

Is California Backsliding On Its Plan To Reach Zero Carbon Emissions By Mid-Century?



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In reality, California does not actually have a detailed roadmap for slashing greenhouse gas emissions in order to fulfill the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

California is one of the world's largest economies. It is also a liberal state that acts as a leader in efforts to combat the climate crisis. Indeed, California is said to have revolutionized climate policy, advancing many key pieces of climate legislation that seek to combat global warming and its catastrophic effects. Among them is a plan to ban the sale of new gasoline-powered vehicles statewide by 2035. California leaders also pride themselves in seeking to meet climate goals while maximizing jobs and [economic growth](#).

The passage of climate bill AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, set the stage for the state's transition to an ecologically sustainable future. It was a bipartisan clean energy action requiring the Air Resources Board to develop regulations and market mechanisms to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 levels by 2020. The state met the [goal of AB-32](#) four years ahead of schedule. In 2016, California's legislature voted to extend the state's climate change targets. [SB-32](#) set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emission levels by 2030 to 40 percent of 1990 levels, while in [2018](#) an Executive Order was signed requiring state agencies to reach carbon neutrality by 2045.

California's emissions reduction program has a number of key features, which include the development of [California's Climate Scoping Plan](#) and a [cap-and-trade program](#).

Pursuant to AB 32 and SB 32, a number of other key climate policies were

introduced as part of an apparently overall roadmap in the state's efforts to achieve its emission reduction goals and become ultimately a clean energy economy. They include the [Green Building Standards Code](#), which requires commercial and residential buildings to meet minimum energy efficiency standards, the [Low Carbon Fuel Standard](#), a program designed to decrease the carbon intensity of fuels used within the state, and the [Advanced Clean Cars Program](#), which seeks to limit vehicle emissions.

Nonetheless, California's valiant effort to confront the climate crisis is encountering increasing difficulties. California is not on pace to meet the 2030 goal of a 40 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels, according to a recent report by [California State Auditor Elaine Howle](#). The problem seems to be that while California, as Mary Creasman of [California Environmental Voters](#) put it, has passed a number of good environmental laws, most of them are incremental.

In reality, California does not actually have a detailed roadmap for slashing greenhouse gas emissions in order to fulfill the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. For instance, while transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in California, the state lacks an identifiable path to decarbonize the sector. Worse still, the state's legally mandated emissions goals do not go beyond 2030. And when a new bill, the [Climate Crisis Act \(AB 1395\)](#), co-authored by Assembly members Al Muratsuchi and Cristina Garcia, was introduced on the last day of last year's legislative session, it was soundly defeated.

If passed, AB 1395 would have codified into law the climate goals set by former Governor Brown in 2018 and [backed up](#) by Governor Newsom. In fact, Governor Newsom has expressed the hope that a pathway can be identified by the Air Resources Board to achieve carbon neutrality even a full decade earlier than the existing target of 2045 set in Executive Order 2018.

AB 1395 went down in defeat at the hands of various organized interest groups, ranging from the oil industry, labor, California Chamber Commerce, and agricultural groups. This was a devastating blow to progressive lawmakers and climate activists who had hoped for the passing of a bill that would ensure the attainment of a carbon-neutral future for the state of California by mid-century.

Among labor groups that strongly opposed AB 1395 was the State Building and

Construction Trades Council, AFL-CIO, which represents nearly half a million workers. The organization opposed the bill on the basis of the argument that a reduction target of 90 percent of carbon emissions would cripple investment and innovation. In the same context, in a letter to the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Deputy Legislative Director of State Building and Construction Trade Council urged California lawmakers to embrace carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies as a strategy to mitigating climate change.

Unions representing fossil fuel workers also opposed AB 1395, but it is uncertain whether this was simply due to the fact that the bill did not include a just transition program. Unions representing fossil fuel workers also happen to be in support of CCS strategies as well as expanding oil and gas infrastructure. Assembly member Muratsuchi had another bill on just transition for fossil fuel industry employees last year, AB 1453, but it was held in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1395 may not, however, be entirely dead. It is still eligible to move and Assembly member Muratsuchi and some of his associates will be talking with stakeholders later this year, according to Ashley Labar, Chief of Staff at California State Assembly. But judging from the way organized interests mobilized in opposition to AB 1395, it is highly doubtful that the bill's fate will be reversed.

The irony behind California's efforts to tackle the climate crisis by reducing carbon emissions and eventually attain carbon neutrality by mid-century is that there is a detailed pathway available for the state and for immediate implementation. It was produced in the summer of [2021](#) by a group of researchers headed by Robert Pollin at the renowned Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and has already received the endorsement of over 20 unions, including three fossil fuel unions. It is a study that demonstrates that California can reach zero emissions by 2045 while also experiencing economic growth, including the creation of over 1 million new jobs statewide through investment programs in energy efficiency, public infrastructure, land restoration and agriculture. The study also includes a robust just transition program, which is absolutely essential since [fossil fuel workers](#) will not give up easily what they have managed to secure for themselves (relatively high-paying union jobs with benefits) after many years of hard work.

In sum, it might be time that California lawmakers took a close look at the PERI Program for Economic Recovery and Clean Energy Transition in California. It seems to be an ultimate win-win situation for all.

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The Problem Of Fortress Europe And Russia



*Mati Shemoelof - Ills.:
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Imagine that the US was surrounded by missiles in all its borders, both in Mexico and Cuba, in both Canada and South America. Would it allow countries to receive missiles from Russia or China and continue to behave as usual? Of course not. We have already seen the missile crisis in Cuba.

The threat that Russian armies (on the border with Ukraine) posed to the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty falls into the long history of the Cold War.

Commentators explaining Putin's move in response to a US weakness that has emanated from Afghanistan and Iraq. But behind all the Western propaganda and hysteria of the media lies a remarkably simple narrative. The NATO alliance as a continuation of the US seeks to expand its borders and surround Russia with missiles, troops, and weapons. Putin seeks to return to the agreement that NATO will not expand to all countries surrounding Russia, as well as Georgia and more.

The countries of the world that see the situation in black and white, immediately mobilized to help Ukraine as well as the Baltic states. How? Send more weapons, ships and announce military collaborations. They are doing so without thinking about deepening the conflict, and how to really get the cat (Putin) off the tree.

But what if there is an effortless way? Why did European countries establish a military alliance and a supranational army after World War II? All European countries have armies, and some also have nuclear weapons. What is NATO's goal? Well on paper, NATO will always say that its goal is to preserve and protect democracy. But we know the laundering of the words of democracy. The United States conquered Afghanistan (with the help of European countries) and Iraq (with the help of Britain and some European countries) to establish democracy. And we saw that this was not the goal.

The other way around, we saw the economic interests as well as the deep collaboration with weapons industry.

Now, instead of the diplomats convincing NATO, which is the cat that climbed the tree, to get off it and assure the Russians that Ukraine will not join their alliance, they are sending increased weapons to Ukraine and other countries. The only sane country in this story is Germany that refuses to send weapons to the developing conflict and arm Ukraine (Thanks to the SPD leader that understand well, what would happen to Europe without the Russian Gas, as well as, have a great fear to go to another war with Russia after WW2). Now, because of that,

Germany is facing the hawkish side of NATO.

In other words, this whole war, if it breaks out, is not really a war for the protection of Ukraine's borders, or a bending of the hand of the terrible dictator Putin who threatens the democratic fabric of Europe. This war if it breaks out is for the benefit of the military industries, NATO's vast forces and to provide more resources to European countries. One of the nicknames of the European Union today is 'Fortress of Europe' and it was granted to it, after the fortress was closed to refugees from other countries (except as mentioned Germany which took in about a million refugees). But this fortress of Europe today takes on a contrasting character, which is the one behind a war that is brewing and is not willing to compromise. And ask yourself again, would you be willing to sit in a country surrounded by missiles and armies?

Putin is terrified of the revolutions in Ukraine and in Belarus and Kazakhstan. He feels his power is waning. An economic crisis is gripping Russia, and the corona is also biting into the shortened lives of Russia's residents. It is said that all this operation is to wag his tail, to gain more power within Russia.

This is because it also falls in the polls. NATO should not grant him this rope. It will be for the better interest of the people of Russia, Ukraine, and Europe.

The article was first published on 'Haaretz' newspaper and translated by the author

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Chomsky: US Approach To Ukraine And Russia Has “Left The Domain Of Rational Discourse”



Noam Chomsky

The Russia-Ukraine crisis continues unabated as the United States ignores all of Russian President Vladimir Putin's security demands and spreads a frenzy of fear by claiming that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is imminent.

In a new exclusive interview for *Truthout* on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, world-renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky outlines the deadly dangers of U.S. intransigence over Ukrainian membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) even when key Western allies have already vetoed earlier U.S. efforts in that direction. He also seeks to shed some light on the reasons why Republicans today seem to be divided on Russia.

Chomsky — whose intellectual contributions have been compared to those of Galileo, Newton and Descartes — has had tremendous influence on a variety of areas of scholarly and scientific inquiry, including linguistics, logic and mathematics, computer science, psychology, media studies, philosophy, politics and international affairs. He is the author of some 150 books and recipient of scores of highly prestigious awards including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Kyoto Prize (Japan's equivalent of the Nobel Prize), as well as dozens of honorary doctorate degrees from the world's most renowned universities. Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently Laureate Professor at the University of Arizona.

The following transcript has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

C.J. Polychroniou: Tensions continue to escalate between Russia and Ukraine, and there is little room for optimism since the U.S. offer for de-escalation fails to meet any of Russia's security demands. As such, wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the Russia-Ukraine border crisis stems in reality from the U.S.'s intransigent position over Ukrainian membership in NATO? In the same context, is it hard to

imagine what might have been Washington's response to the hypothetical event that Mexico wanted to join a Moscow-driven military alliance?

Noam Chomsky: We hardly need to linger on the latter question. No country would dare to make such a move in what former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of War Henry Stimson called "Our little region over here," when he was condemning all spheres of influence (except for our own — which in reality, is hardly limited to the Western hemisphere). Secretary of State Antony Blinken is no less adamant today in condemning Russia's claim to a "sphere of influence," a concept we firmly reject (with the same reservation).

There was of course one famous case when a country in our little region came close to a military alliance with Russia, the 1962 missile crisis. The circumstances, however, were quite unlike Ukraine. President John F. Kennedy was escalating his terrorist war against Cuba to a threat of invasion; Ukraine, in sharp contrast, faces threats as a result of its potentially joining a hostile military alliance. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's reckless decision to provide Cuba with missiles was also an effort to slightly rectify the enormous U.S. preponderance of military force after JFK had responded to Khrushchev's offer of mutual reduction of offensive weapons with the largest military buildup in peacetime history, though the U.S. was already far ahead. We know what that led to.

The tensions over Ukraine are extremely severe, with Russia's concentration of military forces at Ukraine's borders. The Russian position has been quite explicit for some time. It was [stated clearly](#) by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at his press conference at the United Nations: "The main issue is our clear position on the inadmissibility of further expansion of NATO to the East and the deployment of strike weapons that could threaten the territory of the Russian Federation." Much the same was reiterated shortly after by Putin, as he had often said before.

There is a simple way to deal with deployment of weapons: Don't deploy them. There is no justification for doing so. The U.S. may claim that they are defensive, but Russia surely doesn't see it that way, and with reason.

The question of further expansion is more complex. The issue goes back over 30 years, to when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was collapsing. There were extensive negotiations among Russia, the U.S. and Germany. (The core issue was German unification.) Two visions were presented. Soviet leader Mikhail

Gorbachev proposed a Eurasian security system from Lisbon to Vladivostok with no military blocs. The U.S. rejected it: NATO stays, Russia's Warsaw Pact disappears.

For obvious reasons, German reunification within a hostile military alliance is no small matter for Russia. Nevertheless, Gorbachev agreed to it, with a quid pro quo: No expansion to the East. President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker agreed. [In their words](#) to Gorbachev: "Not only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well, it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction."

"East" meant East Germany. No one had a thought about anything beyond, at least in public. That's agreed on all sides. German leaders were even more explicit about it. They were overjoyed just to have Russian agreement to unification, and the last thing they wanted was new problems.

There is extensive scholarship on the matter — Mary Sarotte, Joshua Shiffrin, and others, debating exactly who said what, what they meant, what's its status, and so on. It is interesting and illuminating work, but what it comes down to, when the dust settles, is what I quoted from the declassified record.

President H.W. Bush pretty much lived up to these commitments. So did President Bill Clinton at first, until 1999, the 50th anniversary of NATO; with an eye on the Polish vote in the upcoming election, some have speculated. He admitted Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO. President George W. Bush — the lovable goofy grandpa who was celebrated in the press on the 20th anniversary of his invasion of Afghanistan — let down all the bars. He brought in the Baltic states and others. In 2008, he invited Ukraine to join NATO, poking the bear in the eye. Ukraine is Russia's geostrategic heartland, apart from intimate historic relations and a large Russia-oriented population. Germany and France vetoed Bush's reckless invitation, but it's still on the table. No Russian leader would accept that, surely not Gorbachev, as he made clear.

As in the case of deployment of offensive weapons on the Russian border, there is a straightforward answer. Ukraine can have the same status as Austria and two Nordic countries throughout the whole Cold War: neutral, but tightly linked to the

West and quite secure, part of the European Union to the extent they chose to be.

The U.S. adamantly rejects this outcome, loftily proclaiming its passionate dedication to the sovereignty of nations, which cannot be infringed: Ukraine's right to join NATO must be honored. This principled stand may be lauded in the U.S., but it surely is eliciting loud guffaws in much of the world, including the Kremlin. The world is hardly unaware of our inspiring dedication to sovereignty, notably in the three cases that particularly enraged Russia: Iraq, Libya and Kosovo-Serbia.

Iraq need not be discussed: U.S. aggression enraged almost everyone. The NATO assaults on Libya and Serbia, both a slap in Russia's face during its sharp decline in the '90s, is clothed in righteous humanitarian terms in U.S. propaganda. It all quickly dissolves under scrutiny, as amply documented elsewhere. And the richer record of U.S. reverence for the sovereignty of nations needs no review.

It is sometimes claimed that NATO membership increases security for Poland and others. A much stronger case can be made that NATO membership threatens their security by heightening tensions. Historian Richard Sakwa, a specialist on East Europe, observed that "NATO's existence became justified by the need to manage threats provoked by its enlargement" — a plausible judgment.

There is much more to say about Ukraine and how to deal with the very dangerous and mounting crisis there, but perhaps this is enough to suggest that there is no need to inflame the situation and to move on to what might well turn out to be a catastrophic war.

There is, in fact, a surreal quality to the U.S. rejection of Austrian-style neutrality for Ukraine. U.S. policy makers know perfectly well that admission of Ukraine to NATO is not an option for the foreseeable future. We can, of course, put aside the ridiculous posturing about the sanctity of sovereignty. So, for the sake of a principle in which they do not believe for a moment, and in pursuit of an objective that they know is out of reach, the U.S. is risking what may turn into a shocking catastrophe. On the surface, it seems incomprehensible, but there are plausible imperial calculations.

We might ask why Putin has taken such a belligerent stance on the ground. There is a cottage industry seeking to solve this mystery: Is he a madman? Is he planning to force Europe to become a Russian satellite? What is he up to?

One way to find out is to listen to what he says: For years, Putin has tried to induce the U.S. to pay some attention to the requests that he and Foreign Minister Lavrov repeated, in vain. One possibility is that the show of force is a way to achieve this objective. That has been suggested [by well-informed analysts](#). If so, it seems to have succeeded, at least in a limited way.

Germany and France have already vetoed earlier U.S. efforts to offer membership to Ukraine. So why is the U.S. so keen on NATO expansion eastward to the point of treating a Russian invasion of Ukraine as imminent, even when Ukrainian leaders themselves don't seem to think so? And since when did Ukraine come to represent a beacon of democracy?

It is indeed curious to watch what is unfolding. The U.S. is vigorously fanning the flames while Ukraine is asking it to tone down the rhetoric. While there is much turmoil about why the demon Putin is acting as he is, U.S. motives are rarely subject to scrutiny. The reason is familiar: By definition, U.S. motives are noble, even if its efforts to implement them are perhaps misguided.

Nevertheless, the question might merit some thought, at least by “the wild men in the wings,” to borrow former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy’s phrase, referring to those incorrigible figures who dare to subject Washington to the standards applied elsewhere.

A possible answer is suggested by a famous slogan about the purpose of NATO: to keep Russia out, to keep Germany down and to keep the U.S. in. Russia is out, far out. Germany is down. What remains is the question whether the U.S. will be in Europe — more accurately, should be in charge. Not all have quietly accepted this principle of world affairs, among them: Charles de Gaulle, who advanced his concept of Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural’s; former German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik; and French President Emmanuel Macron, with his current diplomatic initiatives that are causing much displeasure in Washington.

If the Ukraine crisis is resolved peacefully, it will be a European affair, breaking from the post-World War II “Atlanticist” conception that places the U.S. firmly in the driver’s seat. It might even be a precedent for further moves toward European independence, maybe even moving toward Gorbachev’s vision. With China’s Belt-and-Road initiative encroaching from the East, much larger issues of global order arise.

As virtually always in the past when it comes to foreign affairs, we see a bipartisan frenzy over Ukraine. However, while Republicans in Congress are urging President Joe Biden to adopt a more aggressive stance toward Russia, the proto-fascist base is questioning the party line. Why, and what does the split among Republicans over Ukraine tell us about what is happening to the Republicans?

One cannot easily speak of today's Republican Party as if it were a genuine political party participating in a functioning democracy. More apt is the description of the organization as "[a radical insurgency](#) — ideologically extreme, scornful of facts and compromise, and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition." This characterization by political analysts Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise is from a decade ago, pre-Donald Trump. By now it's far out of date. In the acronym "GOP," what remains is "O."

I don't know whether the popular base that Trump has whipped up into a worshipful cult is questioning the aggressive stance of Republican leaders, or if they even care. Evidence is skimpy. Leading right-wing figures closely associated with the GOP are moving well to the right of European opinion, and of the stance of those who hope to retain some semblance of democracy in the U.S. They are going even beyond Trump in their enthusiastic support for Hungarian President Viktor Orban's "illiberal democracy," extolling it for saving Western civilization, no less.

This effusive welcome for Orban's dismantling of democracy might bring to mind the praise for Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini for having "saved European civilization [so that] the merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history"; the thoughts of the revered founder of the neoliberal movement that has reigned for the past 40 years, Ludwig von Mises, in his 1927 classic *Liberalism*.

Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson has been the most outspoken of the enthusiasts. Many Republican senators either go along with him or claim ignorance of what Orban is doing, a remarkable confession of illiteracy at the peak of global power. The highly regarded senior Sen. Charles Grassley reports that he knows about Hungary [only from Carlson's TV expositions](#), and approves. Such performances tell us a good deal about the radical insurgency. On Ukraine, breaking with the GOP leadership, [Carlson asks](#) why we should take any position

on a quarrel between “foreign countries that don’t care anything about the United States.”

Whatever one’s views on international affairs, it’s clear that we’ve left the domain of rational discourse far behind, and are moving into territory with an unattractive history, to put it mildly.

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Organizers In Appalachia Are Building A Green New Deal Blueprint For Themselves



The Green New Deal proposal is one of the only effective, broadly recognized pathways to tackle the climate crisis and address its social and economic consequences. It is technologically possible and economically sustainable. Yet although the Green New Deal project is already under way in some shape or form in various states, it has yet to be scaled up to the national level. In fact, climate policy as a whole has been stalled in Congress, and the Biden administration has so far engaged more in symbolic gestures than in living policy processes.

With time quickly running out to prevent a greenhouse apocalypse, activists need to reorganize and unite efforts to build massive public support and political will for climate action. In this context, much is to be gained by looking at the work of ReImagine Appalachia, which is promoting a Green New Deal blueprint for the Ohio Valley region. This is the focus of the following exclusive interview for *Truthout* with Amanda Woodrum, senior researcher at Policy Matters Ohio and co-director of project ReImagine Appalachia.

Woodrum works at the intersection of energy, equity and the environment with the aim of finding common ground among environmental, labor, racial justice and community leaders to create a powerful grassroots movement with the capacity to assist in the transition toward an ecologically sustainable and equitable future.

C.J. Polychroniou: It has been three years since Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-

New York) and Sen. Edward Markey (D-Massachusetts) introduced a Green New Deal resolution. Progressive Democrats in Congress also introduced the THRIVE Act in April 2021, which is in line with the vision of the Green New Deal. Yet, very little progress has been made so far toward decarbonizing the economy and moving in the direction of a sustainable and equitable future. Is this an accurate assessment of where we are? If so, what are the main obstacles that need to be overcome so we can keep moving forward in the hope of avoiding a greenhouse apocalypse?

Amanda Woodrum: Let my answer be a big verbal hug to you and others who feel like you do. We have made progress, big progress, it just hasn't fully materialized into actual infrastructure quite yet (at least not at the scale we need).

First, I think of [the bipartisan infrastructure package] as a down payment on our climate infrastructure needs. It contains hundreds of billions of dollars for modernizing our electric grid, electrifying our transportation system, including public transportation, upgrading the nation's rail infrastructure, and starting to repair the damage from the last century of extraction industry practices — reclaiming abandoned mine lands, capping orphaned oil and gas wells that spew methane, and remediating brownfields at shuttered coal plants and former steel facilities. The Biden administration is currently working to develop federal policy guidance on these resources designed to ensure the jobs created from these investments are good union jobs and pathways into those union jobs are built for Black workers and other people of color, as well as women and the many other people currently working in low-wage jobs.

Second, we are at a tipping point. Much work needs to be done to make sure the resources from bipartisan infrastructure package are spent the right way. If we are successful in this, it will change the landscape, both physically and mentally.

Even in Appalachia, if these resources are spent wisely, we will see that national climate solutions, if done right, can be good for the economy and the working people it serves. More and more people already understand this, or we wouldn't have gotten this far.

As you know, the Ohio River Valley of Appalachia, also known as coal country, has long been a political stumbling block to national climate and clean energy solutions. No longer. Appalachia is now at the table of the national conversation.

We know what we want and need.

ReImagine Appalachia is advancing the vision of a 21st century economy for the Ohio Valley. Can you talk about the principles and aims guiding this vision?

[ReImagine Appalachia](#) is a collection of hundreds of stakeholder groups working across the Ohio River Valley states of Appalachia — Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. We came together to create a collective vision of what a 21st century sustainable Appalachia looks like, and to build out the roadmap for how we get from where we are to where we need to go.

It is important to understand that Appalachia is essentially an area of concentrated poverty. The region has been exploited for more than a century by absentee corporations in the extractive industries — exploiting our workers, damaging our lands, and leaving our workers and neighbors sick. With the abundance of natural resources in the lands of coal country, one would think we would be the richest region in the nation. But we are not. We are the poorest. [Too many of the region's counties rank in the bottom 10 percent nationally](#) for their high level of unemployment and poverty, and low family incomes. The region is poor, and it isn't going to lift itself up by its collective bootstrings.

National climate solutions, if Appalachia is at the table, can be an opportunity to secure much needed and deserved resources for the region. Appalachia literally powered the prosperity of the rest of the nation, while the region itself was left in poverty. We believe the region is owed its due share of climate infrastructure resources.

The people of Appalachia want everything everyone else wants — a modern electric grid in Appalachia that doesn't lose power every time it rains hard; [universal, quality broadband affordable to everyone](#) so the kids can use computers without going to the library and parents can work remotely; to [grow clean and efficient manufacturing in the region](#) with equivalent jobs to those found in the coal industry; and, to build out a sustainable transportation network that includes an Appalachian rail corridor. Perhaps more importantly, we want the good union jobs that can come with these investments. These infrastructure investments can put the region's residents to work building the future they want to live in while also laying the foundation for a much more prosperous economy over the long haul.

We must also invest to [repair the damage from the last century of extractive industry practices](#) — reclaiming abandoned mine lands; remediating brownfields, including coal ash ponds and coal slurries; reforesting the region; restoring the wetlands; and supporting sustainable agricultural practices among local farmers rather than Big Ag. This is why the coalition to ReImagine Appalachia is calling to [revive the Civilian Conservation Corps](#), as a carbon farming strategy that involves absorbing excess carbon with natural greenery. One can easily see how many people we could put to work just planting trees. We also think a revived Civilian Conservation Corps, as a public jobs program paying living wages, could be used to create second-chance opportunities for our many residents that were caught up in the “war on drugs” and opioid[crisis], something that hit Appalachia hard.

We call it [a new deal that works for us](#).

Who are ReImagine Appalachia’s partners, and what is being done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Ohio Valley?

[ReImagine Appalachia](#) is a diverse group of stakeholders — organized labor, racial justice leaders, faith groups, local government officials and environmental organizations, among many others. Folks based in the region working to find common ground and to re-find our common humanity. The last decade or so has been incredibly divisive. Absentee corporations in the extractive industries have helped foment that divide. But the reality is that there is a win-win solution for the 99 percent of us. To find it we must stop to listen to each other. All sides must do this. Environmental leaders must realize that no one will replace their job for an idea. People must be able to put food on the table for their families. And they shouldn’t have to choose between a job and the environment.

But if we work together, we can make sure the climate-friendly jobs of the future are good for workers, communities and the environment. That means making sure most of the jobs we create are good union jobs, we are prioritizing coal industry workers for new opportunities; we are including on-the-job training opportunities on publicly funded infrastructure projects for union apprentice; and we are targeting Black workers, women, other people of color and low-wage workers for these apprenticeships. We can learn a lot about how to do this from [best practices in the national movement to ensure community benefits from big development projects](#). Essentially, public infrastructure resources should come with community and labor standards, or “strings attached.”

What strategies have you discovered that work best for securing broad consensus around ReImagine Appalachia's policy blueprint for a sustainable future?

ReImagine Appalachia's success is in part due to the creation of an inspiring, collective vision in the context of the very real possibility of securing federal resources that can actually turn that vision into reality. That vision is a collective vision created by people with deep roots in the states of the Ohio River Valley of Appalachia. Many people in the region have been waiting a long time for something like this to come along.

Nothing we do is done in a vacuum. Every year, we start the year off with a strategy summit that hundreds of stakeholders participate in to help develop our vision and our workplan. Our [initial vision and blueprint](#) was written after culling through 50 pages of notes from a virtual convening of stakeholders. Even then, the draft document was shared widely for even broader input and additional listening sessions were held to secure reactions to the draft.

We continue to dig deeper into every piece of our vision, collectively, with listening sessions and input into various drafts. When many people with different backgrounds, experiences and areas of expertise help to craft a vision, those diverse stakeholders not only help make it better, they learn from each other and ultimately become more dedicated to helping make that vision a reality. To promote wide dialogue, across stakeholder groups, we hold many public events (virtually), and share almost all of them [live on Facebook](#). So, even if you cannot attend the actual event, you can see and learn what happened later and weigh in.

We also have several teams that get together regularly to discuss issues — a labor team, a racial and community justice team (that helped launch the [Black Appalachian Coalition, or BLAC](#)), and a research team. Our 2022 strategy summit led us to believe we need to create a faith table, one dedicated to promoting community dialogue at the local level and visioning sessions, and a manufacturing team.

We are particularly excited about the idea [of redeveloping shuttered coal plants and former steel facilities into environmentally friendly industrial parks, or eco-industrial parks](#). The basic idea of an eco-industrial park is that one company's waste is another company's useful input. Shuttered coal plants have incredible electric grid and transportation infrastructure that can be harnessed to make the

sustainable products of the future. For various reasons, we believe Appalachia could become a hub for battery technology, alternatives to single-use plastics, steel bars for rail, and electric buses and vehicles.

We have so much work to do and so little time! But rest assured, the proverbial train has left the station and we are chugging forward into the new energy economy. We just need to keep hammering away at it, beating the same drum, and singing from the same hymnal. All the metaphors will be needed to keep this train on track.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Inflation Policies Must Deal With Impact Of Rising Food Prices On The Poor



*Alastair Smith - Photo:
University of Warwick*

Consumer prices in 2021 rose 7 percent over the past year, making this the largest rise in consumer prices over a 12-month period since 1982. Why are prices rising, especially global food prices? Is the current inflationary episode related to the pandemic? Is aggressive monetary policy the main inflation culprit? And how does inflation affect the world, and the poor in particular? Can it be controlled?

Alastair Smith, an international expert on issues of global sustainable development, seeks to offer answers to these questions in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Smith is a senior teaching fellow at the University of Warwick in England and a research associate of the Global Drugs Policy Observatory at Swansea University, Wales.

C.J. Polychroniou: Inflation has increased to surprising levels in 2021, with the U.S. experiencing one of the biggest increases, and looks like it will continue to climb in 2022. Why is inflation happening now, and to what extent is it affected by the pandemic?

Alastair Smith: Inflation seems to have been driven through trade openness and a growing trade deficit in recent decades; with a specific increase from 2020,

despite [a limited contraction of imports](#) during the COVID pandemic. Primary drivers of this deficit include an increase in industrial supplies and materials, mainly petroleum, products and metals. An underlying cause of growing expense has been the increased cost of international shipping and domestic transport: the Baltic Dry Index (a measure of shipping costs) has increased significantly, while higher gasoline prices and truck driver shortages in some regions are pushing up the cost of road transport services. Therefore, the legacy of the pandemic — currently elongated by sluggish vaccination in countries without a critical mass of immunity — has and is [predicted to continue driving inflation into 2022](#).

Global food prices have risen significantly over the last year or so. What is driving the increase in overall food prices in particular?

It's important to select our dataset for analysis critically and I don't believe we currently have the right balance.

The dominant narrative from the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Governments, and therefore the media and wider public understanding, is that nominal prices have increased significantly recently. Headlines highlight that "Global food prices rose 'sharply' during 2021," on the basis that the FAO's "Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices, averaged 125.7 points — [a 28.1 percent increase over 2020](#)."

However, the FAO also maintain a separate price index, where "nominal" prices are converted into "real" prices. This index shows the relative cost of food over time, and in the context of wider inflationary pressures. In contrast to the nominal price index, the real price index shows that international food prices declined between the 1960s and the turn of the millennium, but then started to rise again from the year 2000. They have been increasing, more or less, ever since. This means that in *real terms*, food has not just gotten more expensive over the last year or so, but that [food is less accessible in 2022](#) than it has been for most of modern history.

Focusing on the drivers of international real price increase, we need to look at inflationary pressures of the food sector but also the wider costs of life. We know that despite all our socio-technical development, food production is still victim to unpredicted and unpredictable weather. This is exacerbated by the recent La Niña episode driving dryer weather in most food exporting countries. There has

also been a steady pressure on land use created by demand for biofuels — an indirect consequence of the climate emergency. Another pre-COVID shock was the African Swine Fever outbreak, which created price rises in various protein markets. A further significant, more recent pressure has been rising costs of international shipping — something that has increased the costs of all imports.

How do rising prices impact the world and the poor in particular?

We know that poorer individuals and households generally spend [a greater proportion of their income on food](#) than more financially wealthy households. This illustrates the evident truth that food is a staple consumable understandably prioritized even by those with less economic capacity. However, in the context of generalized inflation, in the costs of food and other essentials, more of the poor in countries such as the U.S. are increasingly required to choose between even the basic level of nutrient and other essentials, such as heating (context depending). For this reason, we have seen greater reliance on emergency food provision in countries, such as the U.S. and the U.K.

In other geographies, we might accept that malnutrition has been growing since 2014 as this is largely [driven by conflict, climate extremes, economic downturns and reductions](#) in purchasing power for the poorest. The current famine in Madagascar has drawn speculation that it will be the first globally recognized example of a [climate-driven emergency](#). Other analysis has critiqued this. However, given the low level of economic capacity in the country, rising prices, particularly in rice markets, only reduces the option to mitigate local pressures through imports.

Is there any evidence to suggest that government spending has an effect on inflation?

The impact of government spending on inflation would be highly contextually dependent. We'd need to consider both the magnitude and specifics of such spending, the degree of openness for any specific economy, as well as other economic variables. Government expense will contribute to inflation when other forces create such potential. In other situations, where spending is depressed due to wider factors, well calibrated increases in government expenditure can be used to create a more desirable situation. The COVID pandemic has been a very clear example of this, where even highly politically conservative governments have

used public funds to support the economy through restriction essential to saving valued human life years disrupted. As ever with these things, the devil is in the details.

What specific policies can be used to contain inflation? Is there any room for strategic price controls in today's economy?

Again, containing inflation is complex, and the appropriate measures will be highly contextually dependent. Interest rates are a widely used strategic price control intimately related to suppressing inflation and it's widely anticipated these will soon begin to rise.

More broadly, it has been interesting in the U.K. We have a Tory government ideologically committed to minimizing income support for the poorest. Ironical that such elitist government has been responsible for bankrolling [the largest public borrow-and-spend initiative in decades](#). Sadly, an immediate action after the pandemic has been to [cut income support and add further conditions for continued eligibility](#) — that create further structural barriers to self-sufficiency for many of the poorest.

A more logical response for those apparently concerned with “leveling up” would have been to recognize the possibility to set a strategic price control for society to pay its constituent citizens — through the possibilities of Universal Basic Income (UBI). This would facilitate a more flexible labor market and allow individuals to invest in personal development for new and emerging opportunities. Flexibility would genuinely underpin and support economic restructuring and offer a long-term dampening mechanism on inflation driven by external costs. Such investments wouldn't need to be funded through further debt: what we need in post pandemic 2022 is 100 percent smooth, progressive taxation, not administratively burdensome staged tax bands. (Under a true progressive taxation, the percentage rate increases as income increases, possibly as high as 60 or even 80 percent tax for incomes over, say, 1 million dollars.) In this scenario, contemporary data processing power could set a continually adjusting strategic control on the price of citizenship for each member of our society. Only this sort of qualitative visioning for the future can deliver transformation of national and global economies to the more stable, steady state economics essential to the sustainability of human development on this planet.

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