

The Path To A Green New Deal Must Involve A Series Of Separate Bills



*Kaniela Ing - Photo:
Twitter*

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act are two landmark bills with the potential to carry significant economic and environmental benefits. They also speak volumes of the role that progressive voices and organizations can play in helping to create sustainable and equitable economic growth and in powering a safer future. Of course, they are imperfect bills, points out National Director of the Green New Deal Network Kaniela Ing in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, but they are important stepping stones toward a Green New Deal and advancing justice for frontline and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) communities. For now, however, the most immediate concern, Ing says, is making sure that “the full benefits of the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act reach communities across the country and have a positive impact on the planet and its people.”

Ing was a founding member of the Green New Deal Network (GNDN) as the climate justice director for People’s Action, where he led campaigns to combat climate change. While at People’s Action, Ing co-created and led mass mobilizations around the People’s Bailout and THRIVE Agenda, which largely shaped the suite of federal legislation.

C.J. Polychroniou: Last year, the United States Congress passed the largest

federal investment to tackle climate change, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. This was preceded by Congress passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, another bill breaking spending records to restore and modernize our infrastructure. What role did the Green New Deal Network and other movement organizations have in passing these bills?

Kaniela Ing: The historic levels of investments passed in the last two years is a direct result of communities across the country fighting for climate, care, jobs and justice. Coalitions like mine have built on the decades of work by leaders and activists, advocating that everyone have access to essential goods and services, be protected from crises, and have the opportunity to thrive.

Since 2020, organizations and activists within the Green New Deal Network (GNDN) have fought for Congress to pass a package that tackles the overlapping crises facing our nation: climate chaos, economic instability, racial injustice, outdated infrastructure and corporate influence over our government. The Green New Deal Network — and its 15 national organizations and 24 state coalitions — crafted the [THRIVE Act](#), a \$10 trillion climate, care, jobs and justice bill that would create enough jobs to end unemployment; build modern, reliable infrastructure; and invest in community resources while ensuring labor and justice protections.

What we secured was nearly \$3 trillion in infrastructure, transportation, climate and health care over two bills, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. By [turning people out in the streets](#), [supporting progressive leaders in Congress](#), advocating for [much-needed and popular policies](#), and [pressuring politicians](#) that were pandering to corporate influence, we have started charting a path to a Green New Deal.

Our network's multisectoral coalition was crucial in ensuring that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act create millions of local, family sustaining jobs, target funding to communities that are often left behind, and begin taking on the climate crisis. By having a coalition of labor, climate, racial justice and political organizations moving together as a united front, GNDN was able to ensure that the policies in the two bills extended beyond simply reducing climate change-causing emissions, but also began to act on jobs, justice and health care.

Now that these historic bills have passed, how much closer are we to securing a true Green New Deal?

The Green New Deal was always meant to be a series of legislation, an all-of-government approach to climate justice that cuts across issues, geographies and sectors. The climate investments we have thus far secured are a down payment on the bolder bills we know we need Congress, state and local governments to pass in order to reach the vision of a thriving future.

A [recent study by Evergreen and the Natural Resources Defense Council](#) found that the Inflation Reduction Act's investments will result in 66 percent of the U.S. being powered by clean energy by 2030. However, if we plan to mitigate the climate crisis once and for all, we need to meet President Biden's goal of 100 percent clean energy by 2035 and 80 percent by 2030.

In addition to falling short of our full climate goals, the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act also neglect investing at scale (or entirely) in other key sectors where Americans are facing immense challenges. From the housing crisis exacerbated by high utility bills, to inaccessible care services where caregivers are expected to work without paid or sick leave, people all across the country need our government to take a holistic approach to tackle the overlapping challenges our communities experience. At its foundation, the Green New Deal should simultaneously be investing in modernizing all sectors of the economy because our families do not simply experience one crisis at a time.

Finally, a true Green New Deal does not pander to fossil fuel corporations and throw lifelines to the fossil fuel industry. In order to tackle the climate crisis, we can't continue to toss tax dollars and create government-mandated pathways for the development of dirty energy when the science is clear: our overreliance on fossil fuels led us to the climate and environmental justice crisis we are facing and the reality is that the clock is rapidly running out on mitigating catastrophe.

What is the role of organizations like your own and our government in implementing the provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for real world benefits?

For years, our fight was to attain passage of federal legislation that met the scope of the climate crisis. In the end, we accomplished some, not all, but some very important gains in the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and

Jobs Act.

Now, it has to be the role of leaders and climate champions to ensure these gains are implemented into tangible wins. If we stop our campaign to secure transformative change in climate and environmental justice at its signing into law, then we fail. At this moment, there is an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of families and communities across the country. It's important that we don't miss it.

This means that it is our responsibility to ensure that the public funding we fought so hard to win is allocated correctly, and reaches the communities it is meant for: those most impacted.

It is a necessity that we begin by building public awareness around these investments and working together with grassroot organizations, BIPOC communities, and tribal governments to provide the resources needed to track and apply for funds being doled out by federal agencies. It also means holding state legislators accountable in the equitable use of these funds to outfit their states, and most importantly, [implementing Justice40](#) to direct 40 percent of the benefits of federal investments into communities facing disproportionately high and detrimental health and environmental impacts. In doing so, we ensure that communities that have historically been divested from have access to a future that is just and healthy for everyone.

What are the biggest challenges that you anticipate to face as you forge ahead and how can they be overcome?

The fight for climate justice in the U.S. is at a crossroads.

The Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act contain the most significant climate investments in our nation's history, and it is the role of organizations, community leaders, local governments and members of Congress to now ensure that the hard-won federal funds become real benefits for our communities.

If implemented at the behest of climate polluters, the compromised provisions in these acts could worsen injustice, disillusion our base and jeopardize our governing power by putting climate-friendly politicians at risk of losing their elections. For instance, we need to ensure that the utilities don't use funding in

these bills to continue operating fossil fuel plants that are costly and dirty.

We already know that utilities and corporations have a vested interest in preventing a transition to clean energy. Despite [solar being the cheapest source of power in the U.S.](#), the majority of our energy is from coal and fracked gas, with a measly [1.3 percent](#) from solar. Between 2020 and 2021, while Americans were grappling with the COVID-19 crisis, fossil fuel corporations were profiting off of price hikes on already costly dirty energy. For instance, Southern Power Company — the [third largest investor-owned utility in the country](#) — increased its operating revenue by [12.5 percent](#) largely due to higher fuel costs. Meanwhile, [28 percent](#) of Americans were unable to buy basics like food and medicine so that they could afford to pay their utility bills. It is safe to assume that these same utilities that have been hampering the transition to renewable energy will seek ways to keep profiting off their dirty fossil fuel infrastructure through climate destructive provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

In the Inflation Reduction Act, we see the direct influence of fossil fuel corporations through mandates that support the growth of oil and gas, despite the climate and environmental harms caused by dirty energy. These Inflation Reduction Act provisions require that all new solar and wind energy development on federal lands and waters must have a prerequisite oil and gas lease sale, thus choking the growth of renewables to fossil fuel development. Additionally, the Inflation Reduction Act mandates oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico and Cook Inlet, Alaska — despite the recent [history of failed fossil fuel leasing attempts](#) in both places.

The influence of corporations on the policies in the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is likely to extend into the implementation of these bills, making it crucial for communities and leaders to champion true climate solutions rooted in a just transition to a 100 percent clean energy economy.

When will working families and communities across the country expect to start feeling the benefits of these bills? What role do everyday people have to play in ensuring that Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act implementation is a success?

If implemented with respect to our communities, the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will serve as a down payment on a Green New Deal, advance justice for frontline and BIPOC communities, and incentivize members of Congress to fund additional federal climate justice investments that science and the future of our communities demands.

More specifically, the Inflation Reduction Act's \$370 billion in climate investments includes almost \$270 billion in tax credits and another \$100 billion in the form of loans and grants to governments and nonprofit organizations, of which roughly \$45-60 billion is set aside for environmental justice [in] communities. Working families, corporations and local governments will be able to access most of the funds between 2023-2028.

Among the [impacts of this bill](#) will be:

- Millions of new, local, family sustaining jobs, including [9 million jobs over the next decade](#) through the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Reduced utility costs for every family by [\\$500](#) by increasing renewably generated energy.
- Tax rebates of \$1,000-\$4,000 per household when upgrading to clean, modern electric appliances.
- Tax credits covering 30 percent of the costs to install solar panels and battery storage systems at homes as well as community solar.
- Up to \$7,500 in tax credits to buy new electric vehicles (EVs) as well as \$4,000 tax credits for the purchase of used EVs.
- Full and permanent funding for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund to ensure coal miners suffering from Black Lung disease have access to medical care.
- Provisions that would tax corporate polluters, the wealthy and tax evaders, reducing the national deficit by nearly [\\$300 billion](#) and protect frontline communities from pollution.

With the majority of the climate investments going toward tax credits, it is crucial for working families, landlords, small businesses and manufacturers to take advantage of the reduced cost of electrification. Because many of these tax provisions are uncapped, the more people use them, the more money the federal government will put toward providing tax credits. Just as importantly, the more successful the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are, the more likely Green New Deal champions will win

elections and put forth bolder climate, care, jobs and justice bills. But we will only see the full impacts of these bills if community and government leaders take the time to educate and activate everyday people to invest in cleaner and safer infrastructure.

If you had to describe what a win for this campaign would look like, how would you do so? Is there a cost to not succeeding in implementing the policies being fought for?

We are already on the pathway to having a Green New Deal by 2030 with the passage of the biggest climate investment in our nation's history. Beginning this year, we will also be making sure that the full benefits of the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act reach communities across the country and have a positive impact on the planet and its people.

Let's be clear, the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are imperfect bills. They fall short on 100 percent emissions reductions and investing in key sectors like public transportation and housing — gaps that need to be addressed in order to stop the climate crisis and deliver environmental justice to BIPOC and frontline communities. There is no denying that these bills continue to prop up the fossil fuel industry, despite the affordability and sustainability of clean energy solutions. While we defend the wins in the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we also need to prevent exacerbating the climate crisis and environmental injustices.

For our coalition, winning this campaign is winning a full Green New Deal by the end of the decade. Winning for us is when we have created enough jobs so that anyone who wants to work can do so and expect fair and dignified working conditions; when natural disasters stop creating refugees among our poorest BIPOC community members; and when working families don't have to pick between paying for food versus keeping the lights on. It is about laying the foundation for a sustainable and modern future where everyone is thriving, and our children are given the opportunity to lead healthy lives, with the guarantee of pollutant-free and lead-free drinking water, toxin-free air and unburdened access to all essential services. This future, rooted in restoring a regenerative economy, ensuring climate resiliency, and delivering environmental justice is not only just a win for our campaign, but a win for all of us.

The cost to not do so is too large to quantify.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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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).