

## AN OPEN LETTER TO NEW YORK STATE'S ELECTED LEADERS

May 26, 2022

### **Re: Ensuring the fossil fuel industry contributes fairly to New York State's costs arising from the global warming induced climate catastrophe**

Dear Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Assembly Speaker Heastie:

We write on behalf of our organizations to strongly urge that you support legislation to ensure that the oil, coal, and gas industries are held financially responsible for the climate catastrophe that all of us already are – and will continue – enduring. Those industries' decisions led to the crisis; they – not New York's other taxpayers – should be held financially responsible for the mess that they created.

As you know, New York State – and the nation – is facing an existential threat posed by a rapidly heating planet. The climate changes resulting from the burning of fossil fuels could cost New Yorkers tens of billions of dollars in damages caused by more powerful storms, more intense and frequent heat waves, and an increase in air pollution. Moreover, those companies are now benefitting from windfall profits due to conflicts in Europe. Consumers are paying higher heating and transportation costs that are fueling those profits. It's time for some of those profits to be directed to the state's climate costs.

Climate change from burning fossil fuels has already had severely adverse effects on New York, especially frontline environmental justice communities, including extreme weather events that cost too many New Yorkers' their lives and caused billions of dollars in damages. For example, "Superstorm Sandy" caused \$19 billion in damages in New York City.<sup>1</sup> Hurricane Irene devastated the state and resulted in ten deaths and more than \$1.3 billion in damages.<sup>2</sup> Tropical Storm Lee brought drenching rains that caused more than \$1 billion more in damages.<sup>3</sup> This past August, the remains of Hurricane Henri drenched New York with record-busting torrents of rain. Little more than a week later, the remnants of Hurricane Ida shattered even those records, causing devastating damage and tragically drowning New Yorkers in their own cars and homes.

Extreme heat is the number one weather-related killer in the United States, responsible for more than 130 deaths in New York City per year, a number that could increase to more than 3,300 deaths annually by 2080 if action is not taken.<sup>4</sup> More than one-third of New York State residents live in

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<sup>1</sup> The City of New York, "A Stronger, More Resilient New York: Climate Analysis,"

[http://www.nyc.gov/html/sirr/downloads/pdf/final\\_report/Ch\\_2\\_ClimateAnalysis\\_FINAL\\_singles.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/sirr/downloads/pdf/final_report/Ch_2_ClimateAnalysis_FINAL_singles.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Hurricane Irene One Year Later: Storm cost \$15.8 in Damage from Florida to New York to the Caribbean, *The Associated Press*, August 27, 2012. [www.nydailynews.com/new-york/hurricane-irene-year-storm-cost-15-8-damage-florida-new-york-caribbean-article-1.1145302](http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/hurricane-irene-year-storm-cost-15-8-damage-florida-new-york-caribbean-article-1.1145302). Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical\\_Storm\\_Lee\\_\(2011\)#cite\\_note-59](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical_Storm_Lee_(2011)#cite_note-59).

<sup>3</sup> *Tier Flood Damage \$1 Billion*, Jennifer Micale, *Press-Sun Bulletin*, February 1, 2012.

[www.pressconnects.com/article/20120201/NEWS01/202010330/Tier-flood-damage-estimate-1-billion](http://www.pressconnects.com/article/20120201/NEWS01/202010330/Tier-flood-damage-estimate-1-billion).

<sup>4</sup> Umair Irfan, "New York City Could See Thousands of Heat Deaths by 2080," *Scientific American*, June 23, 2016, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/new-york-city-could-see-thousands-of-heat-deaths-by-2080/>.

areas moderately to severely vulnerable to heat, according to the New York State Heat Vulnerability Index.<sup>5</sup> The impacts are most severe in urban areas and frontline environmental justice communities, and among the elderly and other vulnerable populations. Already the number of days reaching 90°F or more is increasing from an average of 18 per year between 1971 and 2000 to as many as 33 days per year by the end of the current decade.<sup>6</sup> This extreme heat necessitates urgent investments in mitigation and adaptation and will lead to a substantial increase in medical costs, ER visits, and deaths.

Researchers have estimated the potential economic costs of climate change impacts. “Climate change costs in New York State for the sectors analyzed in this report may approach *\$10 billion annually* by mid-century.”<sup>7</sup> [Emphasis added]

It is clear from historical records that for the better half of the late 20th Century, oil companies knew that burning fossil fuels was warming the planet. Nevertheless, starting in the 1980s, the industry championed climate change denial and opposed regulations to curtail global warming. The industry funded organizations critical of climate change treaties and undermined public opinion about the science that global warming is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Their successes in bamboozling the public have pushed the planet to the brink.

New York State must take the nation’s lead in developing and implementing an innovative approach to funding the state’s mitigation and adaptation efforts in response to the storms, extreme heat and other impacts of global warming. This innovative approach would ensure that those responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions and the political efforts to thwart science and policy change -- the oil, gas, and coal industries -- be responsible for the state’s environmental mitigation and adaptation costs.

New York has a strong history of holding polluters accountable for the pollution they created. New York’s 1986 Environmental Bond Act, combined with the state's Superfund program, helped put polluters on the hook for the costs of toxic waste cleanups. Likewise, the oil spill fund programs offer precedent for a “polluter must pay” model for making the fossil fuel companies responsible for the costs tied to the growing climate catastrophe. Under both programs, polluters are obligated to pay for remediation of environmental harms caused by their companies’ (or predecessor companies’) actions.

There is broad support amongst the public for the "polluter pays" principle. Recent national polling, conducted by the Center for Climate Integrity, found that 70 percent of Americans support the concept of holding climate polluters financially responsible for efforts to fight climate change,

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<sup>5</sup> New York State Department of Health, [https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/weather/vulnerability\\_index/nys\\_maps.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/weather/vulnerability_index/nys_maps.htm).

<sup>6</sup> The City of New York, “A Stronger, More Resilient New York: Climate Analysis,” [http://www.nyc.gov/html/sir/downloads/pdf/final\\_report/Ch\\_2\\_ClimateAnalysis\\_FINAL\\_singles.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/sir/downloads/pdf/final_report/Ch_2_ClimateAnalysis_FINAL_singles.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> ClimAID Annex III, “An Economic Analysis of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations in New York State,” Authors: Robin Leichenko, David C. Major, Katie Johnson, Lesley Patrick, and Megan O’Grady 1 Rutgers University, <https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/fsrcomm/commdocs/NY%20state%20report%20on%20economic%20risks.pdf>.

with that number jumping to 82 percent after respondents were informed of the decades of deception perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry.<sup>8</sup>

Climate change poses an immediate, grave threat to the state's communities, environment, and economy. Our organizations strongly believe that New York must take the national lead to advance legislation that extends the "polluter pays" principle to greenhouse gas emissions.

We urge your support for this first-in-the-nation, innovative approach to ensuring that the state's efforts to respond to global warming are appropriately funded and that such revenues are derived from those responsible for the world's current climate crisis.

Sincerely,

350Brooklyn

350NYC

Alliance for a Green Economy

Big Reuse

Bronx Jews for Climate Action

Church Women United in New York State

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Clean Air Coalition of Greater Ravena

Coeymans

Climate Reality Finger Lakes Greater

Region NY Chapter

Coalition to Protect New York

Dryden Resource Awareness Coalition

Earthkeeper Health Resources

Elmirans and Friends Against Fracking

Environmental Advocates NY

For the Many

Fossil Free Tompkins

Gas Free Seneca

Grassroots Environmental Education

Green Education and Legal Fund

Green Ossining

HabitatMap

Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Interfaith Climate Justice Community of

WNY

LI Council of Churches

Mamaki

Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club

Natural Resources Defense Council

New York Progressive Action Network

New York Public Interest Research Group

North Star Fund

NYPAN Enviro Committee

Peace Action New York State

People for a Healthy Environment

Putnam Progressives

Riverside Salem UCC/DoC

Seneca Lake Guardian

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Sierra Club Long Island Group

Sisters of Charity Federation

Sixth Street Community Center

Solarize Albany

South Asian Fund For Education,

Scholarship and Training (SAFEST)

South Shore Audubon Society

Stone Quarry House

StopCricketValley.org

SUNY New Paltz Environmental Task

Force

TIAA-Divest! from Climate Destruction

United University Professions

Upper Hudson Green Party

UU Congregation of Binghamton, Green

Sanctuary

Veterans for Climate Justice

WESPAC Foundation, Inc.

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://payupclimatepolluters.org/survey-results>.