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NEWS RELEASE

FAITH LEADERS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS, SENATORS: NEW YORK NEEDS TO SHOW THE NATION HOW TO TACKLE CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

Groups urge Albany lawmakers to include green power, Big Oil superfund in final budget

ALBANY, NY – One week after the world’s experts [issued their dire warning](#) about Earth’s rapidly heating atmosphere, faith leaders and environmental organizations joined with senators to call on Albany to respond in the final budget.

The groups highlighted the NYS Senate’s comprehensive climate plan included in its [“one house” budget](#), including a centralized system for funding climate projects ([S5360 Harckham](#)), and a provision to hold the world’s largest and richest oil companies accountable for funding climate damages and resiliency ([S.2129](#) Krueger/A3351 Dinowitz). Including multiple pieces of first-in-the-nation legislation, the Senate’s plan will solidify New York as the nation’s climate leader.

Watch the presser here.

“In the decade since Superstorm Sandy, New York State has seen tens of billions of dollars in damages from climate change-driven disasters. Even if we do everything we should to mitigate the climate crisis, we will still face well over a hundred billion dollars more in damages and adaptation costs between now and 2050. The choice we face is clear – will we saddle New York businesses and taxpayers with the cost of cleaning up this mess, or will we make Big Oil pay for the problem they knowingly caused. The Senate has been clear that we stand on the side of New Yorkers, and we will make the polluters pay. I urge the Governor and the Assembly to stand with us,” said **Senator Liz Krueger, sponsor of the Climate Change Superfund Act.**

“We need a Climate and Community Protection Fund that ensures that green jobs have labor standards and that workers in legacy industries are supported while prioritizing new investments in historically overlooked communities. My legislation, included in the Senate’s one-house budget, covers all this, and it must be adopted in the final budget,” said **Senator Pete Harckham.**

“Over 40 years ago, the residents of the Niagara Falls Love Canal neighborhood were exposed to cancer-causing chemicals from Hooker Chemical’s Love Canal dump with over 22,000 tons of toxic waste, said **Roger Cook, Co-Convener of the Interfaith Climate Justice Task Force and former member of the Love Canal Ecumenical Task Force.** “The faith community backed the Love Canal Homeowners in their demand that the government step in. Not long after President Carter signed the Federal Superfund law based on the polluters pays principle. Today, the Faith Community is calling on the Legislature and the Governor to hold the Fossil Fuel companies financially accountable for paying for the damages of the climate crisis by including the Climate Superfund Act in the final budget.”

“The IPCC’s new report shows just how dire, and fast-moving, the climate crisis is. And it’s only getting worse. The Senate’s budget package takes this unfortunate reality into account by including the Climate Change Superfund Act. As temperatures rise and storms become more and more frequent and severe, it’s everyday New Yorkers who suffer while being forced to pay for new infrastructure and damage clean-up. But Big Oil made this mess, and we can lead the nation by holding them accountable to clean it up. Now, the Assembly and governor must take the threat of climate change as seriously as the Senate by standing with taxpayers — not record-profit-making multinational Big Oil companies — and making polluters pay in the final budget,” said **Blair Horner, Executive Director of NYPIRG**.

“Persons of Faith often plan ways to pass on their faith to those who come after them,” said **Catherine C. Darcy, Sisters of Mercy Justice Team**. “In his letter, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.” (160) New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) provides the kind of comprehensive approach which Pope Francis recommends. The 2023 NY State Legislative Session needs to provide the funding needed to implement the CLCPA starting with the Climate Superfund Act.”

“While the United Nations and leading climate scientists issue severe climate warnings on a regular basis, we have yet to move sufficiently to fund and implement the landmark New York State Climate Act. Incremental programs that do not take effect until three, four or five years from now are too little and too late. Let us listen to UN secretary general, António Guterres, when he says: “[The United Nation International Panel on Climate Change] report is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every timeframe. Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once,” said **Michael Richardson, Rivers & Mountains GreenFaith**.

“Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical letter, *Laudato Si’* provides people of all faiths the moral basis for acting energetically to mitigate the abysmal climate crisis. Francis emphasizes that ‘strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.’ We urge the Governor and Legislature to include the Climate Superfund Act and the All-Electric Building Act in this year’s final budget.” said **Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches**.

The Senate’s comprehensive climate plan includes creating a centralized office to support climate justice projects, a 6% income cap on electricity bills for low and middle income families, ending provisions that allow for gas utilities to charge ratepayers for gas infrastructure expansion, and notably, a version of the Climate Change Superfund Act.

Notably, the Climate Change Superfund Act is first-in-the-nation legislation to put Big Oil, who is still driving the climate crisis, on the hook for climate damages and resiliency. Currently, taxpayers are footing the bill for this mess. The legislation is modeled on the existing toxics superfund law (which deals with land and drinking water contamination) that makes polluters financially responsible for the environmental damages that they have caused. These costs wouldn’t fall back on consumers, according to [an analysis](#) from the think tank *Institute for Policy Integrity at NYU Law*.

2022 was a [record profit](#) year for big oil, with the top companies' combined profits reaching an astounding \$376 billion. Those record profits allowed them to deliver unprecedented returns to shareholders while doing little to address the climate crisis [they knew was coming, but did all they could to undermine climate action](#). Starting in the 1970s, scientists working for Exxon made “remarkably accurate projections of just how much burning fossil fuels would warm the planet.” Yet for years, “the oil giant publicly cast doubt on climate science, and cautioned against any drastic move away from burning fossil fuels, the main driver of climate change.”

Big Oil is at fault for climate change, and it can certainly afford the costs — which are uniquely necessary — and expensive — in New York. A new report from Rebuild by Design "[Atlas of Disaster: New York State](#)" identifies the impacts of recent climate disasters across New York State at the county level, for the years 2011-2021. The data shows that every single county in New York has experienced a federal climate disaster between 2011-2021, with 16 having five or more disasters during that time. **In that decade, more than 100 New Yorkers died as a result of climate-driven disasters. In 2022 that number grew exponentially when Winter Storm Elliot in Buffalo killed 39 people.**

In a [separate report](#), Rebuild by Design estimated that the climate costs to New York could be \$55 billion by the end of this decade. Furthermore, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [estimated that it would cost \\$52 billion](#) to protect NY Harbor *alone*. And while storms get worse, sea levels are rising and groundwater poses a higher risk of flooding - [and we don't even know how much yet](#). Clearly, New York is facing staggering – and growing – climate costs.

The Climate Change Superfund Act isn't just necessary – it's popular. According to a poll from Data for Progress, [89% of New Yorkers](#) support fossil fuel companies covering at least some of the cost for climate damages. 200+ groups including key labor unions such as DC37 [sent a letter](#) to Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie urging them to include the bill in the one house budgets. In their letter, the groups write that the fossil fuel industry should be subject to the state's climate costs since their “decisions led to global warming; justice requires that they—not New York's other taxpayers—be financially responsible for the tragically enormous climate crisis impacts that they created.”

Last year, a federal proposal to make polluters pay [championed](#) by U.S. [Reps Bowman and Nadler](#) (and U.S. Senator Van Hollen, MD) received support from over 40 members of the House of Representatives. But the proposal didn't make it through Congress, and NYS now has the opportunity to step in where the federal government has failed and be the first legislative body to enact such legislation. Three other states — Maryland, Massachusetts, and Vermont — are also considering similar legislation to make climate polluters pay.

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