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Vice President Kamala Harris says Denver students' climate plan is a model for others to follow

In appearance with Polis and Bennet, Harris linked the crisis to past political movements



DENVER, COLORADO – JUNE 16: Vice President Kamala Harris speaks to the crowd during a visit at Northfield High School in Denver, Colo., on Friday, June 16, 2023. Harris spoke to students and community members, delivered remarks about climate change, and expressed the importance of students in leadership for the future of the U.S. Before Harris, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock, Gov. Jared Polis, and other politicians spoke to about 200 people. (Photo by Grace Smith/The Denver Post)

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Linking the climate crisis to youth-driven political movements of the past, Vice President Kamala Harris spoke at a Denver high school Friday and urged students to organize and fight to change the hotter, dryer world they're inheriting.

“You have endured a mental and emotional toll of this crisis,” she said at Denver’s Northfield High School. “In fact, so many of our young people talk to me about it and they told me, ‘Well, you know we have a name for it. It’s called climate anxiety.’”

Friday was Harris’ second visit to the metro area in three months, both focusing on climate change. Her first visit was a discussion [about the challenges of the crisis in Arvada](#). This time, she said, she wanted to spur on youth involvement in climate policy by highlighting the work done by Denver Public School students to enact a district-wide climate action plan, [which encouraged cleaner energy and reducing the district’s carbon footprint](#). It was one of the first climate plans adopted by a school district in the country, Harris said.

Joining Harris in speaking Friday was a retinue of Colorado politicians, including Gov. Jared Polis, U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette and outgoing Denver Mayor Michael Hancock. The group touted their own achievements in the climate space, [including several bills passed by the state’s legislature this year](#), plus last year’s passage of the federal Inflation Reduction Act. That bill included nearly \$370 billion in climate and clean energy investments, [according to the Congressional Budget Office](#).

Bennet called that bill “the most important climate bill that any government has passed on planet Earth.” But he said young people were demanding more and that the work wouldn’t stop with the Inflation Reduction Act.

There’s good reason for that demand, particularly from a generation that will weather the wildfires, droughts and intensified heat that have become the norm. [The United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) wrote earlier this year that the human-driven, adverse effects upon the climate will only continue to worsen, requiring “deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.” Harris and Bennet both joked about the welcome sight of rain in Denver, given the droughts facing the West.

While youth in Denver organized to spur district officials to adopt a climate plan, in Montana, a landmark trial is underway [pitting 16 young people against the state](#). The young people in that case argue that their leaders have violated the state constitution and jeopardized their futures by embracing fossil fuels, [according to the New York Times](#).

Harris, who was set to speak at a Cherry Hills Village event after the speech, pointed to the youth activists involved in civil rights and suffrage movements of the past century as evidence of the power young people can have to affect societal change. She said the work undertaken by DPS students was a model for others to follow.

Two of those students, recent East High School graduates Mariah Rosensweig and Gabriel Nagel, introduced Harris. Nagel said he first “recognized the urgency of the climate crisis” when he was evacuated from his home by a wildfire.

“In that moment, I realized that this was an issue of the present, not of the future,” he said.

Rosensweig then instructed the audience to take a deep breath in, then out.

“We need to consider who will be breathing this air in generations to come,” she said.


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