Climate Equity

https://www.climateone.org/audio/climate-equity
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Greg Dalton: With income disparity at the center of the presidential campaign, our show today looks at the opportunity to build an economy that is clean and inclusive. For more than a century, fossil fuels helped lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and propelled the economic growth. But in the recent Paris climate deal, 195 countries agreed to move away from fossil fuels in coming decades. Remains to be seen if the emerging green economy will be more equitable and inclusive than the brown economy, which often concentrates pollution in poor communities of color. Will low income and immigrant families be left behind in the move to solar panels, electric cars and organic strawberries? Will poor neighborhoods be the first to be abandoned when rising sea start flooding various streets more frequently? This hour we'll talk about these and other questions of climate equity with our live audience at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. Our program today is generously underwritten by the San Francisco Foundation and the Seed Fund. We're pleased to have with us three experts on environmental justice. Manuel Pastor is Director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California. Miya Yoshitani is the Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Environmental Network which serves immigrant communities. And Vien Truong is National Director of Green for All, an advocacy group based in Oakland. Please welcome them to Climate One.

[Applause]

Vien Truong, let's begin with you. Tell us your story, you – how you came as an immigrant from Vietnam to an activist in Oakland.

Vien Truong: I'm the youngest of 11 kids and my mom was pregnant with me nine months pregnant when she got in a boat with all of us and my dad, and my grandma to get the 500 miles from Vietnam to Macau. I ended up being born actually once we got into a refugee camp. And that's why I didn't have citizenship for a long time. We ended up going to Portland, Oregon where we worked as migrant farm workers for many years picking snow peas and strawberries as people do.

My mom strapped me on the back; that's what we did back in the day. And we did that for three years and probably would have stay there forever if it wasn't for the fact that my grandma was starting to get dementia. So we ended up moving to Oakland where my family became sweat shop workers for 15 years. My parents, who didn't speak Chinese, I mean who didn't speak English, only spoke Chinese. And so for me, that is what I think of when I think of the work that we're doing. It's about people who've been displaced for whatever reason; it's about people who are literally sweating away in inhumane conditions out in the farmlands. It's about people who have no access to a decent

job, no access to healthcare, and what does it mean when climate change aggravates all of the problems that they're going through.

Greg Dalton: Quite a story. Manuel Pastor, you were a professor in Los Angeles and you went on a toxic tour. What were you thinking about environmentalism and how did that change your views of environmentalism as a more core issue for you?

Manuel Pastor: You know, I came to environmental justice in an interesting way it actually makes me think about Occidental College. A colleague Jim Sadd and I had two great students who wanted to work for us but also wanted to do a study they said of environmental justice. That is the fact that there are disparities in terms of exposures and proximity to hazards for committees of color in Los Angeles. And we said, well fine you can work for us but you gotta do that on the side because we're not sure how that's gonna play out. So they wound up doing this, this was in the 1990s. And now you could use a GPS device on your phone, but then they had to carry around big blocks and find out where these facilities were and map them and look at hazards and they were off doing their work.

And then one day I opened up the LA Times and there was an article above the fold in the first page saying "Occidental College study alleges environmental racism." At which point Jim and I thought we'd better start supervising our students. Because it turned out that they had talked to the press about this and it triggered the City Council created an environmental justice task force at the first object, the business of which was to meet with the Occidental College researchers. So we said, well can you wait a few weeks and we went back and kind of looked at the study and fixed it up. And it sort of caught the attention of the press, caught the attention of policymakers and it caught the attention of a sort of constellation of fantastic community organizers who were working on this issue. And for like the last 15 years I've been doing research on environmental justice in concert with these community-based organizations represented here.

The thing that's been interesting and one of the reasons why I got into it is because I think that the environmental movement has done a really good job of convincing people that everyone has the right to clean air. That children have the right to be able to not be affected by asthma from pollution, et cetera and it seems to me like we need to broaden that concept of the environment because everybody's also got the right to a good school, they've got the right to access to employment, they've got the right to be able to enjoy themselves and realize their opportunities. So for me environmental justice it's important in and of itself, but it's also way to get people to understand that there's a broader social and economic environment that we have to make sure that people have access to.

Greg Dalton: Thank you. Miya Yoshitani, you also started as a youth advocate. Tell us your story, how you came to be where you are now as an advocate.

Miya Yoshitani: Well I was probably one of those annoying students, similar to yours. But I just wanted to say first that it's great to be up on stage with two of my absolute heroes in the movement contributing so much to this work.

I started as a student organizer kind of making trouble on campuses and I think there are three things that happened, while I was at University that really kind of influenced the direction. One was the war, the war in the Gulf that – so I'm dating myself, this is the first one. This was clearly a war for oil and, you know, a war that demonstrates how the power of the fossil fuel industry as well as where politics and race actually intersect. There was also the Rodney King uprising that happened at the same time while I was on campus. And these two things were really influential to me in how I kind of saw the integration of poverty, of pollution and of political voice too.

And then I'd say the third thing was while I was a student, I was exposed to a seminal environmental justice study, by Dr. Robert Bullard that was called Toxic Waste and Race. And it basically demonstrated what you're talking about that there is, whatever metrics you use when you look at proximity to hazardous waste sites, this was the first study, that race was the number one factor, no matter what income level is actually you are much more likely to whether you're African-American or Latino or Asian-American or Native American, you're likely to live closer to hazardous wastes that would or hazardous sites that would affect your health and your economic outcomes. Whether or not you are middle income or poor, and the fact that race was the number one issue just really was a defining kind of understanding for me about what needed to be built in the movement to actually address this.

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, I learned some things preparing for this program. And one is that the opinions of African-American and Latino voters in California and their interest, how they rank climate change is a concern and their willingness to pay more for solutions. Tell us about that opinion.

Vien Truong: That's right and there's a survey that Green for All did with NRDC that showed that people of color across the board understand the importance of climate change to their lives. And are willing to actually invest in solutions than mitigates the impacts and provides the long-term benefits in their communities. Not only that, not only did they understand the immediate benefits, we actually have to tap into the fact that they are a political power that is under understood. So when we talk about the importance of engaging communities of color; it's about how do we win more climate policies, more climate solutions.

Prop 23 in California was a great example of when we actually do that well what can actually happen. In 2010, couple of oil companies came out and bankrolled a proposition to push back on our landmark policy AB 32. A number of organizations came together, including APEN, including Roger Kim who's in the audience today and Greenlining Institute coming together, Ella Baker Center, working on how do we actually engage voters of color. How do we actually make sure that they're turning out at the polls? And not only that they defeat along with the other organizations, not only did they help to turn out and defeat the oil proposition, but 70% of the voters of color who came out actually voted more progressively across the ballot. And was widely credited for helping to get Governor Brown and Senator Boxer their seats back against Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina who were, you know, quite wealthy and bankrolled their own campaigns.

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor, this goes against the image often that climate change is a luxury issue for white people who are comfortable and can think about polar bears and glaciers, which are just far away for many people.

Manuel Pastor: Yeah, it's striking I think when people think about who cares about climate change what they imagine is a sort of thin, you know, a white hipster in spandex fresh off their bicycle sort of tossing granola over their shoulders as they walk along. But in fact what the polling and there are few of them in the audience and God bless you. But what the polling data shows and by the way, this is from the Public Policy Institute of California and they've shown it for about the last seven years in the USC polling which I participated in we found pretty much the same results. But in the last poll when asked whether climate change was a very serious concern, one that you are willing to address even if it involves economic costs and there can be economic benefits, only 43% of non-Hispanic whites in the state of California said it was a very serious concern. 63% of Latinos said it was a very serious concern. 57% of African-Americans and 54% of Asian Pacific Islanders. So people of color across the board are actually more concerned about this.

And so it's less that the bicyclist in spandex and more the immigrant woman who lives near a

refinery in Wilmington who's kind of facing the daily ravages of pollution from those remitting greenhouse gas emissions and the co-pollutants. And by the way this also holds for income. And the same poll with the Public Policy Institute of California tells us is that 61% of those making less than $40,000 a year consider climate change a very serious issue. Only 45% of those making more than $80,000 a year consider this a very serious issue.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani, a lot of the solutions how people can directly personally affect climate change are consumer actions. What do I eat, what do I buy, buying organic, getting solar, a plug-in car, are those accessible and available to the communities that Manuel Pastor is talking about?

Miya Yoshitani: Well that's what we're led to believe, that's what we're told about this sort of the that's the main environmental messages that we get and told about –

Greg Dalton: Is that a myth?

Miya Yoshitani: It's about you personally. What we can do is actually limit it to your ability to change a light bulb, your ability to buy a new hybrid or your ability to buy solar panels and put them on your house. And really that is, it's not a myth that those things help. But what is a myth is what is going to lead to the transformation that's actually needed to address both the atmospheric causes of climate change and the local impacts that people in the front lines are living with. And actually the economic transformation that's both an opportunity and that must happen in order for us to address those problems. So it's a myth, so this transformation is not gonna happen through buying cars and buying light bulbs. This transformation is actually going to have to be, you know, it's policy on the one side but mostly it's about putting people back in the center.

This is not about light bulbs. This is about what we want the most for our children which is, you know, health, it's access to good jobs, it's the ability of people to make decisions that are most important in their lives and it's nothing less than that.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani is with the Asia Pacific Environmental Network. We're talking about climate equity at Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. Manuel Pastor, is this about wealth distribution? We have a leading candidate for president right now who's talking about that.

Manuel Pastor: I think we probably have every candidate talking about it because the extremes of wealth in the United States have gotten so sharp and it's particularly true in California. In 1969, California was essentially in the middle of the pack in terms of states ranked by their inequality measures. Now, California is the fourth most unequal state in the country outpacing such paragons of progressive virtue as Alabama and Mississippi, places we've always looked to as beacons of social justice. So part of this is the maldistribution of wealth but it's what Miya was talking about earlier; it's also a maldistribution of the environmental hazards and the environmental amenities. We've got communities of color that, you know, it's striking in the Bay Area for example, an African-American family making more than $100,000 a year has a higher likelihood of living near a toxic emitter than a white family making $20,000 a year. So people tend to think this is really about income but it's also about race and the way that that plays out in the political power system.

And so I think that we need to address also this environmental disparity which you know winds up having a long-term impacts as well on children, their ability to learn, their ability to do well in schools, their ability to be healthy. So this is a crisis that's an intergenerational crisis.

So equity is about income, equity is about race, equity is about environmental exposures and equity is about intergenerational equity. Whether those of us in this generation are gonna make the choices now, not just the individual choices, but the hard policy choices that are gonna leave a better planet

for the next generation.

Greg Dalton: So you have a paper coming out later this year about whether environmental justice and equity is good for white folks, is that true?

Manuel Pastor: Well, yeah, I mean I gotta say we have some friends who wrote the first version of this pretty early. And they used the title, which is like one that I almost resent because it's it such a good title which is, Is Environmental Justice Good for White Folks. And essentially what they did was find out that those places where there's more environmental disparity, there's just more environmental hazards overall. When people think they can put the burdens in someone else's backyard, you just get more of them. Our innovation is that we've looked at a wide array of the literature and found that this is a very constant theme in the literature. That environmental disparity leads to environmental increase environmental inequality, leads to a decrease in environmental quality. And we've also now looked at the change over time in those places that have been more disparate in terms of their hazards and in terms of their air, wind up improving their environment less over time.

So I think what this whole panel would probably agree to is that climate equity is not a special interest issue. It's at the center of what we need to do to address the climate crisis because it's about what will put us all into the common ground to be able to address this crisis. And it's about mobilizing those political constituencies that can make a difference when we come up against the oil companies that are trying to retard the progress that the state of California is making.

Those two oil companies that put out Proposition 23 also happen to rank in the top eight of the emitters in California in terms of the racially disparate impacts. So there's a coincidence here that I think is well, not a coincidence.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani, you also worked with immigrants who have a particular perspective on climate change because of where they've come from. Tell us about how immigrants see climate change both here in the United States and their home country?

Miya Yoshitani: Well, as we were, as has been mentioned here already. That the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in California and I believe across the country if you do the polling are like we are talking about before, you know, are the people who actually care about these policy outcomes. They really want to see something done on climate immediately. They're willing to pay more in taxes for it, they think it is one of the most important, they put it as a primary issue, one of the biggest issues facing their families. And I do think that's not a coincidence. What I mean, Vien told her story and this is a lot of the members in our organization, a lot of the community members have very similar stories. So one, they are connected; this is not just a local issue for them. They really understand without being told the international connection and they understand that what is happening to them here is happening to their families back in their home countries. And whether or not they were forced to move from those countries out from war or being displaced or climate refugees, they understand that they are connected to the outcomes here as well as there. And so it puts them at an advantage being able to actually understand the greater issues and how it's connected to the global economy as well as a whole bunch of other issues.

And also I think that so the refugees that we have been working with a refugee community the Laotian refugee committee in Richmond that we've been organizing in for over two decades. That community, that's a fence line community to the Chevron refinery, they came as refugees to the United States after living in refugee camps in Thailand for over a decade. And they come here out of decades of war and to be exposed to some of the most highly toxic chemicals. So there's, there, it's in the air they breathe it's in the soil that they plant their vegetables in. And so it's completely it

surrounds them, and they have a deep connection to how cleaning up the air, reducing climate pollutants is actually going to bring healthier outcomes for their families.

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor.

Manuel Pastor: Just a quick footnote on that; in the polling that we did on this issue. We offer samples, Latinos, and then we offer samples in Spanish to give people a choice of what language. And so not only were Latinos more generally, concern about climate change, but it was the folks who chose to take the interview in Spanish, who were even more concerned. Those are presumably the immigrants, so really has more validity to what you're saying.

Miya Yoshitani: And we have the same outcomes when we call people on the phone across the state about these issues.

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, let's talk about some of the positive stories. Where are things getting cleaner, where are things getter better? Because environmentalism is often about what's broken. Where are some positive stories, things getting cleaner and perhaps more equitable?

Vien Truong: I want to touch on that but I want to go back to what Miya was talking about earlier about the importance of us understanding that we need to move from the personal responsibility moving from a narrative of we, individually are responsible for this problem, to moving towards not only institutions having to clean up their act and doing right, but now having to deal with and tackle systemic problems. And the only way we're gonna get there is if we're actually working together to understand the interconnectedness of our different ethnic communities, black, brown, Asian communities. How do we actually understand that this is not just about one household but about the fact that my home in one area is connected to one across the globe from ourselves?

And once we begin understanding that there's a unique tie behind all of this, there's a cause, right because I want to understand what is the most elegant solution that we actually can get to. And there is one cause; we're beginning to prioritize profits over people and planet at a speed and a rate that is dehumanizing across the globe. And that has caused us to blow up our mountains for coals. That has caused us to frack in people's backyards, contaminating drinking water. That has caused us to have a race to the bottom for labor, causing cheap jobs with no career pathways. It has caused us to prioritize profits in our production which has caused companies to pollute our air and put waste in our communities literally next to our home. People are actually drowning in waste. And we need to tackle that issue not only by saying what we're against but what, I love Miya's quote in Naomi Klein's book and I have it in front of me because I think it is one of the most inspiring things and she really is my hero so it's such an honor to be here.

She talks about how this is not about what we're fighting against, but what we're fighting for. Once we understand that this is about fighting for a new energy system, fighting for a new democracy, fighting for a new way that we relate to one another as sisters and brothers. How do we actually create a new relation to our planet, how do we actually create a new economy and that is what is at stake here.

So it is not about the world we're actually headed towards and it's dismal, it can be, but what is it that we actually want to create.

You know, one of the things that we have to work together on is a law in California called SB 535. And led by a Latino legislator, one of the greenest state legislators I've ever seen in the country who said let's make sure polluters not only pay but pay and invest in the community hurt most. And it has gone to so many programs, including to free solar for families who could never afford it. Fresno, one

of the poorest and most polluted communities in the country, received a number of these free solar panels for their households. And one woman named Maria Sevala that we got to meet and interview. She was a new widow over a few years. She got a son, teenage son in and out of trouble. Her sister in law had actually passed a few months before we met her out of pollution related illnesses. And she heard about this program for free solar, she applied and got a free solar panel installed on her rooftop. And her average energy bill went from $200 a month to $1.50. Just a little over the cost of a soda, right. But what that actually means is somebody got a job putting the solar on her rooftop. That refinery that was cranking out this dirty energy actually cranked out a little less energy. And the community that lived around it got to breathe a little better and all of our health got to be improved. And Maria got to save $20 a month that she now gets to invest in the local economy of Fresno. So that is the possibility of what we can do once we get this right.

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, is a National Director at Green for All, an advocacy group based in Oakland. We're talking about climate equity at Climate One. Manuel Pastor, what are some examples you see of where there is green growth, equitable growth in California?

Manuel Pastor: Well, I think we see a pretty burgeoning in solar installation industry and solar panel installation history in Southern California which has had pretty good pipelines to folks who are coming from disadvantaged communities and through apprenticeship programs and I think that's quite a positive.

I think we've got a long way to go. One thing I'm very excited about and it's about potentially green jobs but also greener communities, is an effort in the city of Los Angeles called Clean Up Green Up. And Clean Up Green Up is an effort that was launched by multiple communities, but it's occurring in three: Wilmington, a port community, heavily polluted. Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles, intersected by many freeways and Pacoima which is in the San Fernando Valley and people don't realize that the San Fernando Valley has undergone big demographic transition. The Valley Girl is now La Muchacha Del Valle because of tremendous growth in Latino community up there. And there used to be a lot of industries up there, lots of pollution as well. And in these three communities, what folks have done is come together and it's been a really interesting merger of research, policy and organizing. We worked with some of these folks and they went out to their own communities and documented the hazards that were there and then used air monitors to record the level of air quality in their communities. And I gotta say Greg, as an academic I guess there's many times when I've, you know, I can think of a research award I've gotten, right. But nothing's been more fulfilling than seeing an immigrant mother from Wilmington get up in front of the City Council and testify about air quality in her community because she did the testing herself. And what out of that they did was develop a policy to create green zones.

So in these three neighborhoods and this is now moving forward, there's going to be additional technical support for the businesses to be able to clean up their processes and green up their processes. Special regulatory attention in these communities. And this is a way of taking the most overexposed communities and helping to do local greening of the industries. Local access to parks, local improvement in air quality, local improvement in terms of proximity to hazards. And when many people think about the enormity of the problems we've got in terms of climate, we need to address them at a statewide level. We need to take personal responsibility and it's heartening to watch communities really lead the effort with these sort of grassroots demonstration projects.

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor is Director of the Program and Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California.

I'd like to go to our lightning round where we have a brief question for each of the speakers. First for Manuel Pastor, yes or no, California will elect a Latino governor in the next one or two

gubernatorial elections? 2018 or 2022?

Manuel Pastor: Si.

[Laughter]

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, you fled your home in Vietnam and one day rising seas may force you to leave your home in the Oakland flatlands.

Vien Truong: Maybe, yes.

Greg Dalton: Maybe. Miya Yoshitani, the Bay Area doesn't have enough money to protect every neighborhood from rising tides. Some neighborhoods will be abandoned and others will be protected?

Miya Yoshitani: No, we're not gonna do that.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani, climate change is like sex and politics. You sometimes choose not to talk about it in polite company?

Miya Yoshitani: Oh, not me. I always talk about all three.

[Laughter]

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, some of your liberal friends suffer from climate hysteria?

Vien Truong: Yes.

[Laughter]

Greg Dalton: Last one for Manuel Pastor; you are a social scientist that means you are a scientist with social skills?

Manuel Pastor: That is true and that's why in this recent video from Spotlight California, I've been labeled the party scientist or the fiesta scientist.

[Laughter]

Greg Dalton: Wasn't that way when I was in your class, but okay.

[Laughter]

It's alright.

Manuel Pastor: I've matured, Greg.

Greg Dalton: That's right. That's the end of our lighting round. How did they do, I think they did pretty well.

[Applause]

[CLIMATE ONE MINUTE]

Announcer: And now, here's a Climate One Minute.

As our speakers agree, communities of color have just as much at stake in the environmental fight, if not more, than white, middle class, highly educated consumers. But until recently, they've been largely overlooked by the green movement. Adrianna Quintero of the Natural Resources Defense Council says the age of environmental elitism is over, and it's time for a reboot.

Adrianna Quintero: And so, at this point, what we have to do is really start to change the conversation. And so that's one of the things that I've really been working at in NRDC; how can we change the conversation so that we are actually talking in a voice that's much more inclusive, in a way that people can understand and relate it to their lives, not simply, "Are you driving your Prius to Whole Foods and buying your $12 light bulb?" That's out of reach for many people, even for young people frankly.

So we see the risk of continuing to speak in those terms and we see the opportunity and the need to truly mobilize communities and allow them to step in and speak their story. Tell us your story. Tell us why it's important to you, whether it's because you grew up in a very polluted neighborhood or because you really believe that our country can do it. Whatever part of the spectrum we fall on, it's important for us to make sure that those voices are heard by our decision makers. We want the majority of voices to be diverse because otherwise it's too easy to simply write it off as a white elitist movement. We're never going to succeed that way. And right now, I really believe that the environmental movement, the mainstream environmental movement, has that squarely in their sights and we're ready to make a change.

Announcer: Adrianna Quintero, Senior Attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, speaking at Climate One in 2014. Now, back to Greg Dalton and our live audience at The Commonwealth Club.

[END CLIMATE ONE MINUTE]

Greg Dalton: We're talking about climate equity at Climate One with Manuel Pastor, Director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California. Also Miya Yoshitani, Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Environmental Network and Vien Truong, with Green for All.

We can't talk about environmental justice in this country without talking about Flint, Michigan. So, Professor Pastor, I'd like to hear you on Flint and what that means to you just the fact, a personal confession I guess I was sitting here with the governor of Michigan in September, September, October before this broke. I wish I'd known about it I certainly would've asked him about that. But the country got pretty darn mad about that. What we make of that episode?

Manuel Pastor: You know, I think, I hope that this doesn't become another Katrina in the sense of getting people's attention briefly and then letting things go. I mean when I think about Katrina, it's a classic case of environmental justice because if money had been spent to protect the Lower Ninth we would've saved the entire city exactly the way in which equity could be good for the entire environment. Flint is a tremendous tragedy because for what amounted to $100 a month it turned out that a generation of children have been poisoned by lead. Because they didn't have the political power they were literally disenfranchised because the city government was essentially in receivership. And, you know, it's a population, it's low income been devastated by industrialization, largely African-American at least relative to Michigan standards. I think it's a, you know, it's just a tremendous tragedy. What I hope people realize is that that tragedy is being replicated in so many different locations maybe not quite so extreme.

But when you've got hazardous-wastes being spewed into communities, when you've got air quality

with particulate matter and toxics that are creating asthma, so the children aren't able to concentrate and learn in school, you're causing a kind of lighter version of the same problems that these young kids in Flint, Michigan are gonna face going forward. I hope that we find the political will to deal with Flint, Michigan and I hope that we find the political will, as a nation and a state to deal with this environmental disparity that affects so many children.

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, there's a place in Southern California, a wealthy area Porter Ranch where there's a huge methane leak going on. Some people think it hasn't received much attention, some people think it would have received less if it was in a community of color. What do you make of Flint and Porter Ranch?

Vien Truong: It's true; I think that what it's telling for me is there's been a long time saying in media that "if it bleeds, it leads," right? But what we have seen in the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement is that it's not true. Because our communities have been bleeding and dying from a number of environmental problems and it hasn't caught national attention. Flint was a perfect example. That story was public two years ago and now we're learning about it. You know, the storage of gas underneath black and brown communities have been happening for years and no one's been talking about it except when it just started happening in a different community. One of the projects that Greenlining Institute worked on was Sacramento Natural Gas Storage. And it was very similar in the natural gas leakage case, except that this is a predominantly black and brown community. And they were going to store eight billion cubic feet underneath this community that was historically black and brown. And the gas company actually went door-to-door weeks before Christmas and said, "Would you sign this waiver of all your rights so that we can store gas under your home and this is gas that you can't actually smell. And if you don't sign, you waive your rights, we will take it by eminent domain."

It was a lie, but they did it, and a lot of families signed up for it. And then they turned around to the state of California, "See, these residents don't mind. They don't mind that." And they got gas cards out of it. And so therefore they're actually on board. What we're seeing is that we actually have to begin making sure that stories like Flint aren't continuing to happen. And not only to we address the water crisis in Flint, it's not enough that we just get Flint residents clean water. We actually have to begin addressing all of the issues that was around Flint and communities like Flint. So it's not just about clean water but it's about how do we get a long-term sustainable economy in Flint; how do we have long-term solutions.

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor.

Manuel Pastor: You know, shortly after that story of the young students leading into the environmental justice world. We began working with committees for better environment and we got a big grant to work together on environmental justice. And I remember I was very proud so I told my aunt my Tia Talia, I said "Tia, Tia, we just got a big grant to work at environmental justice." She said, "Ai Manuelito, I'm so proud. What is environmental justice?" And I said, "Well, that's the fact that hazards are disproportionately in low income and communities of color." And she looked at me still proud but kind of sad, and said "Manuelito, everyone knows that."

[Laughter]

I've spent a lifetime of researching the obvious, but that's not really the point of the story. The point of the story is that communities know these issues and it took only a couple of months before community members in Flint were saying there's a problem with the water and this ought to be addressed. And I think that one of the things we do sometimes as policymakers and researchers is not listen to what communities are saying that they know to be real and validating and trying to

figure out what they're saying. If Flint residents had been listened to early, the kind of lasting effects we're gonna see for their children and the cost of that would've been evaded.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani, I'd like to ask you about two specific projects here in the Bay Area. There's a possible coal terminal in Oakland that people are concerned about, coal dust affecting people nearby, and also refineries that have been potentially refining tar sands oil, though with the low oil prices, that may not be happening. But first coal.

Miya Yoshitani: So, yeah, coal stupid idea. Stupid idea in terms of an economic development plan for the 21st century. How ridiculous is that that we're even contemplating coal export out of Oakland when we have so many innovations and so many resources in terms of transforming local economies available to us in the state of California. The state has made some incredible progress in those areas, and we have this, we have a legacy of racism, of poverty and of pollution in Oakland that we are even, that it's madness that we're even considering that as a solution or as a job creator which doesn't even create jobs very many jobs in the first place.

But, so we – the thing is it's again, it's about listening to the communities. The communities in Oakland have a vision for how they want to build resilient communities that have renewable energy that's actually owned by the community that creates wealth, circulates wealth and generates wealth in the community.

And for a transition to an economy that is not just providing alternative energy but is providing an alternative and democratically controlled economy. And when we have that vision, why would we seek to bring coal through our streets and our neighborhoods? It's ridiculous.

Greg Dalton: And on cheap oil, let me ask the economist up here Manuel Pastor, oil price has crashed. A lot of people never thought we'd see oil at the low prices that it is today. How's that affecting the transition from a brown economy to a green economy? All of a sudden SUVs are more affordable, oil is cheap, but that's also doing some things, keeping tar sands in the ground and making some projects uneconomic.

Manuel Pastor: Yeah, I mean I think the risk is that what is a short-term phenomenon gets thought to be a long-term phenomenon because we will eventually run out of fossil fuels. And the fact that the price of oil directly has gone down doesn't mean that the price of all the side effects of fossil fuel consumption have gone down. So it may be a little bit cheaper for you to buy a gallon of gas, but it causes just as many health problems for the communities living near refineries, it causes just as many health problems for people living near freeways when there's too much traffic. And so I think one of the reasons why people have talked about the cap and trade or carbon fee or carbon tax system is because the costs of oil are not fully recognized in the price of oil those externalities they get paid for by other folks. So I'm hoping, you know, one thing that had been kind of actually somewhat inspired by is that even though the price of oil has fallen, you're still seeing business recognizing that alternative energy and renewable energy really is the wave of the long-term future.

I'm actually kind of inspired by the proposal that President Obama just put out of taking advantage of the low price of oil to put a tax on oil so that we could actually use that to accelerate the transition. Because right now with the fall in the price of oil you could raise additional revenues without really incurring heavy costs on - you know, people are expecting a bit more so it's an opportune time to actually try to begin to internalize what were externalities.

Greg Dalton: I'd like to ask Vien Truong about some vulnerabilities in terms of climate impacts. We've been talking about the causes, there's also the impacts and tell us about the communities that are most vulnerable to whether heat, severe weather et cetera because it's certainly hot; 2015 was

the hottest year on record. It’s gonna get hotter, that’s gonna affect people that don’t have air-conditioning et cetera.

Vien Truong: That’s right. And so we're going to see people’s health impacted. We’re going to see people who are vulnerable seniors and young people, especially those with asthma or other sensitivities be aggravated even further, especially if they're living in areas that are especially hot. Like Fresno or Bakersfield, areas that are surrounded by pollution or by mountains that captures and keeps in the pollution. And I want to add this other thing to it. Not only are we individually more vulnerable, our entire communities are becoming more vulnerable. I recently had a chance to sit down with leaders from the Houma nation. And they’re in the Gulf Coast, for folks who are wondering. And their community their land is being submerged underwater at the rate of a football field every hour. Every hour, a football field of their land is going underwater. And so their entire community is vulnerable and in 8 to 10 years it’s likely to be entirely underwater and it’s happening so quickly they can’t even build a seawall to protect it.

And so they're going to have to re-define or relocate. And what's going to happen to their land, their culture, their history, their practices and where are they going to go? And what's going to happen to the community that they move to, right? We saw a lot of times when the only communities they can afford to move to or other communities already under stress. And so when you bring in a new community on top of that, if we don't facilitate that well and right it actually can create more tensions for the lack of resources. And we have to begin figuring out how do we actually begin anticipating that in our solutions and our policies.

Greg Dalton: Miya Yoshitani, you earlier said that all Bay Area neighborhoods would be protected, but the economic reality is that's gonna be a lot of money and you saw some recent stories about Hoboken, New Jersey. There's lots of fights and they’re getting federal money about no, we don't want this wall because it’ll block my view. And Hoboken, this little community is up in arms over how to protect themselves. That's one little town in New York if we think about the whole Bay Area coastline, which is about hundreds of miles of coastline – how are we going to do in the Bay Area to protect all these communities, some more vulnerable than others?

Miya Yoshitani: I wanna switch it up a little bit because we’ve been talking a lot about, you know, what are the impending disasters and I want to talk about the impending opportunities because that's where we actually have the most promise to be able to meet the transformation that needs to happen. Whether it's a seawall or whether it’s a new energy infrastructure or whether it's new water infrastructure obviously in California we have to think about that.

Because the crisis is so big – and we don't need any more evidence of how big the crisis is because it is a combined economic crisis, a combined ecological crisis, a combined political crisis, crisis in our democracy, these are all happening at the same time. And with that incredible crisis, we are at a moment where we are being forced to do something about this. We have to address climate change, and we have to address it the right way. We have to address it equitably. The reason we have to address it equitably is because the support that's going to come from communities of color that's needed to address climate is coming from the communities that have the most support for those policies. And so we have to meet the real needs of those communities in order for all of us to be able to survive the climate crisis.

So there's no way around it; there is no way, except for straight through to equity. And that offers us a huge amount of opportunities. When we divest all that we've been investing in the dirty energy economy that frees up an enormous amount. When we ask, not ask, when we demand that polluters actually pay for the full cost of pollution, there is tremendous resources for us to actually build the infrastructure and the local economies and thriving, resilient neighborhoods in the face of climate

change that we actually need.

Greg Dalton: So we're gonna pick up on polluter pays, that that's an accomplishment you've said here. But what but what personal responsibility; those of us who knowingly drive gasoline cars as I did today. Do I have any personal responsibilities easy to attack supply and big companies, but what about personal responsibility for the choices we make?

Miya Yoshitani: I think you have a greater personal responsibility to go out and vote for people who are going to be leaders in this transition, than you do to go buy a new car.

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor, personal responsibility versus saying it's the man, it's the big institutions, they're evil and I don't have any responsibility I can just live my life the way I do?

Manuel Pastor: I'm not sure that that's the right choice because I don't think it's a question of pointing a finger at someone else and assuming that they're gonna do the work. I think what Miya is saying is that our personal responsibility is to join with our neighbors, our friends and our allies to try to think about what the right policies are, to push for those policies to come into being to try to grow the economy in a more equitable way

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor is Director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at University of Southern California. Miya Yoshitani is Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Environmental Network and we have Vien Truong, from Green for All. I'm Greg Dalton. Let's go to our audience questions, welcome to Climate One.

Female Participant: Thank you very much for this very insightful communication that you've been talking about, about equity. I have a question, the Supreme Court ruling that came down just saying basically staying the ruling by the EPA around coal-fired electricity plants. Can you comment on that and what do you think is gonna happen here? I was actually surprised. I'm really surprised and if not or if you were, what's gonna happen next?

Greg Dalton: Vien Truong, you wanna tackle that? Supreme Court blocking the president's key climate bill plan, yeah.

Vien Truong: Right. And so the ruling came down today and they're going to stay the implementation of the clean power plan and the court is expected to hear it on June 2nd. In the meantime, people are wondering what's going to happen with the implementation of clean power plan. That said, we're seeing that it is very likely the court will move forward with the implementation of the plan. They have made similar rulings in the past authorize or seeing that the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to act to regulate carbon under the Clean Air Act, which is what the clean power plan does. And so that this is a stay, it's not the best circumstance, but there's full confidence that this will continue moving forward.

Greg Dalton: And there's lots of states that are already kind of doing that, have plans in place to go along, though a few states are suing the administration, they're not going along. Let's go to our next question. Welcome to Climate One.

Greg Dalton: Let's go to our next audience question, welcome.

Male Participant: Hi. California is trying to continue to reduce its carbon emissions and some of the representatives from California are saying that increased gasoline prices and other things that are done to reduce carbon emissions may hurt the economy, that people that you're talking about will not be able to afford higher gas prices, or may even lose their jobs because the economy will suffer. What do you say to that?

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor.

Manuel Pastor: Well I'm sure we all have something to say about it. I was struck by the debate this last year about SB-350 and in particular the articulation by oil companies about their deep concern about poor people, which has been characteristic of their operations for years.

So I was glad to see it sort of reaffirmed.

This is hypocrisy of the most egregious sort. It is true that if you raise the price of gas that it can be regressive but if you use those funds to invest in public transit for low income populations that you said, you can mitigate part of those effects. You can think about all sorts of ways to move money back to communities from those sorts of things and not make it regressive. It's also not clear that it costs a lot of employment relative to trying to generate the kinds of employment that we might get in renewable energy industries and the kind of resilience and retrofitting that we need to have. A lot of which is very has worked that will – and Green for All has done great work on this – for there's a lot of entry-level positions for which there are then career ladders and trajectories moving forward. So I think it's been an argument that's been sort of conveniently raised and actually doesn't reflect what communities themselves are saying when you look at the polling numbers.

Greg Dalton: Let's move on to Vien Truong, I wanna get you on green jobs. If we were talking about this conversation eight years ago, green jobs would be a big thrust to the conversation. They didn't quite pan out or fulfill some all the promise but let's talk about green jobs.

Vien Truong: Well, I want to touch a little bit on the last question before I get into green jobs, I'll land there for sure. California's AB-32 was passed in 2006 and since then, the economy has grown and continue to grow in the green economy. And it's now, you know, globally it's the seventh largest economy, one of the largest green markets in the country. And what we're seeing is that these things are coming to create great green jobs, including what we saw in California out of SB-535. Some of the programs that was created included this one: funding vanpools for migrant farm workers. And at first blush, it may not seem like a big thing but it created a new fleet of electric vans for access for migrant farm workers. And this was key in places and rural communities like Huron where if you are a family that lives in the city right outside of Fresno, in order for you to take the bus system to go to Children's Hospital and they have one of the highest rates of asthma in the country, it takes you 3 1/2 hours on a bus to get to Children's Hospital if you got a child that has an asthma attack. So if that doesn't work what you do is you go to the guy in a diner and for $65 and the cost of his meal he'll take you to the hospital and back.

And so, given that we met with the leader community leader in Huron, Rey Leon who said this is happening how can you help fix it. And we created a program, a pilot program that would fund electric van fleets that would then allow for the people in Huron and in Fresno to now be able to get into a van and get to the core places that they need to go. And to create essentially another system that is a complement to an existing public transportation system, which is key to areas that have a poor public transportation system or no public transportation at all. And that's what the green economy is beginning to look like and beginning to grow. The green jobs movement took a huge growth in 2008, 2010. We're – it's not done. It didn't take two years to finish the green jobs movement; it's gonna be continuing to grow and we need your help to continue to help with it.

Greg Dalton: Let's go to our next question, welcome.

Lisa Hoyos: Hi companeros, Lisa Hoyos with Climate Parents and it's a great panel Greg. Given that you all run or Manuel you helped influence as a thought leader, social movement power, what would you guys do and what's your thinking about how we counter the influence of fossil fuel money in

politics?

Greg Dalton: Manuel Pastor.

Manuel Pastor: I'm sure we all have something to say about this. You know, I think we need to kind of really ask the question what agenda people have and to use that as a way to really build a movement going forward. And I did want to say two other things because I know we're kind of coming to a close. One is, you know, the book that launched this thinking about the green economy, The Green Collar Economy by Van Jones, had the unfortunate event of being published in October 2008. So what became sort of like one solution to the overall jobs crisis got thought of as the solution to the jobs crisis, right. So the fact that we haven't completely transformed to a green economy with jobs bursting at the seams is thought of as a huge failure when in fact this is a sector that's been growing and that's all that really was being said in that book. And what we're trying to say is that it's part of a broader economy moving forward.

And I wanna say one other thing that I've learned from your founder, Van Jones, who reminds us that when Martin Luther King marched with everyone else on Washington and gave that famous speech that it was not called "I have an issue." It was called "I have a dream." And I think what Van meant by that is that those of us who've got an issue around transit or around climate, around economic equity or around criminal justice, we need to realize that we need a dream of a more inclusive America, of a place where people work together where respect the planet as much as we respect each other. And there is that bigger dream that's gonna weave together the social movements so that they don't get divided on these kind of small issues like what happened with SB-350.

Greg Dalton: We're coming to the end but we've overlooked one very important issue today and that is food. And so I want to ask Vien Truong about the importance of food access, food equity in terms of – food is a big, production of food is a big climate issue, lots of food deserts and communities of colors. So talk about food as an on-ramp and connecting it to the broader climate conversation.

Vien Truong: Food brings us all to the table and we all eat. We all want healthy foods and some communities don't have access to it. Places like Richmond doesn't even have one grocery store, one traditional grocery store serving the city. And we need to counter that

And the great thing about food is that it brings together people in a way that we need to see and replicate now as a movement in the last decade and a half working in this work, seeing faith leaders, labor unions, HBCU, civil rights groups, immigrant rights groups and various individuals coming together in a way that we haven't seen before. And our organizations have been at the forefront of bringing people together. And the key thing that we need to figure out now is how do we make sure we don't fall trap to oil companies who are trying to use a divide and conquer strategy to make us think that there are communities of color out there who doesn't like this. Because polling has shown time after time that we are behind this, we're behind good climate solutions. And the important thing for us to do now is to begin working in authentic solidarity and not in tokenism, not in coming to us in fighting for solutions or subsidies for other companies, but really coming to our communities and say how can we actually work together so that we can all win the planet and the vision and the future that we want to see.

Greg Dalton: We have to end it there. That's Vien Truong from Green for All. Our other guests today at Climate One had been Miya Yoshitani, for the Asia Pacific Environmental Network and Manuel Pastor, Professor and Director of the Environmental and Regional Equity Program at the University of Southern California. You can join the conversation on Twitter using our handle @climateone. Podcast of this and other Climate One programs are available @climateone.org. We'd

like to thank our audience here in the room at the Commonwealth Club and listening on air. Thank you all for coming and thanks to our guests.

[Applause]