

October Newsletter



The



Policy

Edition



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**@sustainablexleaders
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October Action of the Month:

Go Paperless

By Navya Gupta

As the academic year begins and offices reopen post-pandemic, SLIA has chosen “Go Paperless” as their October Action of the Month to help households reduce their paper waste.

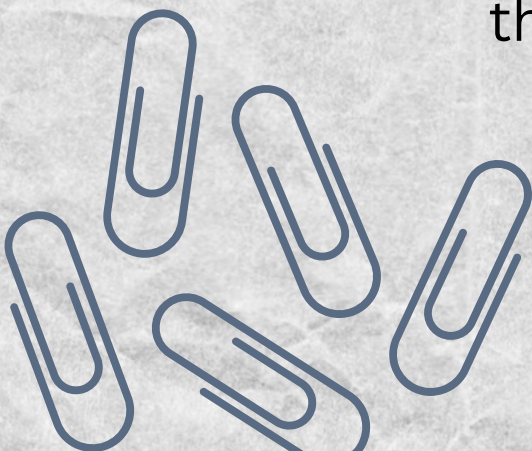
The one potential benefit of the pandemic is that it proved that a great portion of our work can be completed online. Now, as the impact of climate change is becoming more apparent, this lesson is increasingly relevant. In most cases, having digital copies of important documents is not only safer, as the risk of documents being lost or damaged online is significantly smaller than for physical copies, but also makes it easier to send, save, and organize them.. Moreover, software like Adobe Reader, which allows you to write virtual documents, maintains the use of physical copies while saving time and trees. Think before you print and ask yourself if it is necessary



Speaking of unnecessary, what do junk mail and paper towels have in common? They are both bound for the bin. In fact, Nine million pieces of junk mail were sent out in 2017 only to be ripped up and thrown in the trash. To avoid spending money on that expensive Costco pack of paper towels or time digging out urgent mail from a sea of sleazy ads, consider two alternatives:

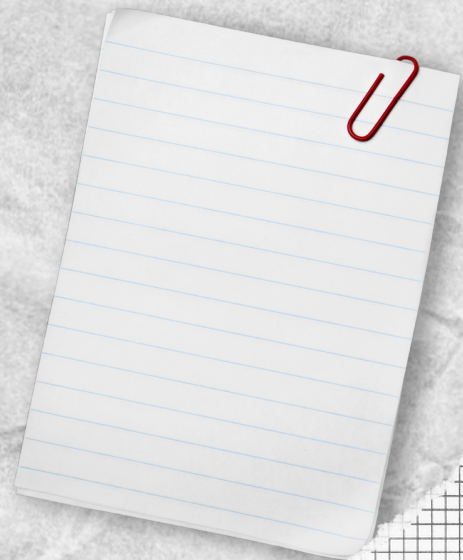
1. Sign up at <https://www.dmachoice.org/> for only two dollars to stop junk mail from being delivered to your household for the next ten years. This simple action significantly reduces the number of trees being sacrificed unnecessarily.
2. Instead of paper towels, use cloth. After using an old shirt, store bought towel, or cut-up rag, you can simply wash and reuse it, eliminating unnecessary paper use and waste.

Blocking junk mail from your mailbox and switching to cloth rags are not the most obvious methods in environmental preservation, but their impact extends beyond personal benefits to the preservation of thousands of trees.



Using paper is inevitable, but eliminating its waste can be achieved by recycling and buying recycled paper. For both office and home paper such as toilet paper, most stores offer recycled versions for slightly higher prices; that price difference can be made up by using cloth rags and printing less. Using just one ton of recycled paper saves 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4000 kilowatts of energy, and 7000 gallons of water, which shows just how impactful this method can be.


We hope this article has given you some simple strategies to reduce your paper consumption and waste! You can also track your household's carbon footprint, learn more about the Go Paperless action, and take more actions with us on the Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge website.



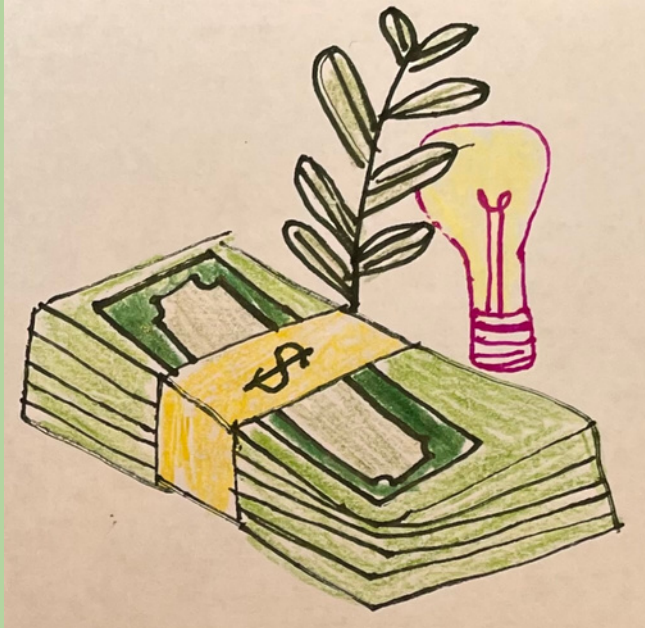
CONGRESS' NEW CLIMATE PACKAGE

By: Alison Chiu

Art/Photo: Karlina Meyer


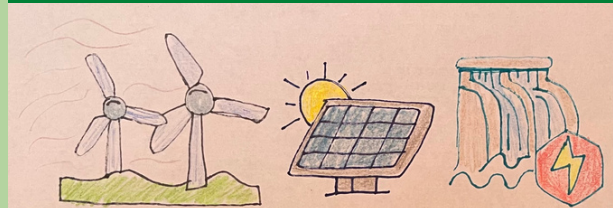


For example, the bill will encourage Americans to buy electric vehicles instead of less clean alternatives. Americans will be able to qualify for a \$4,500 tax credit to purchase used electric vehicles or a \$7,500 tax credit for new electric vehicles. As seen in recent events that caused gas prices to skyrocket and events that caused major pollution from gas vehicles, gas vehicles are not the most reliable form of transportation to depend on. A shift toward electric vehicles aims to eliminate these past problems and create a more sustainable way of living for everyday Americans.



ON AUGUST 12, 2022, CONGRESS

passed H.R. 5376, "Inflation Reduction Act of 2022," which includes a \$369 billion dollar climate package. This bill is the remains of the previous Green New Deal and Build Back Better Act (read the full bill here). After a period of 34 years that saw no major legislative action, the recent package has been called, "the most ambitious climate package ever passed in the US" and "the most significant climate bill in US history." The bill uses the \$369 billion dollars to lower US carbon emissions by 40% by 2030 by allocating the money to energy security and climate change. About \$30 billion dollars will be used in loans, while more than \$60 billion will be invested in tax credits.



The bill also pushes many other climate-related policies: lowering energy costs, increasing energy security, decarbonizing sectors of the economy, focusing on disadvantaged communities, and supporting rural communities. Explore more details on each specific focus in this summary. In fact, this bill is also expected to increase jobs in the United States. Due to the investment of \$60 billion in manufacturing and the institution of infrastructure and necessary maintenance, many new jobs will be created across the country. According to an analysis by Energy Innovation, the package will create up to 1.5 million jobs by 2030.

While it was passed, the package faced some opposition and had many vocal critics. For instance, many pointed out that although it penalizes oil and gas companies that do not cut methane emissions, it also fails to mobilize them to move away from coal and oil drilling.



Despite its criticisms and faults, this historic bill is a first step in a future of prospective climate legislation that would help the United States take its first steps toward a cleaner world. Even though the bill promises a lot for the future, much more is to come with regard to how the country will develop – hopefully for the better.





CLIMATE POLICY: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

By Joshua Odiase

It's no secret that environmental conditions have been worsening with increased fossil fuel production and green gas emissions being let out into the atmosphere. However, with initiatives and protests worldwide galvanizing more people to combat our current reality, there is still a glimmer of hope. It's great that people are putting in time and effort to plant the seeds for change, but it shouldn't stop there. As much as there should be voices in the streets shouting for change, there should also be voices in the political sphere to pass policies and acts to protect the environment, minimize air pollution, and stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate. These voices would prepare the general population and infrastructure for the imminent effects of climate change and how we as a society should adapt.



Voices in policy would assess and inform the public on the state of climate and how to respond accordingly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is notable for doing just that.



CLIMATE POLICY: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

They provide assessment, special, and methodology reports and deliver them through government representatives to discuss which actions need to be taken. These courses of action are significant steps in the implementation of climate policy. Another major step for policy occurred in 2021, when countries were deliberating the Climate Paris agreement at COP 26 in Scotland, where studies showed that human activity was unequivocally driving climate change and its effects would be irreversible for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, despite the fact that Biden proposed climate reforms, he has fallen short on those promises to where Line 3, a fossil fuel infrastructure project, would perpetuate our country's reliance on fossil fuels. Now, before you go criticizing, President Biden has recently passed the Inflation Reduction Act to slow the effects of global warming. It's similar to taking one step forward and two steps back; progress on climate change is often slow or even stagnate.



If there is a country that is on track for passing policies that ensure the protection of the environment, it's our fellow NATO ally France. La France est à la pointe de la politique climatique, or, for those who don't speak French, France is at the forefront of climate policy.



CLIMATE POLICY: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

For example, [President Emmanuel Macron recently passed an act for incentives and quotas on transportation, housing, and consumption to lower greenhouse gas emissions and waste](#). This act bans domestic flights that can be made by train in less than 2.5 hours. It will also, “create low-emission zones in urban areas with over 150,000 inhabitants by 2025, limiting the circulation of certain polluting vehicles” (New York Times). Although the French government receives criticism that their actions aren’t enough to combat the effects of changing climate, they are a step closer in sustainability.

Neither protests nor climate policy should be the “end all be all.” Instead, they should complement one another; both are more effective when in unison. For example, people can participate in marches and protests as well as get involved in climate change on a political level. You, yes, you as a citizen have the power to get legislation passed and signed. One way to do so is to elect representatives to Congress and offices that will fight for climate policy. Another common way is through initiatives. The [Statewide Initiative Guide](#) has comprehensive information on how to form such a movement.



CLIMATE POLICY: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

If you need any information on how to form a political initiative, here is a link to a document entailing what you need to know:

<https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ballot-measures/pdf/statewide-initiative-guide.pdf>

Whether you are on the streets holding rallies like the extinction rebellion protests in 2019, participating in strikes such as the Student Climate Strike formed by Greta Thunberg, or litigating grievances against conglomerates and corporations for negative externalities proliferated in the environment at the UN, any form of protest you choose can bring more attention to the cause. “It starts with just one” is an overused but fitting line.



How different Countries are Fighting Climate Change and What We Can Learn

By Nina Damiano

Art by Hannah Lee

Climate change is a growing issue, and its impact is becoming more and more clear over time. From the melting of icebergs in the arctic to sweltering summers in urban settings, global warming and its devastating effects are increasingly apparent to people all around the world. Some coastal regions are endangered by flooding, others are at risk of drought, and places everywhere are being influenced by rising global temperatures. But what are countries doing about it?

The efforts of various countries to limit their carbon footprint have largely been centered around the Paris Agreement, an international treaty focused on limiting impacts on climate change. With an overarching goal to keep global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius (ideally 1.5 degrees) from pre industrial levels, the Paris Agreement is a legally binding sustainability framework adopted by many countries worldwide. By setting Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, and updating them every five years, countries can set goals on reducing their carbon emissions and implement ways to adapt to rising temperatures.

With an NDC of cutting emissions in half by 2030, the United States is not doing nearly enough in efforts to reduce CO2 emissions. We are currently still emitting 13% of global emissions. If we continue on the path we are on now, predictions place the US's current emission trajectory to be about 26-42% of pre-industrial levels by 2030, not nearly enough as hoped.





Additionally, in 2016, the US produced the most plastic waste in the world, with 42 million metric tons of plastic waste – equivalent to 286 pounds per person in a year. And although many states have implemented policies banning or reducing plastic use, our federal government still has yet to make a unified attack on plastic.

The story is the same with our CO2 emissions - without effective policy on the national level holding the US accountable for its pollution, the US's efforts to fight climate change remain scattered and unorganized.

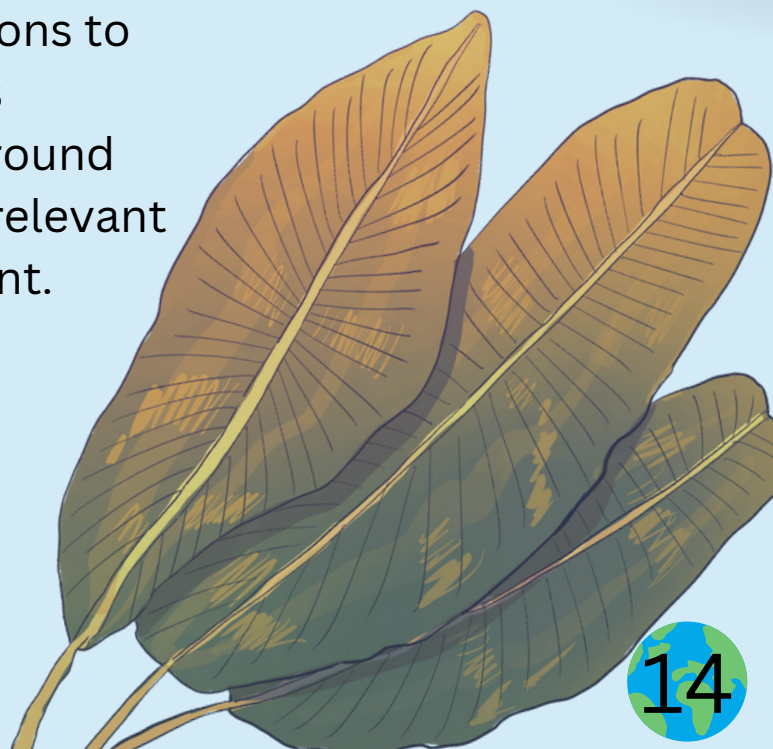
So how can we change our sustainability policy for good?

In the Caribbean, several islands are completely banning single-use plastics after witnessing the pileup of plastic waste uncollected in the environment every year. Banned items include plastic food containers, plastic utensils and bags, and straws. Instead of plastic, countries are using cheap alternatives such as banana leaves, which can be sourced locally, and don't leave a long-lasting ecological footprint.

Norway is targeting its plastic waste through its revolutionary refundable deposit program. Using this program, every bottle recycled is worth several cents—an effective economic motivator to get more people to recycle more. In fact, Norway recycles a whopping 97% of all plastic bottles, 92% of which are actually turned into plastic bottles again. In comparison, the US only recycles 29% of plastic bottles and has no similar deposit program. Norway sets the model for other developed countries including the US. Such a seemingly simple solution to plastic waste can create a ripple effect of benefits for the environment and the economy.

An example of powerful legislative climate policy can be seen through Finland's act on making carbon negativity legally binding. The country's parliament approved the passing of a new Climate Change Act, stating that Finland must be carbon negative by 2040. If this goal is not met, citizens of Finland will be able to pursue legal recourse in order to force their government to reduce emissions. The US has traditionally had trouble passing effective climate bills that would keep us on track to limit global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels, as set out in the Paris Agreement. Mostly due to the veto power of the US government, widespread reform through legislation is hard to implement in our current system. However, without effective legislation, the US won't be able to control its warming, possibly creating irreversible change to our climate. With garnering widespread support for a bill such as Finland's, the US could have a chance in passing a definitive and motivating climate policy.

Using these different examples across the world on how some of the most eco-effective countries are handling the growing threat of climate change, the US can create change both locally and nationally. From passing decisive and impactful laws on emissions to limiting single-use plastics as much as possible, these and other countries around the globe are providing valuable and relevant lessons in the fight for our environment.




5. During her “inside years” working for organizations such as the US Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Water Resources, Darling learned a valuable lesson in learning to listen to people with diverse interests and distinguish between what is being said versus what is actually meant.

6. After retiring, Darling decided she wanted to use her experience to help her community, so she applied for and served on the Walnut Creek Planning Commission for 10 years before running for City Council in 2020 on an environmentally focused platform.

7. As a member of City Council, Darling is currently involved in updating the city’s housing element and climate action plan in order to match the state’s current goals. She hopes this climate plan will allow the city to accommodate more electric vehicles, increase the use of recycled water, make the climate plan more equitable, and more!

■■■■ Michael Cass' Takeaways ■■■■

1. He was influenced by his parents who were both engineers but wanted to avoid the long hours and taxing commitments..
2. Travel was also very influential on Cass, and he has been to 30 countries. One particular trip that inspired his love for the environment was an elementary school trip to Costa Rica.
3. You don’t always have to have a plan! Cass attended St. Mary’s College without a solid plan in mind and ended up becoming a communications major.

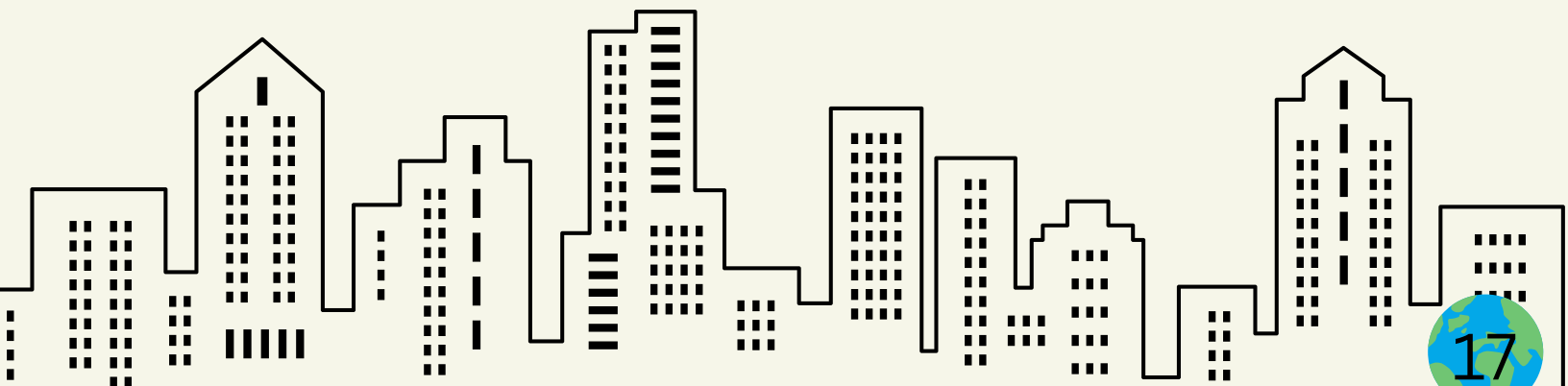


4. Connections can form in the unlikeliest of ways. Cass met his mentor, Steven B. Falk, the former city manager of Lafayette, through tutoring his kids! Falk is the one who first introduced Cass to city planning and helped him jumpstart his career.

5. While working for the City of Concord, Cass led a policy team that worked on a community choice energy program that resulted in a higher percentage of renewables being used, a polystyrene ban, and a bike share program!

6. In his position with the City of Dublin, Cass is currently working on a climate action plan and is particularly focused on housing elements that establish citywide goals and policies for how the city is going to manage growth sustainably.

Our August Climate Careers Chat was a huge success, and we can not thank our panelists, attendees, and volunteers enough! If you missed it this time around, no worries, stay tuned to SLIA's instagram @sustainablexleaders to catch the next one! We hope to see you there!



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