



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

Don't let climate protection become a partisan issue; Let's deepen our own involvement instead

Talk at a 350.org demonstration
1-9-17 Greg Mello

First off, I would like to thank 350.org for organizing this event, and thank you all for coming. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

We are living at the end of an age.

"Normal" times are in the rear-view mirror, for good. They were behind us before the election, but few saw just how far from prior political assumptions the world had already moved -- how much of the old world had already crumbled.

This year will see more upsets. People will ask, again, "How can this be happening?"

Like it or not -- and few of us do -- we now live in a revolutionary time, for reasons that include (but are hardly limited to) climate change. Boldness is necessary now and it will sometimes be rewarded with success. Incrementalism will fail.

The climate timeline is very, very short. We have got use this demonstration and others as springboards for more radical commitment and deeper, stronger, and more rewarding activism.

Half-measures that don't step on toes -- Democratic Party toes -- are going to fail spectacularly, as they have been doing.

We cannot let climate become a partisan issue. Democrats have been failing to address climate change almost as effectively as Republicans. What happened on climate when Obama was in the White House and Democrats controlled both houses of Congress? To make a long story short, *nothing*. This is not a partisan issue. It's much bigger, and deeper.

In fact it's *Democrats* who are in *denial* about the gravity of climate deterioration. The Trump style, the James Inhofe style, is actually *delusion*, which is more serious -- indicative of political psychosis.

The soft climate denialism that we see in Democrats, in the *New York Times*, in our universities and New Mexico newspapers, from our New Mexico senators and two Democratic congresspersons, is almost as damaging. It assures failure while encouraging a fatal somnolence among the educated and wealthier, politically-active classes.

So I am not here to thank Udall and Heinrich "for their past support for climate solutions." There hasn't been support. Not only have Udall and Heinrich not exhibited climate leadership, but neither has Obama. Obama's "Clean Power Plan" would ADD net global warming over the crucial short term (namely methane). None of these Democrats have ever stood "strong" on climate.

Plus, their unwavering support for militarism, empire, and nuclear weapons means they don't support climate protection, which is utterly incompatible with these priorities – fiscally, institutionally, and politically.

Our present highly-militarized society and failing global empire – the incumbency represented by New Mexico senators – will not be able to deliver on any significant progressive or environmental agenda whatsoever, or even to maintain a viable civilian economy.

The actions and inactions of Heinrich and Udall are more the cause of Trump's victory than any antidote to it.

The incumbency can only cough up competing brands of climate-destroying, corporatist, fascists. Trump is something of a Mussolini. That's the old kind. Obama and the Clintons are more "Davos," a new kind. They represent a well-dressed, well-spoken corporate neoliberalism, with the dogs of aggressive war at their sides and their nuclear aegis overhead, which would suck the whole world dry – barring encounter with some sovereignty they cannot crush or subvert, in which case the whole world might well end in blast, fire, and nuclear winter.

The bottom line: The biggest story and biggest struggle of our time lies in the nexus of climate, energy, economics, and environment. Whether we like it or not it's our struggle. It will be our story, now and forever. It will be partly heroic, partly tragic, and for those who don't hide or flinch, it will be manly, womanly, joyful in measure, and fulfilling. Nonviolent action – constructive, and resistive – is the very best of what life on earth offers today.

First and foremost we need to cultivate an ecological vision, which sees the public realm *sub specie Terrae*, from the perspective of Earth.

I urge you to omit as many distractions as you can, including those which are programmed into our genes, as well as those constantly beamed at us by advertisers. Young people in college and who are thinking of graduate school need to think very hard about what exactly they are doing there that is more important than saving a habitable planet.

The master predicament we and our children are facing – facing right now, in this decade – is defined by the tight nexus of our collapsing climate; the rapid energy transition driven by declining conventional oil and gas resources and *quickly required* to save a habitable earth; the dramatic environmental impacts of energy choices and climate deterioration, as well as the environmental measures we may take in response; and finally the radical economic and social implications of these harsh new realities.

Climate, energy, environment, and economy – these will now dominate human affairs from this moment forward.

Climate collapse must be halted and reversed before critical thresholds are passed, lest it become unstoppable. These thresholds are upon us now. The collapse of Arctic albedo (reflectivity) due to shrinking sea ice is already leading to dramatic Arctic warming. The consequences of this, if continued, could be irrecoverably catastrophic to life and civilization. *The moment for emergency action is already here.*

Prioritizing some things means de-prioritizing others. We could make a long list of political practices on the "progressive" left which could and should be de-emphasized.

Oddly, many progressives in New Mexico are tolerant to war and militarism, which is fatal to climate progress.

“What can I do?”

1. Understand what is going on, not just react to the latest propaganda.
2. Clarify your intentions, assess your capabilities, and prepare for new commitments.
3. Connect to others, especially with trusted friends.
4. Decide to mobilize some fraction of your time, energy, and resources.
5. "Rinse and repeat" as experience, friendships, and commitment grow.

You can:

- Volunteer with 350.org or other organizations. You can volunteer at Study Group. We will need a commitment of at least 10 hours per week. Talk to us.
- Organize a niche for a full-time activist at your church. Full-time, eyes-open, independently-supported organizers and activists are precious.
- Decide to devote a year of your life as a full-time volunteer.

Finally, let's consider Rick Perry, nominee for Secretary of the Department of Energy (DOE). You can find longer remarks about Perry on our web site, lasg.org. I'll be brief.

Perry is a political choice, a potential rival being brought into the tent. He's not the first like that at DOE and he won't be the last.

He's a "drill baby drill" guy who imagines he understands oil because he is from West Texas.

As regards nuclear weapons, DOE's biggest mission, Trump will pick some poor sucker for that job and that person, and the military, will run that (big) part of DOE.

There will be a limited amount of damage Perry can do. If he wants to damage the nuclear weapons mission, go for it.

In our view the Perry confirmation can and should be opposed, but in a smart way. Udall and Heinrich will not do that, however. As senators from the weapons labs more than they are senators from New Mexico, they will focus on extracting promises from Perry not to cut those labs. This is the exact opposite of what should be done.

Somebody needs to stick pins in our inflated labs. We all need to tell our senators to cut the parasite labs – and that's what they are, dangerous parasites too – not just oppose Perry per se.

News reports suggest, by the way, that Senate Democrats may [not oppose Perry](#). He's not on the short list. Neither is Zinke, the nominee for Interior, who will be worse than Perry. Democrats cannot be trusted, as I am saying.

Trump is starting out at the "F" level on climate and energy. It is his greatest negative. But he may not stay that way. He needs US renewable energy (RE) companies to grow, and grow fast, if he wants enough new US jobs to keep voters from turning on him even more quickly than they otherwise will.

Trump and his nominees want "energy independence." With fossil fuels and nuclear energy, he is barking up the wrong tree. For "energy independence" as for jobs, he needs RE, energy efficiency (EE), as he will soon discover, and he needs deep energy conservation (which he will *not* discover). But he can't drill his way to energy independence no matter how hard he tries – and he will.

Perry's mandate may be less about management and more about being a wrecking ball, which would fit into his prior predilections. But as unpleasant as that may be for all concerned, we have to face the fact that DOE's day of reckoning cannot be postponed forever.

There can be no doubt that Trump's energy policies will lead directly to economic and environmental disaster, and will be a disaster for DOE as well. Even so, how greatly different, in its bones, is this from the course laid out by the Obama administration? When reforms fail, and truth is suppressed, disaster will come, sooner or later. Trump and his cabinet picks are one current form of that disaster.

DOE and its labs, with the exception of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in Golden, CO and the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory (LBL), have generally failed in the Department's original, core energy mission. The Department and its labs are also failing to sound the alarm about the existential dangers of climate change. Still less have they articulated any viable energy and climate path for the U.S. going forward. So it will not hurt the United States to have a debate about the future of DOE.

To conclude, we have got to deepen our thinking and our engagement, with or without Trump and these cabinet picks, horrible as they are.

The biggest challenge is not with them. It's with us. Thank you.