



the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey

Climate Policy in the USA:

Green New Deal. December

2018 was a huge month for climate policy in the United States and around the world.

First, activists and elected officials from across America rallied behind a long-percolating comprehensive policy to address climate change—the **Green New Deal**. A Green New Deal would



consist of massive federal investment in renewable energy infrastructure to spur a nationwide transition away from fossil fuels, coupled (in many iterations of the policy) with a federal jobs guarantee that would offer workers displaced by the transition a chance at working in the renewable energy industry. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (pictured above), U.S. Representative-elect for New York's 14th district and progressive rising star, has unquestionably sparked the new burst of interest in the Green New Deal. On November 13th, she joined a protest urging incoming House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi to step up and support decisive action on climate change. Since then, 45 congresspeople joined "AOC" in a call for a Select Committee on a Green New Deal (including, incidentally, Chellie Pingree, representative for this writer's home district). While that currently looks unlikely to occur, Pelosi has announced the formation of a House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. The influence of the Green New Deal concept on policy, however, is just getting started. Senators Bernie Sanders and Cory Booker, likely candidates for the presidency in 2020, have already announced that they support the Green New Deal, ensuring that climate policy will be a lively topic of debate in the Democratic primaries. Furthermore, over 311 state and local elected officials have signed a letter affirming their support, including Spencer Thibodeau and Pious Ali of Portland, Maine, as well as a former Mobil Oil executive vice president (For more on that letter, see uselectedofficials.org/). Most excitingly, a poll by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that 81% of registered voters (and 57% of self-described conservative Republicans!) either "somewhat" or "strongly" support the Green New Deal. While the Green New Deal stands no chance of becoming law while Republicans control the Senate and the presidency, it may be the galvanizing idea needed to elect a pro-climate action government in 2020. This is amazing news, and could herald a new age of climate policy in America. For more, see goo.gl/gPc5Xz.



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USA: District of Columbia. While the surge of support for the Green New Deal raises hopes of federal action on climate change under a future administration, states, cities, and utilities are continuing to take action on climate change on their own. On December 18th, the Washington D.C. City Council unanimously approved the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Act of 2018, which requires America's capital to **generate 100% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2032**. When D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser signs the bill (as she is very likely to do), the District of Columbia will become the third state-level territory in the US to commit to generating 100% of its electricity from renewable energy. DC will also take the lead in climate action by setting the most ambitious timeline for its energy transition (Hawaii and California have both pledged to move to 100% carbon-free energy by 2045). For more, see goo.gl/nuyQUM.

USA: California Bus Initiative. California continues to lead on climate change. On December 14th, the California Air Resources Board unanimously voted in a new set of rules to cut greenhouse gas emissions from California's bus fleets. The purchase of new gas or diesel-powered public transit buses will be prohibited by 2029, and **all buses are required to emit no greenhouse gases by 2040**. "The benefits of this decision go beyond addressing climate change and reducing air pollutants," said Jimmy O'Dea, senior vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists. CARB's action "sends a strong market signal to manufacturers around the world. California must keep leading the way on reducing transportation-related carbon emissions that contribute to global warming, because every fraction of a degree of warming we avoid matters." Great news! For more, see goo.gl/n5mkGM.

USA: Transportation and Climate Initiative. On December 18th, nine Northeastern states and the District of Columbia announced that they are working to create a regional cap-and-trade system that will put a price on greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and reinvest the money in low-carbon transit. Congratulations to CT, DE, MD, MA, NJ, PA, RI, VT, VA, and DC for taking this much needed step! For more, see www.transportationandclimate.org/.

USA: Xcel Energy. In another great step forward for the fight against climate change in the United States, Xcel Energy, a major utility providing electricity to 3.6 million customers across 8 states, has pledged to **move entirely to producing carbon-free energy by 2050** and to cut their carbon emissions by 80% by 2030. (Carbon-free energy includes renewable energy, such as solar, wind, and geothermal, as well as non-renewable sources of energy that do not emit carbon dioxide, such as nuclear power). This is a smart business decision for Xcel, as renewables are getting much cheaper and their customers include strongly environmentalist communities. It's already shaking up the energy industry: two days after Xcel's December 4th announcement, rival utility Platte River Power Authority announced that it would eliminate all of its carbon emissions by 2030. Spectacular news! For more, see goo.gl/rXTzSp.