countries disproportionately hit by climate events. In March 2017, the new president, Donald Trump, directed the EPA to review and ultimately rescind the Clean Power Plan, which had received an incredible amount of public support. In its place, the EPA proposed the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule, which was significantly weaker in pollution aims. When the EPA commenced implementation of ACE in 2019, almost [two dozen states filed suit against the EPA](#), stating that ACE did not meaningfully address carbon pollution under the Clean Air Act.

Federal dismantlement of hard-fought climate regulations, while an impetus for increased anxiety, only strengthened local and state climate policy action. Efforts of frontline communities, those most affected by pollution from oil and gas extraction, received ever-greater solidarity from like-minded partners in the faith, public health, equity, and policy arenas.



Environmental justice advocates [rally outside the South Coast Air Quality Management District](#) on February 3, 2017 for an Air Quality Management Plan that strengthens oil and gas industry's requirement to reduce pollution.

2018 witnessed many municipalities and states strengthening action on, and commitment to, pollution reduction strategies, including two from California. Advocates celebrated the passage and signing of SB 100, which extended the Golden State's emissions reduction goal from 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 to 100 percent clean energy from the electricity sector by 2045. Governor Jerry Brown rode the growing momentum of clean vehicles and [issued an Executive Order](#) that set a target of five million zero-emission vehicles on state roads by 2030, and \$2.5 billion for 250,000 electric vehicle charging stations and 200 hydrogen fueling stations by 2025.

On a federal level, the new administration remained resistant to climate solutions, even though a [growing number of U.S. residents](#) recognized climate change as a public health threat created by human activities. The EPA declared the Mercury and Toxic Standards (MATS), as no longer "appropriate", even though by that time, industry had spent more than \$18 billion in MATS compliance. The [federal Clean Cars Standards](#) finalized in 2012, which paved the way for fuel economy of 54.5 miles per gallon and which were supported by a dozen automakers, was in danger of being overturned. In three national hearings conducted by the EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) on the proposed weakening of the standards, comments from public health, faith, environmental justice, equity, policy, and some business organizations were overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining the 2012 commitments. However, these pleas, often citing multiple health impacts, fell upon deaf ears.

2018 was also a year of weather extremes, and the recognition of a "new abnormal" for events such as year-long wildfire seasons in the western U.S. One especially pernicious event, the 2017-2018 Thomas Fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, was started by electrical power lines

coming into contact during high winds. It scorched 440 square miles, caused two deaths and several injuries, destroyed 1,063 buildings, and cost over two billion dollars in damage. And the devastation continued: in early January 2018, soil saturation from heavy rainfall created a massive debris flow, [which killed 23](#), injured 163, and destroyed or damaged 300 structures



The chapel on the campus of La Casa de Maria Retreat Center in Montecito was damaged by debris flow on January 9, 2018, and several buildings were destroyed. 23 lives were lost in the Montecito area.



The Clean Cars Standards received wide support from the U.S. public, including the faith and justice sectors, like this support from Watts Clean Air and Energy Committee in December, 2018.

In 2019, in light of additional environmental setbacks from the federal government, local and state municipalities, organizations, individuals and faith communities enhanced their action even further. Many of these efforts focused on the protection of frontline communities, which historically bear a disproportionate amount of pollution and poor health outcomes. California Senator Connie Leyva introduced SB 210 which would clean up medium- and heavy-duty trucks involved in goods movement. It received wide support and was put into statute.

Frontline communities and their many supporters advocated for Assembly Bill 345 (Muratsuchi), which aimed to erect health and safety setbacks between oil and gas extraction sites and residential, educational, and recreational sites. [The implications of oil and gas drilling on peoples' health and the environment](#) had been known for decades. Increased cardiac and respiratory illnesses, pre-term births, and increased risk of cancer and premature death are a reality for those living close to oil and gas sites.

2020 witnessed the arrival of COVID. It affected every sector of American life, from jobs, the economy, transportation and childcare to housing, poverty, and access to healthcare. On the federal and state policy front, COVID took the spotlight with bills aimed at health and financial protections for those affected. [California's legislature was a snapshot of the nation](#): legislators worked from home, legislative processes were interrupted, and most proposed legislation other than COVID protections were scrapped in response to the growing pandemic that was taking lives, livelihoods, and jobs, making already financially vulnerable Americans even more so.

In addition to COVID, extreme temperatures hit key regions: [areas of Siberia reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit](#), some 30 degrees above normal. Extreme heat, especially in the Arctic and Antarctic regions [further solidifies "feedback cycles"](#) in which one event (heat) affects another (permafrost melt and methane release) that brings on further heat.

Ironically, humanity's response to COVID brought encouraging signs of life. [As global communities locked down, animals were free to wander](#) in empty, less polluted, and quieter areas. Many climate advocates rejoiced in seeing such images, believing in a build-back-better strategy that would decrease pollution and allow nature to thrive.

2021 began on a more hopeful note with a new federal administration that proclaimed action on [clean energy, jobs creation, and a return to scientific integrity](#), including the re-entering the Paris Agreement. It also started the process of [allowing states to set their own standards for Clean Cars](#) and eventually used California's goals as an example. The [Keystone XL Pipeline was officially abandoned](#) by TC Energy and rallies to shut down similar pipelines continued.

Expectations to get the U.S. back on track from four years of attacks on climate protections ran high. At the same time, several recent scientific reports warned that "the point of no return" from climate catastrophe was already in sight. People of faith and many partners experienced a greater sense of anxiety and frustration at the lack of progress after two decades of tireless advocacy for a transition to a clean energy world.



Activists display banners referring to shutting down existing oil pipelines in the northern United States at Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC on April 1, 2021.
Photo: Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images

Activists display banners referring to shutting down existing oil pipelines in the northern United States at Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC. on April 1, 2021 | Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images

The crisis at the Del Rio, TX border with Haitian refugees in 2021 highlighted the [nexus of severe weather events and major social issues](#). A history of colonialism, foreign resources grabs, heavy deforestation, and heavier storms, combined with high unemployment, weak infrastructure, and political instability have exacerbated social unrest and violence. Haiti is considered the [most climate-vulnerable country in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), and the global community is experiencing just the tip of the iceberg now of climate refugees.

The global community headed into the November Glasgow Climate Talks weary and wounded from the COVID pandemic, and with the burden of climate change a clear and present danger. [A 2021 report from the International Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) was described as "code red" for the planet by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. A [record high temperature of 121 in areas of Canada](#) spurred massive, destructive wildfires. On a related note, a 2021 report from the World Health Organization cited air pollution as "the single biggest environmental threat to human health" and [responsible for millions of deaths and lost years of healthy life annually](#). The [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) was a non-binding treaty that again committed to a limit of 1.5 degree Celsius rise, some financing for "loss and damage", and the increase of clean energy.

2022 was another watershed year. Despite the dedication of billions of people around the globe to alter the trajectory of the climate crisis, the damage to the natural world and human infrastructure was evident everywhere. [Massive rain and flooding in Pakistan](#) in June killed some 1,700 people and flooded almost one-third of the country. [Temperatures topped 104 degrees Fahrenheit](#) in Europe, which claimed lives and sparked wildfires.

In June, the [Supreme Court curtailed the EPA's authority on reducing greenhouse gases](#), (such as was proposed in the Clean Power Plan), stating that any "transformational" action to the economy must have authorization of Congress. This was a blow to many who had worked tirelessly for pollution reduction policies. On a hopeful note, clean energy procurement increased like with [Community Choice Aggregation](#) in California.

At Interfaith Power & Light's annual gathering in Washington, DC, advocates encouraged legislators to work with the Biden administration on strategies designed to protect frontline communities and increase clean energy. Our list included providing tax credits for household energy saving tactics, such as solar and EVs, tax credits for large-scale wind and solar projects, and grants to for the cleanup of Superfund sites. As usual, Democratic leaders were in favor, but Republican leaders balked.



Rep. Barbara Lee of Oakland met with IPL national and state leaders on May 18, 2023, and expressed on-going commitment to public health- and climate-protecting policies.

Climate advocates all over the country were thrilled with the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), the first significant Congressional action on climate change. The bill, which aimed to reduce the federal deficit, lower prescription drug prices, and invest in clean energy, passed the House and Senate with all Democrats in favor and all Republicans in opposition. Among its climate-friendly provisions, the IRA provided tax credits for household solar, electric vehicles, heat pumps, and other energy efficiency upgrades, as well as investments in clean energy production facilities.

There was, again, great fanfare and expectation for the globe to come together against the climate crisis at the U.N. Climate Talks in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. The international faith community demonstrated its [strength and unity with multiple events](#). The conference was a win for "Loss and Damage" proponents, and the ["Santiago Network"](#) format was adopted as its platform. [The agreed-upon Implementation Platform](#) resolves to action that keeps warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, commits to deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and swift action on adaptation.

2023 witnessed, again, extremes of hope and despair. In 2022, [China installed as much solar as the entire world combined](#), and then increased that production in 2023.

Ahead of COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry and Chinese climate envoy Xie Zhenhua met twice to formulate an agreement on enhanced climate change efforts. The resulting "[Sunnylands Statement](#)" committed both countries to working together closely on the transition to clean energy, including an effort to triple renewable energy by 2030. This

unofficial pledge was seen as a highlight between the two largest pollution emitters within a global summit that yielded few results.

2024 ushered in considerable steps forward in the growth of clean energy. In the U.S., [solar production increased by 36% from 2023](#), while wind and power generated more energy than coal. Wind and solar accounted for a record [30% of the European Union's electricity generation](#), while fossil fuel electricity fell by 17%.

The Inflation Reduction Act demonstrated positive outcomes for household, production, and job growth. In the two years since its passage, buoyed by billions of dollars from private investment, more than 400 new clean energy projects had begun, creating almost 150,000 new jobs. Millions of households installed energy-saving devices thanks to credits from the IRA.

2024 was also the hottest year globally on record, with January to September [exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels](#). In the U.S., [27 major weather disasters](#) claimed at least 568 lives, and cost taxpayers an estimated \$182.7 billion. One in particular, Hurricane Helene in late September, caused catastrophic flooding from Florida to North Carolina. To this day, some [communities are still waiting for FEMA funds](#) to remove debris, rebuild homes, and restore roads.

Within the good news/bad news milieu of late 2024, one action cast a definite pall over efforts for climate progress: the second election of Donald Trump. Millions of climate advocates geared up for round two of attacks on lifesaving and planet-protecting policies. Trump's election [cast a shadow on COP29](#), the international climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan. The global fossil fuel industry escaped unscathed, but there was a commitment to triple financial commitment to developing countries, from \$100 billion to \$300 billion annually by 2035.

Climate change demonstrated its full fury at the beginning of 2025 in California. The devastating Eaton and Pacific Palisades fires shook the nation and underlined the fact that, due to climate change, "fire season" in Los Angeles is [no longer contained to May through October](#). The fires leveled whole communities where people had lived, gathered, celebrated, and shopped for decades. 29 people lost their lives, and total property damages are estimated between [\\$28 billion and \\$53 billion](#). The cost of these climate change-driven wildfires continue to fall on the backs on homeowners, taxpayers, insurance, and governmental agencies.

Simultaneously, the newly-created Department of Government Efficiency, tasked with shrinking the size of the federal government, [immediately started cutting federal agencies and programs](#) not in line with Trump's agenda. This included anything perceived as related to diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI), including federal grants for environmental justice areas.

Meanwhile, the long-understood scientific connection between fossil fuel companies and the climate crisis became even clearer. In May, the Union of Concerned Scientists published a report proving (again) that [polluting companies knew for decades](#) that the continued extraction, Druffel - "Two Decades of Climate Action"

production and use of fossil fuel energy would lead to catastrophic climate effects. Despite this, fossil fuel giants like Exxon and Chevron fight against every local, state, and national attempt to reduce pollution.

And they have powerful allies. The Trump administration has been gleefully rolling back clean energy, public health-protecting policies. The new EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin [announced a series of rollbacks](#), including hard-won victories related to coal-fired power plants and clean cars standards, calling these actions a "...a dagger through the heart of climate-change religion."

Numerous states and organizations have responded with dozens of lawsuits against these attempts. One organization, Center for Biological Diversity, along with partners has [legally challenged multiple policies](#) that endanger water, air, land, and ecosystems. Attorneys general from more than a dozen states have filed legal challenges, such as the lawsuit challenging Trump's ban on wind power.

But the picture looks grim. In July, 2025, the Republican-led Congress passed a massive budget reconciliation bill that endangers Medicaid for millions, nutrition programs for children, families, and seniors, and continues funding for the illegal and immoral detention and deportation of millions of immigrants. It has taken aim at the progress made by the Inflation Reduction Act, ending energy-efficiency credits for households and companies. And [on February 12, Trump revoked the 2009 endangerment finding](#), the bedrock of federal public health and climate-protection policies.

Going forward and commentary:

Over the short span of two decades, climate change has grown from a little-known phenomenon to a real and present danger recognized by most of the globe. Despite responding efforts, human action is not on par with what is needed to avert further climate and ecosystem collapse. It is inconceivable, but true, that politics and corporate profits are dominating over the suffering faced by millions of people, countless species, air, and land. Globally, billions of people are acting for a better future yet are losing to the mere thousands who hold corporate and political control.

It is the height of irony that, while [the James Webb Telescope brings incredible images](#) of the expanding universe, humanity is caught up in incredible short-sightedness in addressing the largest problem facing the globe. Rather than looking outward with a large lens and with awe, there is a willful continuance to look within, like a child that has not yet understood that he is not the center of the universe.

In order for humanity to succeed in averting the worst of climate change effects and live in harmony with all of Creation, we need to regain recognition of key truths, long held sacred by Indigenous peoples. First, humanity IS part of a deeply inter-connected web of existence, not a separate "thing" that can continue to dominate and destroy natural resources without

ultimately destroying itself. Second, humanity must live in harmonious relationship with all beings – air, land, trees, insects, animals – to assure the fullness of life for all. Only this will help avert the worst effects of climate change and give future inhabitants on the planet a chance.

Third, those in the “developed” world must ask the question, “How much is enough?” Over-consumption is not only unnecessary, but also a terrible burden on Earth’s resources, as well as on folks who toil mightily to produce products. Fourth, which I assert is the foundation of all truths: we all must develop a greater sense of compassion for one another and for all creation. When we feel sympathetic concern for the sufferings of others, we will act to alleviate that suffering. We will share. We will not think just of ‘me and mine’ but keep a watchful eye on all our local and global neighbors, human and non-alike. As we grow in compassion, we will naturally turn to one another and build communities of compassion, recognizing our interdependence, living in right relationships, and sharing our material wealth.

We are at a precipice where we must access the best of humanity within us; gratefulness, inclusion, consideration, working together locally and globally for the protection of all, not just a few. We do not have time to continue with division, competition, and putting net profits ahead of the wellbeing of the planet and all Creation. In the years and decades ahead, the consequences of our actions will be revealed in what our world and climate look like. Billions of people of faith and conscience are fervently acting - and praying - that this revelation will be positive.