Overview of the Green New Deal

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What Exactly is the Green New Deal?

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Evidence of man-made climate change has been building for decades. The greenhouse effect, a description of how carbon dioxide traps the sun’s heat in the earth’s upper atmosphere, was understood by scientisits by the turn of the 20th century. British scientist Guy Callendar presented a paper to the Royal Meteorological Society in 1938 with the conclusion that humans were releasing enough carbon dioxide into the air to raise the world’s average temperature.

In the 80s after learning about the Callendar Effect, Colorado Senator Tim Wirth invited NASA researcher James E. Hansen to testify to the US Senate about CO2 and its potential effects on global temperatures. He deliberately scheduled the hearing for one of the summer’s hottest days and shut off the room’s air conditioning.

Scientists and activists have been calling attention to the problem, and calling for action of the part of citizens and businesses to change the way goods are produced and energy is generated — and for government to intervene with changes to laws in order to protect the earth and its atmosphere.

Realizing that any action big enough to really make a difference would have extensive economic consequences, including in areas that ecology-minded thinkers didn’t traditionally “care” about, it was recognized that plans to halt climate change would have to address the needs of displaced workers and the additional economic burdens that would fall harder on already struggling parts of society.

FDR’s New Deal was taken as a model for the kind of comprehensive policies that would be needed to address the climate crisis. The New Deal plans launched during the Depression were ambitious and attacked multiple problems at once, with the goals of stabilizing the economy and providing jobs and relief to those who were suffering. Over eight years, the government instituted a series of experimental projects and programs, such as the CCC, the WPA, the TVA, the SEC. Beyond interest rates, farm subsidies, and employment programs, it created a new political coalition of white working people, African Americans, and left-wing intellectuals, who shared a belief that an interventionist government was good for their families, the economy and the nation.

Many programs that got their start in the New Deal – Social Security, unemployment insurance, agricultural subsidies – are today considered basic government functions.

It was economist Thomas Friedman who in 2007 started calling for a “Green New Deal” to end fossil fuel subsidies, tax carbon dioxide emissions, and create lasting incentives for wind and solar energy. The following year presidential candidate Barack Obama added a Green New Deal to his platform. In 2009, the United Nations drafted a report calling for a Global Green New Deal to focus government stimulus on renewable energy projects.

After the 2016 election grassroots organizer Demond Drummer and Rhiana Gunn-Wright, a former policy director for progressive Michigan gubernatorial candidate Abdul El-Sayed, worked on an organization to come up with policy ideas that might fix the economy and heal the planet. Would it be possible to come up with a solution to the “climate crisis, the economic crisis, and the global crisis, which is rooted in the history of systematic injustice,” as he put it, all at the same time?

The Green New Deal officially exists as House Resolution 109 of the First Session of the 116th Congress. Its official Title is: “Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal”

It begins by laying out the argument that action is needed.

Restating the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (remember? the one that was released the day after Thanksgiving?)

4 points:

—human activity caused climate change

—climate change is resulting in extreme weather

—warming of 2°C will have devastating consequences in the US and globally

—to keep warming within manageable levels, immediate reduction and eventual elimination of greenhouse gas emissions is essential

It recognizes that the US has historically been a major producers of greenhouse gasses, and therefore must take the lead in reducing them.

It also states that many other systemic social crises are related: poor health, wage stagnation, income inequality, and that vulnerable groups and communities in the US feel the effects of climate change sooner and more acutely.

Also, that climate change is a threat to national security as the rest of the world becomes unstable

The government New Deal programs during the depression and WWII were largely successful, although unevenly applied, and that national, social, industrial, and economic mobilization in response to the current climate crisis can create jobs, increase economic security, and counteract systemic injustices.

**The Resolution***: It is the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal*.

First, it sets out five Goals:

(A) to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions

(B) to create jobs and ensure prosperity and economic security

(C) to invest in the infrastructure and industry

(D) to secure

 (i) clean air and water;

 (ii) climate and community resiliency;

 (iii) healthy food;

 (iv) access to nature; and

 (v) a sustainable environment;

(E) to promote justice and equity for frontline and vulnerable communities (indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth)

**These goals should be accomplished through a 10-year national mobilization** — 14 points

(A) building resiliency against climate change-related disasters

(B) repairing and upgrading the infrastructure, addressing climate change

(C) meeting 100 percent of the power demand through renewable energy

(D) ‘‘smart’’ power grids, ensuring access to electricity

(E) energy efficient buildings

(F) clean manufacturing

(G) remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector by supporting family farming; sustainable farming and land use; sustainable food system

(H) transportation systems: zero-emission vehicles , public transit; high-speed rail

(I) mitigating long-term health, economic, and other effects of pollution and climate change

(J) removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere via low-tech solutions that increase soil carbon storage, such as land preservation and afforestation

(K) restoring fragile ecosystems

(L) cleaning up existing hazardous waste

(M) identifying other emission and pollution sources

(N) promoting the international exchange of technology, making the United States the international leader on climate action

**The Government’s role in the mobilization**

(A) providing capital, technical expertise, supporting policies, and other forms of assistance to communities, organizations, Federal, State, and local government agencies, and businesses working on the Green New Deal mobilization; (in a way that ensures that the public receives ownership stakes and returns on investment— community grants, public banks, and other public financing)

(B) takes into account the environmental and social costs and impacts of emissions —

 (i) existing laws;

 (ii) new policies and programs;

(iii) ensuring that frontline and vulnerable communities shall not be adversely affected;

(C) providing resources, training, and high-quality education, so that everyone participates in the Green New Deal mobilization;

(D) making public investments in the research and development of new clean and renewable energy technologies;

(E) directing investments to spur economic development, prioritizing high-quality job creation and economic, social, and environmental benefits in frontline and vulnerable communities, and deindustrialized communities, that may otherwise struggle with the transition;

(F) ensuring the use of democratic and participatory processes that are inclusive of and led by frontline and vulnerable communities and workers to plan, implement, and administer the Green New Deal mobilization at the local level;

(G) high-quality union jobs for workers affected by the transition;

(H) guaranteeing a job with a family-sustaining wage and benefits;

(I) the right of all workers to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain;

(J) labor, workplace health and safety, antidiscrimination, and wage and hour standards;

(K) trade rules, with strong labor and environmental protections—

 (i) to stop the transfer of jobs and pollution overseas;

 (ii) to grow domestic manufacturing;

(L) public lands, waters, and oceans are protected

(M) obtaining consent of indigenous peoples for all decisions that affect them

(N) ensuring a commercial environment free from unfair competition and domination by monopolies;

(O) providing

 (i) health care;

 (ii) housing;

 (iii) economic security;

 (iv) clean water, clean air, healthy food, and access to nature.