Response and Analysis:
The Biden-Sanders Climate Task Force Recommendations

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Statement

“We are in a climate crisis, and we need to act like it. Democrats advocating for big, bold, and ambitious solutions to solve the climate crisis is not only good policy, it is good politics. Polling shows that climate change is a priority issue for voters, and most Americans want their elected officials to do more to address it. We will keep pushing to make sure that the DNC Platform, and eventually the Biden administration, take the most ambitious steps possible to tackle this crisis head-on. We can afford nothing less.

“These recommendations from the Biden-Sanders Task Force offer some important steps toward tackling the climate crisis with the ambition and urgency it demands. And they are a substantial improvement on the 2016 Democratic Platform. We appreciate the work that went into creating them. In particular, the recommendations center environmental justice, which is critical as we work to undo the many systems and structures that have disproportionately affected Black, Brown, Indigenous, and less-resourced communities in our country. The recommendations also call for meeting a significant emissions target—net-zero carbon for power generation at power plants—by 2035. And they set a target of net-zero emissions by 2050.

“The Council is glad to see that several measures proposed in the DNC Environment and Climate Council’s Platform Recommendations are also contained in the Biden-Sanders Task Force report, including, among many others, the institution and modification of several federal government organizations to more nimbly address climate and environmental justice issues, and the requirement of equity and cumulative impact screenings during permitting processes in order to eliminate toxic pollutant hotspots.
“Unfortunately, the recommendations do not go nearly far enough, or fast enough, to avert devastating and possibly irreversible levels of climate damage to our communities, country, and world. Just this week, the World Meteorological Association issued a new study indicating the world could exceed 1.5 degrees C in any of the next five years. Time is up.”

**Background on the DNC Council**

- On June 4th, the DNC Council on the Environment and Climate Crisis released its [Policy Recommendations for the 2020 Democratic Party Platform](#). These recommendations address tackling the climate crisis, building a green economy, supporting and empowering workers, addressing environmental injustice, and supporting the health of people, communities, and the planet.
- To date, the Council’s policy recommendations have received the endorsements of over a hundred diverse organizations, including Greenpeace, 350 Action, Sunrise, Center for Biological Diversity Action Fund, Dēmos Action, Zero Hour, Our Revolution, PDA, and many national and state-level Democratic and Young Democratic organizations. The DNC Environment and Climate Crisis Council, a permanent entity of the DNC, was established to push the Democratic Party to take bold and urgent action addressing the climate crisis and other environmental issues. In late 2019, with the support of more than 50 co-sponsors, numerous allies, and the eventual backing of DNC leadership, the resolution to create the first Council on Environment and the Climate Crisis was approved by the DNC.

**Analysis of the Task Force Recommendations**

**Emissions Targets**

- While the Task Force’s commitment to net-zero carbon for power generation in power plants by 2035 is a solid goal, we need an intermediate goal that’s not 15 years off: at least 70% zero-carbon (not “net-zero”) by 2030. In 2018, the IPCC called for global emissions to be reduced by 45% by 2030. The U.S. is historically the largest contributor to climate change, and is uniquely situated to contribute to this crucial goal. It must be ambitious.
  - Our Council’s Recommendations call for 100% clean, renewable energy by 2030 in electricity generation, buildings, and transportation.

- The “net-zero by 2050” goal for the U.S. upheld by the Task Force was never adequate for our country: that was a global, not national, goal set by the UN/IPCC. Countries like the U.S. need to do more. Further, recent data and modeling clearly indicate that global warming is happening faster than was thought when that goal was established. Scientists working on the next UN/IPCC Report #6 are publicly stating that the goal is outdated.
The Council’s Recommendations set a goal of near zero by 2040. That’s what science indicates is necessary. It’s also doable.

- Clear, comprehensive, and sequential emissions targets—and a plan for a rapid roll-out of actions to meet those targets—are imperative. This starts with significant, comprehensive near-term goals, including targets by the end of the Democratic president’s first term, and at the 10, 15, and 20-year marks in all major emissions-generating sectors.

The five-year goals in the Task Force Recommendations—converting our school buses to zero-emissions vehicles; installing 500 million solar panels, 8 million solar roofs, and 60K turbines; and undertaking “up to” 2 million housing and 4 million building energy efficiency retrofits—while all worthy, are much too narrow in scope.

- The reliance on “net-zero carbon” goals in the Task Force Recommendations allows (and assumes) the use of carbon offset strategies to meet those goals. These strategies undermine greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts and disproportionately harm frontline and vulnerable communities, compounding legacy and systemic environmental injustices. Further, monitoring, reporting, and verification of carbon offsets and emissions is an intensely complicated and highly uncertain form of emissions mitigation, leading at times to “fuzzy accounting.”

The Task Force also calls for the use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to meet net-zero carbon goals. Building a national strategy reliant on emissions mitigation is risky. The significant costs of CCS would effectively raise the price of electricity production well beyond the current costs of renewable energy. Investing in CCS to offset the use of fossil fuel-based energy production would be an unnecessary subsidy to outdated energy sources. Significant concerns exist about the long-term storage of toxic sequestered gases. Why would we rely on it when we already have much less expensive, proven, clean green technologies?

- The Council opposes reliance on offsets.
- The Council does not support reliance on carbon capture and storage technology to meet emissions targets.

- We need clear goals that set us on the path to zero or near-zero carbon emissions with ambitious, achievable target dates set with the urgency dictated by science and the climate emergency.

While the Task Force Recommendations include a goal of net-carbon zero for new buildings by 2030, there is no overall building infrastructure emissions goal. Some important goals are stated, but have no target dates at all, including transitioning government fleets to zero-emission vehicles.

- Our Council is calling for:
2025: 100% zero-carbon new building infrastructure
2030: 100% clean renewable energy in electricity generation, buildings, and transportation
2030: End the sale of new fossil fuel vehicles and transition to all-electric
2035: 70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
2040: Near-zero greenhouse gas emissions

Ending Fossil Fuel Reliance and Transitioning to 100% Clean, Renewable Energy

- The necessary transition from a fossil fuel economy to a green, renewable energy economy requires a managed phase-out plan. The Task Force calls for a repeal of fossil fuel industry subsidies, which is a good start. However, the Recommendations do not lay out the much-needed path to a green economy or a phase-out, even granted the problematic net-zero by 2050 goal.

- Ending new fossil fuel leasing on public lands is a critical first step toward ending the fossil fuel economy, keeping up to 450 billion tons of GHGs out of the atmosphere annually. This commitment is a part of the Biden climate campaign plan, but it is not part of the Task Force Recommendations.

- The Task Force Recommendations do not call for ending approvals of new fossil fuel infrastructure, which is required for a transition. Increased regulation is not enough: we are running out of time.

- It will be absolutely necessary to intentionally and actively end fossil fuel extraction—in part because time is short and carbon and other greenhouse gases persist, with cumulative effect. And in part because plastics are made of fossil fuels—and the natural gas industry is gearing up to increase plastic production as other demand for their planet-destroying product decreases.

- The president’s leadership can have a significant impact on federal operations, demonstrating what is possible in emissions reductions in this major part of our economy. While the Task Force calls for transitioning to all-electric federal, state, and local fleets, there is no target date, and there are no proposed emissions standards for other federal agency operations, such as built infrastructure.
  - The Council calls for 70% reduced emissions for federal agencies’ operations by 2030, and near-zero-emissions for federal agencies’ operations by 2035—as well as for all-electric new vehicles nationally by 2030.

- Addressing the transition will require substantial investment and strong leadership. The Task Force Recommendations do not include a price tag. Estimates for modernizing the grid alone, which is essential to the transition to renewables, range up to $4 trillion.
The Council calls for a 10-year, $10-16 trillion dollar investment, in line with presidential candidates Senator Warren, Senator Harris and Secretary Castro ($10 trillion), and Senator Sanders ($16 trillion).

- The oil and gas sector is a boom-and-bust industry that is destroying the planet, polluting frontline and vulnerable communities—all the while receiving annual subsidies in the hundreds of billions. The Task Force calls for an end to international coal financing. That is truly inadequate.
  - The Council calls for an end to all fossil fuel financing, in the U.S. and globally.
  - The Council calls for an end to approvals of new fossil fuel infrastructure.
  - The Council calls for a massive investment in renewable, clean green energy infrastructure, which costs less per KWh and creates more jobs.

Healthy, Just, Resilient Communities

- We are glad to see several key environmental justice policies which our Platform Policy Recommendations call for included in the Task Force Recommendations, including honoring the sovereignty of Tribes and upholding treaty obligations, involving communities in developing environmental and climate solutions, recognizing the disproportionate environmental and climate harms on Black, Brown, Indigenous, and less-resourced communities, remediating the tragic backlog of Superfund and other cleanup sites, and measures addressing toxic hotspots in frontline and vulnerable communities that are enabled by currently federal approval and funding processes.
  - The Council recommends codification of the Roadless Rule into law as called for by several Tribal governments, thus helping to preserve the Tongass National Forest, a crucial carbon sink.

- With regard to agriculture, too often neglected in climate plans, the Council notes the Task Force’s anti-trust proposals regarding industrial agriculture, and the language calling for the protection of small and medium farms. However, the Task Force Recommendations do not specify necessary policies or propose shifting subsidies in order to support new, organic and regenerative farms and farmers—and do not acknowledge the role of industrial animal agriculture / CAFOs with regard to climate change, which the Warren/Booker Farm System Reform Act references. There is no call to ban even dangerous pesticides, including chlorpyrifos, slated for ban under the Obama administration—a ban which Trump’s EPA has walked back.
  - The Council calls for reinstatement of the ban on chlorpyrifos and for a ban on other pesticides harmful to farmworkers and public health.

- Budgets are values in action. The DNC Climate Council’s Recommendations include a call for at least 40% of environment and climate investments to go to frontline and vulnerable communities as a matter of environmental justice. We want to see the inclusion of this measure in the Platform.
• Investing in climate literacy is a smart and crucial investment in our future. We support inclusion in the Platform of investments in climate education and curricula at all education levels.

• While the Task Force acknowledges the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis upon frontline communities, concrete steps need to be taken to address the needs of persons with disabilities.
  ○ The Council advocates increasing federal funding for research into adaptive technologies for disaster response as well as climate risks for persons with disabilities, and ensuring that building and housing retrofits for energy efficiency incorporate adaptive design to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

• The Task Force’s Recommendations uphold environmental justice, including a call for an environmental justice fund to address legacy pollution including replacement of lead service lines and lead paint removal, and also calls for the employment of water filters and lead remediation. It should be an urgent national priority: clean, drinkable water is a fundamental human right.
  ○ The Council calls for a major national initiative to ensure clean, safe and affordable drinking water through a national ban on water shutoffs, legislation and investment in existing federal revolving funds, and investment of $100 billion in lead pipe replacement and removal.