

# My Turn: In fight to save planet, inaction isn't an option

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You may think climate change is too big, too diffuse, too futile a problem to fight. I disagree. Here's my story.

I'm a rabbi married to a scientist. My husband, a retired research mathematician with a background in physics, worked for many years at Bell Labs specializing in probability theory, data analysis and rare events. For decades Alan told me about climate change. He conscientiously kept his carbon footprint low: commuting by bike, reading obsessively about new technology, installing LEDs throughout our home, eating vegetarian, investigating emissions-free electricity, opting for fixed-rate wind, selling our car and using Zipcar. I asked him how he knows climate change is critical if the science isn't settled.

He said: "The law of gravity isn't known with 100 percent certainty. We accept gravity as true because we're satisfied with 99.9999 percent, and even lower standards. Climate science has passed the point of certainty, ethically requiring global action."

Years ago I suggested he write letters to the editor about climate change. He thought it was futile for one person alone to write.

Alan wasn't the only person to tell me about futility. A friend felt her personal adaptations to use less carbon energy were futile in the face of rising global carbon emissions. Lisa understood that, unless everyone cooperates to lower emissions, an individual's efforts are pointless. She joined Citizens' Climate Lobby to seek a national political solution. She urged me to join with her. However, joining CCL was painful for me: I despise politics, its futile bickering and ugly corruption. Yet, if I refuse to use our political system to protect my family, community and humanity, I'm surrendering to futility.

So I compared climate groups. Most organizations address climate change as one of many environmental issues. Yet, other environmental issues pale compared to climate change, and create the impression that climate is just one more optional environmental cause. Climate change is the mother of all environmental issues, and if our climate system isn't stabilized, other environmental efforts will be futile. I'm glad CCL focuses just on climate change because there's so much for advocates to learn about climate, energy, utilities, denier networks, economics, policy and politics, it's impossible to advocate well unless one gives it one's undivided attention. CCL volunteers only lobby for carbon fee and dividend legislation to reduce emissions quickly. Charging fossil fuel producers for the harmful carbon emitted by their products will motivate everyone to cut fossil fuel dependency. I'm a former CPA. I grasped immediately why giving dividends to the public prevents carbon fees from being regressive, and helps individuals adopt new, low-emissions technology.

I work as a rabbi teaching Bible to adults. No matter what day jobs clergy hold, they must address their generation's moral issues. I've found that CCL's methodology is suited to clergy. CCL focuses on building relationships with members of Congress, newspaper editors and the public. Fostering relationships requires clergy skills: empathetic listening, compassion, patience, firmness and the moral authority to insist on acting for the greater good.

For four years, I've written letters to the editor as a CCL volunteer. My letters acknowledge people's resistance, respond with facts, tell personal stories, remind readers of our responsibility to our children and urge hope. Letter writing for CCL isn't futile because hundreds of us write, and thousands of our letters are published.

Deniers may say climate change is too big, and addressing it is futile, but America's finest engineers insist current technology could provide our energy needs without emissions by 2030.

As we approach Passover, Easter and spring's seasonal rebirth of hope, let's remember the many biblical stories in which the children of Israel thought leaving Egypt was futile: they despaired of dying in the desert of hunger, thirst or war. Only despair, inaction and slavery to the status quo are futile. This year I'm working with a team of CCL volunteers from New Hampshire and bordering states to start more New Hampshire chapters. I hope you'll join us.

(Rabbi Judy Weiss of Massachusetts is a volunteer with Citizens' Climate Lobby.)

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