

The People Must Lead the Way to Save the Planet

Dysfunction of government, corruption of U.S. elected officials shows itself on climate change

By [Kevin Zeese](#) and [Margaret Flowers](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

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“The American way of life is not up for negotiation. Period.” [President George H. W. Bush](#), 1992, first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro

With the re-election of President Barack Obama in the midst of Hurricane Sandy, some hoped that there would finally be a change in the U.S. posture on climate change. However, at the recent climate talks in Doha, Qatar when a reporter told [Todd Stern, Obama’s Special Envoy for Climate Change](#), that “people expect to see either a major change in tone or substance from the U.S. this week,” Stern dashed all hopes, saying “Well, I—look, I don’t know if I would—if I would—would think about this in terms of a different tone here.”

Indeed not much has changed in the U.S. position on climate change since the era of George H.W. Bush. Anne Petermann of the [Global Justice Ecology Project](#) reports that from the first international climate meeting, the U.S. has played a role of holding back progress on addressing climate change and has instead protected corporate interests whether a Democrat or Republican was in office.

She reports that when Vice President Al Gore went to Kyoto, he forced other countries to include market approaches in the Kyoto Protocol. After undermining the final agreement, the U.S. refused to even sign it. In 2009 at the Copenhagen climate summit, after weeks of negotiations in which many countries collaborated on making progress toward an acceptable agreement, President Obama came in at the last minute with a document created by a handful of countries and insisted upon a ‘my way or the highway’ approach to the “[Copenhagen Accord](#).” The resulting weak agreement does not contain commitments to the emissions reductions needed to prevent temperatures from rising by less than 2°C.

For decades the U.S. has been the leader in producing more carbon emissions per capita than any other country. But it denies historical responsibility and refuses to provide assistance to poor countries struggling with the impact of climate change or take the necessary steps to protect the people and planet, instead it seeks to blame China, Petermann reports.

Petermann was not allowed to attend the meeting in Doha this year unless she agreed to [sign a “code of conduct”](#) because she has engaged in unpermitted protests at the two climate meetings. She describes these meetings as “corporate trade shows,” more about profiting from climate change than facing up to the issue. “These conferences are not a place to accomplish real change. Corporations run the show as governments try to use capitalism to solve the problems capitalism caused.”

As the climate crisis worsens and governments, polluted by corporate interests, are

incapable of responding adequately, repression against dissent by civil society has increased. Petermann describes the UN building massive fences around the climate conventions with aggressive security measures and restrictions on the media to prevent and discourage any form of protest. “You can’t even wear a t-shirt with an unapproved message.”

Petermann believes the solutions will not come from government first, but from people leading the way by acting independently of government. She reports that people all around the world are organizing in their communities to respond to the climate crisis. “It begins with people holding meetings in their homes, educating their neighbors and then developing a plan to reduce carbon emissions and waste.” As with so many other issues, we see that people must both protest what they oppose and build new systems to replace the old ones.

At the top, the United States is failing to confront climate change at home. The presidential debates, sponsored by the corporate-funded debate commission, did not discuss this issue despite record high temperatures, widespread droughts, intense storms and [70% of Americans now saying they believe global warming is a reality](#).

But at the grassroots level, the situation is quite different. For example, people at the [Tar Sands Blockade](#), who are trying to stop the Keystone XL pipeline from being built, report widespread support for their efforts. Supporters disapprove the use of [eminent domain to seize the private property of Americans for a foreign corporation](#), TransCanada. They also recognize that the Keystone Pipeline does not enrich Texas and that the oil is not coming to the U.S. but is being shipped overseas to profit TransCanada. Many realize that the high risks of oil and the need to transition to a [carbon-free nuclear-free energy economy](#).

Diane Wilson, who, along with Bob Lindsey, is in the 24th day of a [hunger strike against Valero Oil](#) and the Keystone XL Pipeline, emphasized that TransCanada is putting the fragile Gulf Coast at risk. She reports that one super-tanker spill would be worse than the BP oil leak.

[Tom Weis](#), who traveled up and down the length of the proposed pipeline, and [videotaped interviews](#) with residents, shows that a wide range of Americans oppose the pipeline including ranchers, farmers, housewives and indigenous Americans. [Weis points out](#) that the Keystone XL:

- Risks destroying more jobs than it would create.
- Portends higher, not lower, gas prices for the Midwest and Rockies
- Functions as an export pipeline for Canada to sell its oil to foreign markets
- Threatens to further poison the air of people living near tar sands oil refineries
- Violates tribal sovereignty and tramples on private property rights of U.S. citizens
- Endangers the water supply such as the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer, which provides water to more than 10 million Texans

The environmental risk is real. [Chris Hedges reports](#) that the proposed 1,700 mile pipeline:

“will pump 1.1 million barrels a day of unrefined tar sand fluid from tar sand mine fields in Canada to the Texas Gulf Coast. Tar sand oil is not conventional crude oil. It is a synthetic slurry that, because tar sand oil is solid in its natural state, must be laced with a deadly brew of toxic chemicals and gas condensates to get it to flow. Tar sands are boiled and diluted with these chemicals before being blasted down a pipeline at high pressure. Water sources would be instantly contaminated if there was a rupture. The pipeline would cross nearly 2,000 U.S. waterways, including the Ogallala Aquifer, source of one-third of the United States’ farmland irrigation water. And it is not a matter of if, but when, it would spill. TransCanada’s Keystone I pipeline, built in 2010, leaked 12 times in its first 12 months of operation.”

In Canada, an area the size of New York State will be dug up to extract the Alberta Tar Sands. The resulting environmental damage has [indigenous Canadians urging](#) people to join them in stopping pipelines now.

Every step along the way, from extraction to travel through the pipeline and transport across the Gulf of Mexico, the environment will be put at risk. Of course, the greatest risk is to the climate. The top U.S. climate scientist, [James Hansen, who now heads NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies](#), has described Keystone XL pipeline as the “fuse to the biggest carbon bomb on the planet.”

The Tar Sands Blockade is the most important citizen’s action in the country. If Americans join the blockade we can stop the construction of the Keystone XL. This will be a major victory for the environment and a victory of the people against trans-national corporate power. It will be a victory on which we can build a broad-based movement to challenge corporate power and put human needs and the health of the planet ahead of corporate profits.

The Tar Sands Blockade is escalating their efforts to stop the pipeline. They have announced a [training camp and mass protest](#) from January 3 to January 8th. We have decided to attend the camp and participate as we have been inspired by the courage of Tar Sands blockaders who have built tree houses, stood in front of tractors, chained themselves to pipeline equipment and barricaded themselves inside the pipeline to block construction. There is still time for you to [sign up and participate](#) in this historic resistance.

For more information, [Clearing the FOG radio](#) has covered this issue in two shows:

[The climate crisis from Doha to East Texas](#) where Anne Petermann of the [Global Justice Ecology Project](#) discusses the failed climate conference in Doha, Qatar which she describes as a trade show for corporations looking to profit from climate change not a conference about solutions; and the increasing exclusion of citizens voices. She says solutions to the climate crisis are coming from the bottom up. Ramsey Sprague of the [Tar Sands Blockade](#) describes the growing resistance to the Keystone XL Pipeline and the upcoming direct action training camp and action Jan. 3 to 8. And ecology activist Diane Wilson, who is on a [hunger strike](#), describes why she is risking her life to hold Valero Oil accountable to her community.

[Interview with Tom Weis](#), President of [Climate Crisis Solutions](#) who tells us about the Keystone XL Pipeline, the truth about the effect it will have on climate change (James Hansen calls it “Game Over”), our drinking water and jobs; and describes in a [series of](#)

[videos](#) the broad coalition of Americans trying to stop the pipeline from being constructed.

Kevin Zeese, JD and Margaret Flowers, MD co-host [Clearing the FOG](#) on We Act Radio 1480 AM Washington, DC, co-direct [Its Our Economy](#) and are organizers of the [Occupation of Washington, DC](#).

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Articles by: [Kevin Zeese](#) and
[Margaret Flowers](#)

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