

THE NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS



Proposal For A Presidential Summit with America's Communities: Engaging Together in Climate Solutions

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The Climate Summit 2013 Coalition and its partners propose that a bi-partisan, kick-off solutions-focused Presidential climate summit, directly linked by the web and TV with action-planning satellite meetings in communities across the nation, be held in early 2013. The goals are to:

1. Let Americans hear directly from their President that climate disruption is now a top national priority and must be a top priority for them as well.
2. Inform Americans of actionable solutions they can employ to prepare for and build resilience to climate impacts, and reduce GHG emissions, and their many benefits.
3. Establish a positive, uplifting, can-do atmosphere that energizes and mobilizes households, businesses, civic, faith and other organizations, and all levels of government nationwide to implement climate solutions.

Event Design and Structure

This would *not* be a typical high-level summit, and the term “summit” might not accurately describe the event. It would not be a roundtable discussion, nor would it be a debate about climate science or different policy options. Instead, the President would use his bully pulpit to tell American’s that it is vital that they actively engage in climate solutions. Then, experts would inform the public about proven solutions---practices, technologies, and policies—explained with concrete examples and their benefits, that households, businesses, farmers, civic and faith organizations, communities, and all levels of government can use to prepare for and build resilience to climate impacts and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Presidential summit would be linked with satellite meetings in hundreds of communities, businesses, civic and faith organizations across the nation where people would listen to the solutions and then design action plans to scale them up.

The Presidential summit would begin with President Obama telling the public that addressing climate disruption is now one of his Administration’s top priorities and must be a top priority for all Americans as well. A short presentation would follow about the causes and consequences of climate disruption. The balance of the day would inform Americans about proven just and equitable methods to build resilience to climate impacts and reduce emissions.

The morning would focus on specific examples of how all levels of society can successfully prepare for and increase their resilience to climate impacts, along with its many benefits including cost savings, avoided costs, business and job creation, improved health, and other outcomes.

The Presidential summit would be linked by video, the web, TV etc. to gatherings in communities across the nation. After listening to the solutions described at the Presidential summit, the participants at the satellite meetings would talk about how to scale them up by answering four questions: a) what preparedness and resilience building actions are already underway?; b) how can we scale up additional solutions?; c) what obstacles limit success?; and d) what do we need from the Federal government (and state and local governments) to overcome obstacles?

Some of the satellite meetings would be electronically linked with Presidential summit. These groups would send their answers to the Presidential summit, which will appear on the video monitor for people nationwide to see.

The afternoon would focus on emission reductions using the same format. Practitioners would describe real world examples of how households, businesses, organizations, communities, states, and federal agencies can reduce emissions, along with their many benefits. The satellite meetings would then answer the same four questions, this time focused on mitigation. The answers produced at the events that are electronically linked to the Presidential summit would appear on the video screen for people nationwide to see.

Time would then be allocated for the satellite meetings to discuss how to develop and/or scale up integrated resilience building and emission reduction action plans. The President would close the day by stating that he has reviewed the information provided by the satellite meetings and is directing his agencies to find ways to remove the obstacles and support climate solutions nationwide. Just as importantly, he would announce that his administration would now develop a national strategy to address climate disruption over the long term, and invite active participation.

Pre and Post Summit Events

To heighten public attention to the urgency of addressing climate disruption, and to the summit itself, prior to the event the President would declare “National Climate Action Day” and ask Americans to attend a satellite event or tune into the summit via the web, radio, or TV. The President would also be asked to visit different parts of the nation, with the media in tow, to hear from people hard hit by climate impacts (i.e. how Hurricane Sandy, drought, wildfire etc. affected people). Immediately following the summit a series of meetings would be held with key constituencies and sectors to engage them in the development of the national climate strategy.

Summary

The day would rivet public attention on the urgency of addressing climate disruption, its causes, and most importantly the known solutions with a positive, uplifting, can-do focus that emphasizes the means and benefits of rapidly scaling up actions. It will thus serve as a springboard to expand the effectiveness of existing public, private, and non-profit resilience building and emission reduction programs nationwide, and help launch new ones, ultimately leading to new federal policies.

Q & A About the Presidential Summit and Satellite Meetings

Why Is A Presidential Kick-Off Summit Linked With Satellite Meetings Needed?

Hurricane Sandy, along with 2012's historic drought, wildfires, and other extreme weather events caused distressing levels of human injury and death. They also produced extensive physical and economic damage requiring \$50 billion or more to repair, along with significant psychosocial anguish that exacerbated economic inequities. In other parts of the globe, the damage caused by rising sea levels and extreme weather last year was even more horrific, with poor nations and regions hit hardest. Combined with news that the West Antarctic Ice Sheet is melting twice as fast as projected, and that 2012 was the warmest year on record, it is now clear that climate disruption is a national and global emergency. Our nation has a moral and ethical responsibility to prepare for and build resilience to climate impacts while also reducing our contribution to the problem by reducing emissions.

However, the majority of Americans have not been clearly and affirmatively told by their President that human-induced climate disruption is happening now, poses grave and unjust dangers to their personal safety, health, economy, and wellbeing, and that left uncontrolled will grow far worse. The majority of the public also does not realize that proven solutions exist to prepare for and build resilience to climate impacts and reduce emissions. A Presidential summit linked with gatherings in communities across the country will fill this gap and help mobilize millions of Americans to actively engage in climate solutions.

What Is The Theory Of Change Behind the Proposed Events?

To make a fundamental change in thinking and practices, individuals and organizations must feel sufficiently high levels of *dissonance*, *efficacy*, and *benefits*. Until recently, dissonance---a gap between a desired state of being and current conditions---about climate disruption in the U.S has been modest. However, 2012's extreme weather events, topped by Hurricane Sandy, altered this. Recent polls found that almost 70% of voters are now worried (read: feel dissonance) about climate change (see below). Election day exit polls found that 60% of voters felt that climate change "made Sandy worse."

Dissonance alone, however, is not enough to motivate major change. People must also be confident that they have the know-how, skills, and tools required to reduce the dissonance (efficacy). And, they must believe that the benefits of employing the tools far outweigh the downsides (generally the pros of a major change must outweigh the cons by at least 2-1). Although dissonance has increased, the vast majority of Americans still have low confidence that we know how to reduce climate disruption. A majority also still lacks confidence that the benefits of acting far outweigh the downsides. A Presidential summit that begins by describing the causes and impacts of climate disruption, and then emphasizes proven actionable solutions and their benefits, will build dissonance and increase the sense of efficacy and benefits among Americans for addressing the problem. The associated satellite meetings will allow community members to build the shared sense of commitment and resolve required to meaningfully engage in climate solutions.

Why Should The President Lead The Summit?

A poll completed in September 2012 prior to Hurricane Sandy by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication found that 77% of Americans said climate change should be a central priority of the president (and Congress): 18% said “very high”, 25% said “high”, and 34% said it should be a “medium” priority. Less than a quarter (23%) said it should be a low priority. After Hurricane Sandy, but before Election Day, 68% of likely voters told pollsters that climate change was a “serious” or “very serious” issue. In election day exit polls, 41% of voters said President Obama’s response to Hurricane Sandy was an “important” or “very important” factor in their vote. This data strongly suggests that the vast majority of American’s now believe the climate is changing for the worse, and that even if Congress won’t act the President must lead our nation’s response to the problem.

Won’t Some Republicans and Climate Deniers Criticize The President?

Climate disruption is a non-partisan issue, as is clearly demonstrated by the fact that people with right, middle, and left political views were undoubtedly injured, killed, or hurt economically by Hurricane Sandy. Nevertheless, pushback from a vocal minority is certain, as it seems to be on every issue today. However, a post-election poll from Zogby Analytics found that half of Republicans and 73% of independents said they are worried about the growing cost and risks of extreme weather disasters fueled by climate change. The Yale poll cited above found that a large majority of Americans (88%) said the U.S. should make an effort to reduce global warming, even if it has economic costs, and that almost half of Republicans (46%) believe the President (and Congress) should make clean energy a high or very high priority. Almost three quarters (71%) of Republicans said the U.S. should use more renewable energy sources (solar, wind, and geothermal) than today.

This data indicates that, even while the far right of their party criticizes the process, if the President uses the summit to clarify how he will help American’s respond to climate impacts and costs, many Republicans might welcome and even participate in the event. This possibility can be increased, and criticism from the far right can be buffered, if a number of current or former Republican elected officials are willing to participate in the summit or community meetings, which we believe is possible. Most importantly, climate disruption is far too important to the future of our great nation and humanity to avoid telling the public the truth and engaging them in climate solutions, as a summit and satellite meetings would do.

Would a Summit Preclude Other Presidential Actions to Protect the Climate?

No. The process is designed to serve as a platform, not the end point, for many actions by the President, as well as Governors, Mayors, business and civic leaders, and households to address climate disruption over the long term.

Who Would Co-Sponsor the Presidential Summit and Satellite Events?

Numerous states and cities, as well as private and nonprofit organizations (e.g. universities, business, insurance, finance, conservation, civil rights, climate justice, youth, religious, farm, labor etc) could be asked co-sponsor the summit and associated

community satellite meetings.

Who Would Attend the Presidential Summit and Satellite Meetings?

All federal cabinet members should be asked to attend the Presidential summit and/or satellite meetings in different locations of the nation to symbolize that climate disruption is caused by, and affects, every sector of society and that solutions will require actions in every sector as well. In addition, congressional leaders, governors, and mayors from across the nation would be invited to attend the summit or satellite meetings, along with business, religious, youth, human rights, civil rights, climate justice, farm, labor and other leaders.

How Will A Presidential Summit and Satellite Meetings Spur Action?

Both the Presidential summit and satellite events would be designed to achieve specific outcomes. The President would tell Americans that promoting climate solutions is now one his top priorities and use his bully pulpit to inform the public that, for their own safety and wellbeing and that of their children, it must become a top priority for them as well. He would then demonstrate his commitment by inviting experts to inform the public about proven solutions, explained with concrete examples and their benefits, that everyone, from households, businesses, farmers, communities, to all levels of government can employ to prepare for and build resilience to climate impacts and reduce emissions.

The satellite meetings would also be strategically designed to produce meaningful action. After listening to the solutions described at the Presidential summit, participants would answer a detailed set of questions focused on identifying practical ways to scale up resilience building and emission reductions actions. They would also be asked to identify barriers to success as well as needs to overcome them. At the close of the day they would integrate the information into scalable climate action plans. Thus, the entire day would be designed to increase understanding and urgency and spur meaningful action on climate disruption.

How Will the Satellite Events Be Organized?

At least two levels of involvement would be established: 1) A number of 'high-profile' satellite meetings (30-50) would be electronically linked with the Presidential summit to allow them to provide feedback on the questions that were provided; and 2) Many more (500-1000) could tune on their own to the Presidential summit by web radio, or TV but not be electronically linked. Funding would determine the exact number of satellite meetings that would be linked electronically to the Presidential summit. Two organizations with expertise in organizing dispersed yet interlinked meetings have stated interest in helping with the process. Guides and tool kits would be distributed to the satellite meetings.

Would the Summit Be Coordinated with The National Climate Assessment?

Careful coordination will be needed between the NCA town hall meetings planned for the spring and the Presidential climate summit and satellite meetings. The NCA, however, focuses on trends and impacts (which can build dissonance), not solutions per se (which increase efficacy and a sense of benefits). If it is publicly available, the draft

NCA findings might therefore be included in the initial science presentation made at the Presidential summit. The information could also be shared at the satellite meetings to allow participants to understand the likely local risks of climate disruption. But the NCA and the Presidential summit and satellite meetings have different goals and would not necessarily be linked.

What Happens After the Summit?

The Presidential summit and satellite events would be a platform to energize and mobilize efforts nationwide to address climate disruption over the long term. One of the actions that should immediately follow the summit is planning sessions with key elected officials, business sectors, and constituencies to engage them in the development of a national strategy to respond to climate disruption. Numerous other actions would be planned to take place immediately after the summit, including announcements of new local and state policy initiatives and more.