

Bold Next Steps: Forward Together

statement drafted by the Peoples Climate Movement-NY

All New Yorkers are dealing with the tremendous impact of the COVID-19 healthcare crisis and its economic fallout. Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones to this dreadful disease and to the literally millions of people who have lost their jobs and are experiencing financial hardship. We deeply appreciate those doing the hard work to keep the rest of us safe, fed, informed, and as comfortable as possible. We stand in solidarity borne out of a common threat: COVID-19.

NYC is currently the epicenter of the pandemic, creating immense strain on all of the systems which sustain us. The federal government has provided neither timely nor adequate support and is completely mismanaging the crisis. They are not only failing to protect us from the virus, but further shredding any safety net of environmental regulation, healthcare, workers' rights, and overall protection from an economy that has put corporate profits before the needs of people. These coming weeks will bring greater loss to our City as the infection spreads, more people die, our healthcare system is increasingly stressed, and as people's economic security is further eroded.

There are real connections between the COVID-19 crisis and the global climate crisis. For instance, the pollution and carbon in our atmosphere that causes respiratory diseases, particularly within certain communities, is now putting those very same people at greater risk in this pandemic. Again, it is poor people, people of color, Indigenous people living under difficult conditions, and the elderly, who are the most endangered. As the climate crisis deepens we can expect further shifts in the world's ecosystem and with that the possibility of new viruses being released. Climate change, like COVID-19, is life-threatening and poses a risk to us all.

Just as epidemiologists warned the federal government that a pandemic was coming and advised it to prepare, scientists have long warned that climate change will create widespread devastation if we did not shift swiftly to renewable energy. The federal government has largely ignored the warnings and is making things worse as they weaken the most basic EPA protections and continue to pour financial support into the fossil fuel industry. Our state and city governments have taken some steps, but much bolder and faster action is urgently required.

If we think COVID-19 is bad, runaway climate change will be much worse with no end in sight. We cannot let that happen. We have learned from this crisis that people can change what they do personally to help the health and welfare of others; people need to heed that lesson in addressing climate change policies and practices before it is too late. We have also learned that every level of government can move quickly when the political will is there. Once the current crisis subsides, we will need to harvest our collective energies to push our government structures to act on the climate crisis as the emergency that it is.

In NYC, we will need our local government to be proactive in building a just and equitable recovery grounded in core principles:

- Centering the health and well-being of the most vulnerable communities by building a just transition that rests on addressing race, gender, class, ethnic, sexual identity, religion, age and disability inequities.
- A commitment to eliminating carbon emissions as quickly as possible and moving to 100% publicly-owned renewable energy, with new energy sources built in the NYC metropolitan area. This must include immediately halting all fossil fuel pipelines, energy plants and other such projects.
- The creation of new living-wage, unionized jobs, while integrating community resilience at the center of projects such as new hospitals, schools, day care centers, clinics, and energy production.
- A just transition also means improving and expanding public transportation; building new and fixing existing public and truly affordable housing; strengthening health and education systems; expanding and protecting open spaces such as gardens, parks, and wetlands; and ensuring strong social safety nets.
- We are not naive about the cost of a just transition: it will require billions of dollars. The City must open up new revenue sources, such as taxing the rich, taxing stock transfers, making corporations pay their fair share and eliminating tax abatements and other tax breaks. This will mean mounting a campaign to make sure the NY State government lets this happen.

To begin this process, the City will need to reframe its annual budget process. Every aspect of the budget must be looked at through the lens of climate, both its expenditures and revenues.

We also must have a truly participatory, transparent, accountable decision-making process that is grounded in community involvement. While different neighborhoods in NYC are already experiencing the climate crisis in different ways, this is something the whole city must be involved in. Better decisions will be made when communities are fully engaged in the process.

We know we can accomplish these critical goals in NYC. It's up to us as citizens and residents of this great city to build a movement to make this happen. We call on our Mayor, City Council, Comptroller and Public Advocate to partner with us to do the necessary work.

When our city comes out of the current health crisis we will face a moment of reckoning. We can step back and lose all we love or we can step forward and create the world we need to survive and to thrive. Let's come together, as New Yorkers, and make it happen.