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## Policy Paper

### **[INTRODUCTION]**

The Green New Deal is a proposal by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) composed of a multitude of economic and environmental plans designed to reduce emissions, create jobs, and ultimately develop a more sustainable United States to improve the state of the world for the next generation. Since its proposal, the plan has gained many high profile supporters, including Rep. Ilhan Omar, Rep. Rashida Talib, Rep. Joe Kennedy, Rep. Elijah Cummings, Governor Andrew Cuomo, and Former Vice President Al Gore. In addition, it was a hot topic on the 2020 campaign trail, as climate change was identified as one of the largest threats to society as we know it, and President Elect Joe Biden, Governor Jay Inslee, Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Vice President Elect Kamala Harris, Senator Cory Booker, and Senator Kristen Gillibrand, all committed to taking climate action, some more progressive than others, as part of their platform.

### **[BACKGROUND + THE PROBLEM]**

Humans have already caused irreversible damage to the Earth, and are on track to make things significantly worse if changes are not made extremely fast. According to NASA's Global Climate Change Department,

- A. Even if the United States ceased release of any greenhouse gases at this moment, global warming would continue to take its course for several decades, potentially

even centuries. Without any substantive action, the global temperature is on track to rise an average of 6 degrees Celsius, or 10.8 degrees Fahrenheit.

B. Sea levels are projected to rise 1.8 feet by the year 2050, which could affect up to one billion people by the year 2050.

C. We should expect extreme heat waves, increased flooding, destroyed wildlife and habitats, increased risk for pandemics.

NASA concluded that it will take a coordinated global effort to truly offset the effects of climate change, but there are steps we as citizens can take, and can encourage the government to take, in order to limit some of the most severe effects of climate change. They wrote, “Responding to climate change will involve a two-tier approach: 1) “mitigation” – reducing the flow of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere; and 2) “adaptation” – learning to live with, and adapt to, the climate change that has already been set in motion. The key question is: what will our emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants be in the years to come? Recycling and driving more fuel-efficient cars are examples of important behavioral change that will help, but they will not be enough.” (NASA). Interference from the United States government with regulations, especially on massive corporations, which produce the vast majority of waste and pollution, is crucial to the future of the planet.

The Green New Deal has become a politically charged term dismissed by members of both parties. Mainstream media sources have portrayed the plan as ‘radical’ and ‘unrealistic’ ; however the widespread support among Democrats shows that with even a little bit of bipartisan support, change would be possible. The proposal includes a realistic timeline to how the US can reduce emissions to help save the planet from climate change by transitioning away from

domestic air travel, moving towards high-speed rail, supporting clean manufacturing and building, and revamping the electrical system and ensuring access to all. Mainstream conservative media sources promote climate denial and feed this inherently false information to viewers around the country, and this has become a serious obstacle for comprehensive climate policy being brought to Congress and being taken seriously.

### **[POLICY PROPOSAL]**

The Green New Deal is a comprehensive plan that tackles climate change and economic issues from all angles. The Sunrise Movement summarizes the five main goals of the Green New Deal as:

- A. “achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers;
- B. create millions of good, high-wage jobs; and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States;
- C. invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United States to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century;
- D. secure clean air and water, climate and community resilience, healthy food, access to nature, and a sustainable environment for all;
- E. promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing the historic oppression of frontline and vulnerable communities.” (New Consensus).

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey introduced this legislation in order to propel the conversation about climate change to the front. They did this strategically in order to ensure that climate policy was at the forefront of the Democratic primary and the 2020 election. The plan incorporates elements of education, labor, housing, people of color, public

ownership, and guaranteed paid leave and vacation time. The plan tackles a lot of issues of inequality and provides plans and timelines in order to accomplish this. The price tag of the Green New Deal is high. However, where the disagreement comes in is that Democrats argue that this price is worth paying, as opposed to the cost of a destroyed planet, while Republicans argue that the effects of climate change are slim to none, especially compared to the billions of dollars it would cost to offset these consequences.

Alternatively, the Trump administration has undone all Obama-era climate policy, including withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement. As a result of the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, many states have taken independent action in order to combat emissions in their state. There has begun to be some climate-related lawsuits, and we should expect to see more of these in the future, as the effects begin to be felt, and people can begin to claim financial damages due to climate change. Unfortunately, things will continue to look grim under a Republican majority. According to the Brookings Institute, “there is no reason to expect legislative action of any kind during the 116th Congress. It would seem there is not much to know about American climate policy in the present.” (Brookings Institute).

### **[PARTISANSHIP + SCIENCE]**

One of the key issues is the lack of alignment when it comes to the two party’s goals of dealing with the climate crisis. Only very recently in March 2019, did McConnell actually address that he does believe there is human caused climate change. According to The Hill, his statement when asked if he thought human caused climate change existed was, "I do. The question is how do you address it. ... The way to do this consistent with American values and American capitalism is through technology and innovation ... not to shut down your economy,

throw people out of work," (The Hill, 2019). He added that the Green New Deal is "nonsense", his response to Democrats voting "present" was nonsense. He continued, "This is nonsense. And if you're going to sign on to nonsense, you ought to have to vote for nonsense," McConnell said. "If there are any Democrats who want to come out against the Green New Deal, they'll have an opportunity to do that today." (The Hill, 2019). However, this sentiment is not the same throughout the party. President Trump has taken multiple different stances on climate change throughout his life in the public eye. Most recently, he's taken stances of climate change denial on Twitter, where he's called it an "expensive hoax", "mythical", and "nonexistent". He famously said in 2012 that climate change is a hoax that was invented by the Chinese government in order to hurt the US economy. One thing that would definitely help is if the Republican party built a unitive stance on climate change into their platform so that Democrats would know where to start from. Democrats are similarly divided amongst themselves on the issue, however, it's more about the extent of action needing to be taken rather than the argument of the existence of climate change itself. Some Republicans are acknowledging climate change and are ready to cooperate and take some action, and have the goal of combating change to the environment due to human causes. Democrats' goals are certainly more comprehensive and ambitious, and deal with ending emissions of greenhouse gases, ending pollution in the ocean, etc. but the differences in opinions come from the ways of tackling the problem. When Democrats regained control of the House in 2019, a select committee on the climate crisis was formed, due to push from youth climate groups and the Sunrise movement, for the purpose of drafting climate legislation such as the Green New Deal. There's another climate committee,

made up of Senate Democrats for the purpose of “examine how climate change is affecting the country and the planet and to mobilize action and support for bold climate solutions,” according to their website.

One can't help but notice that these Senators come from extremely blue areas that are certainly looking for action on climate change. For example, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse is from Rhode Island, that has been a blue state for the last few decades. Senator Whitehouse has been a trail blazing advocate for climate policy, and much of his individual platform and campaign deals with environmental policy. While it is certain that Senator Whitehouse is passionate about climate policy, one can't help but wonder if he uses climate action as a campaign ploy, at least partially. This is just another exhibit of not being able to save the world if you can't save your seat. Democrats are hearing increased calls from the Left to act on climate policy, and key left wing politicians such as Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Bernie Sanders bring this conversation to the Hill on behalf of them. Senator Warren and Senator Sanders have worked closely with climate groups, especially youth climate activists and their movements in order to try and make change happen.

The increased engagement from young citizens is extremely promising for the future of climate policy. Just this year was the School Strike for Climate, led by 16 year old climate activist Greta Thunberg. These advocates have formed groups such as aforementioned School Strike for Climate, Future Coalition, Sunrise Movement, and Extinction Rebellion, and Fridays for Future, mostly made up of youths who are passionate about the fight against climate change. Climate activist Greta Thunberg gave an extremely powerful speech to Congress earlier this year, saying, “We need to treat it accordingly so that people can understand and grasp the urgency.

Because you can not solve a crisis without treating it as one. Stop telling people that everything will be fine when in fact, as it looks now, it won't be very fine. This is not something you can package and sell or "like" on social media. Stop pretending that you, your business idea, your political party or plan will solve everything. We must realise that we don't have all the solutions yet. Far from it. Unless those solutions mean that we simply stop doing certain things. Changing one disastrous energy source for a slightly less disastrous one is not progress. Exporting our emissions overseas is not reducing our emission. Creative accounting will not help us. In fact, it's the very heart of the problem." (Thunberg, 2019). Because of fearless advocates like Thunberg putting pressure on lawmakers and starting more groups to make more noise about the issue, policy makers are forced to ultimately take a stance on the climate issue, and then the voters can decide if they want to keep that lawmaker in office. Eventually, the current youth will take over the major voting body, and suddenly climate action will be universally demanded. The primary issue of getting certain political parties and interest groups behind climate action is money. Many companies PACs and money fund particular candidates because of the candidate's willingness to overlook harm to the environment that that company may be producing. The most recognizable and notable example of this is Exxon Mobil, a company which is one of the Top 20 Contributors of CO2 since 1965, funds \$85,527 to Senate Republicans, and \$68,749 to House Republicans, and including another nearly \$10 million dollars in lobbying, according to OpenSecrets.org.

**[IMPACT]**

We can look to 2021 for climate action under Joe Biden's presidency. A policy like the Green New Deal is ambitious, exciting, and a lot, but with enough passion and drive to solve the climate crisis, no policy is too difficult to pass and enact. Keeping track of the progress, for better or worse, as time goes on until the climate crisis is addressed will be key to understanding the success of any program that is eventually implemented. It's up to us as young voters and the future of the country to take responsibility for reversing climate change, and put in our efforts to ensure the crisis does not worsen. Looking to new voices in politics like AOC, Ilhan Omar, etc. is crucial to demanding a better future for us all. High profile Democrats such as Speaker Nancy Pelosi are not as on-board with the ideas as younger and more progressive Dems, which is why speaking up and taking action is the best way to gain attention to the issue, and ultimately hope for a solution, before it really is too late.

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