

Margaret Chase Smith Library 2023 Essay Contest

Each year the Margaret Chase Smith Library sponsors an essay contest for high school seniors. The essay prompt for 2023 asked students to consider what the proper role of government should be in responding to the issues surrounding climate change. Essays have been edited for length.

FIRST-PLACE ESSAY

Dear Government, Take Action against Climate Change!

by Edgelynn Venuti

The Earth has been sending us warning signs for decades. Cries to help the planet have rung throughout the world since I was born. Government agencies have long ignored these calls, pushing forward with polluted consumeristic agendas. The result? A terrible crisis has arrived, and we are already suffering from it. Fires ravage forests, superstorms hit the coastlines, and temperatures reach record highs everywhere. People—especially young people *cannot* ignore these issues anymore. We are rallying, we are worried, and we want to change.

Combating climate change is in the best interest of us all. The government must take swift and critical action through education, conservation, and reduction of CO₂ emissions to create a healthy and equitable world for future generations of all life on Earth.

One of the first steps in combating any issue is making that issue known. Specifically in the United States, climate change has become a political issue. It has divided the right and the left: many Republicans turned against climate action due to conservative economic views and liberal-minded voters turned against them (Murray 2021). Politics aside, climate

change is real. By declaring a climate emergency, the government could show all people that it is not one party's political agenda, but a global human issue. The effects of climate change will harm people all over the world through an increase in natural disasters, droughts, and food shortages (Boehm and Schumer 2023). It would be highly beneficial to remove the political stigma and instead present it as a humanitarian crisis to break political barriers and clear a path toward unity.

The most recent Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change report confirms that the earth has reached a global temperature rise of 1.1 degrees C. As Boehm and Schumer (2023) explain, “every 0.5 degrees C (0.9 degrees F) of global temperature rise, for example, will cause discernible increases in the frequency and severity of heat extremes, heavy rainfall events, and regional droughts,” which puts many people at risk of losing their homes and their lives, specifically people who live in warm climates. The best way to make sure the temperature doesn't rise anymore is to curb carbon emissions—one of the biggest factors in climate change.

The United States currently contributes 14 percent of all global CO₂

emissions, second only to China, which contributes 30 percent (Vanessa 2021). The government needs to take more responsibility to offset these emissions. Breaking away from fossil fuels and oil and switching to renewable energy use could reduce carbon emissions. As of 2022, the United States produces only 22 percent of its electricity from renewable resources. Compare that to Scotland, which currently produces 97 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, and Costa Rica, which has been producing 98 percent of its electricity from renewable sources for nearly seven years now.¹ The US government should turn its subsidies towards renewable energy and become a global leader in clean energy. America has access to these resources and plenty of people willing to make the change. The government just has to choose to push it forward.

In addition to moving away from fossil fuels, conservation and protection of our natural world is vital in combating climate change. Governments can easily pass legislation and solidify existing laws that uphold those values. Most people on Earth appreciate a deep breath of fresh air at their favorite getaway whether it be on top a mountain, or relaxing on a beach. The places that we appreciate are at risk of disappearing if the threat of climate change continues.

In Maine, activists have been hard at work to get the Pine Tree Amendment added to the Bill of Rights in the Maine Constitution. This law would “protect the rights of all people in the state, including present and future generations to a clean and healthy environment and to the preservation of the natural, cultural and healthful qualities of the environment.” This language echoes the Clean Water Act

as amended in 1972.² Edmund Muskie, a renowned Maine senator had presented this bill that would regulate pollution and give the EPA stronger authority over pollution control. I hope history will repeat itself and the Pine Tree Amendment will be ratified into Maine law, and other states across the country will help move it forward into national law.

Laws like the Clean Water Act and the Pine Tree Amendment are important because nature has given us resources to nourish the gift of life and protecting those resources is worthy enough to be written into law. With the political divide posing a significant barrier, and the stressful fear for the future, understandably many people choose to turn away from this issue. However, there is still hope. Solutions already exist, there just needs to be action. Government officials should listen to the voices of the people who care, especially those who will be inheriting the Earth from them.

Through education, conservation, and reduction of CO₂ emissions, governments across the globe can combat the climate crisis and stabilize the planet so future generations can build lives of their own. In America, declaring a climate crisis to remove the political stigma surrounding climate change provides a clear path forward for global cooperation. Then, action on implementing solutions such as renewable energy and stricter laws surrounding conservation could be accomplished faster. Ultimately, the Earth will be here no matter what happens, so it is up to humanity to decide if we have a future or not.

NOTES

- 1 https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/steo/report/elec_coal_renew.php; <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/11-countries-leading-the-charge-on-renewable-energy/>
- 2 <https://www.pinetreeamendment.org/about>; <https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/history-clean-water-act>

REFERENCES

- Boehm, Sophie, and Clea Schumer. 2023. "10 Big Findings from the 2023 IPCC Report on Climate Change." *World Resources Institute*, March 20, 2023. <https://www.wri.org/insights/2023-ipc-ar6-synthesis-report-climate-change-findings>.
- Murray, Sarah. 2021. "How Climate Change Became Political." *Financial Times*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/4bac715b-2812-4610-a528-dc8db9ecd635>.
- Vanessa, M. 2021. "Which Countries Are the World's Biggest Carbon Polluters?" *ClimateTrade*, May 17, 2021. <https://climatetrade.com/which-countries-are-the-worlds-biggest-carbon-polluters/>.



Edgelynn Venuti

graduated from Washington Academy High School in East Machias, Maine. She participated in soccer, track and field hockey, and

was an active member of the sustainability club. Edgelynn will continue to be an advocate for the environment and seek climate justice as she continues her education at the University of Maine at Orono in the fall.