

**How To Develop a Report Card On The Moral Positions of Your  
State And Local Elected Officials on the Climate Emergency**

**National Climate Ethics Campaign  
[www.climateethicscampaign.org](http://www.climateethicscampaign.org)  
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## **How To Develop a Report Card On The Moral Position of Your State and Local Elected Officials on the Climate Emergency**

Global warming is the most important moral issue of our time. However, many elected officials fail to acknowledge that human-induced climate disruption is occurring, openly talk about the profound moral implications of the crises, or support policies to address it. This handbook provides a method for grading and publicizing the moral positions of your state and local elected officials on the climate emergency

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### **The Importance of Grading and Publicizing the Moral Position of Elected Officials on the Climate Emergency**

Despite ample warnings from the U.S. National Academy of Science and the academies of science from almost every nation on Earth, elected officials on the national, state, and local level have failed to acknowledge or meaningfully address the rapidly deepening climate crisis. This is a moral and ethical failure of the highest order.

There are at least three reasons why this is true: First, because left unchecked climate disruption will produce tremendous unjustifiable human suffering and death here and abroad. Second, because the people and nations that have contributed the least to global warming will, at least initially, be impacted the most. Third, because climate disruption will disrupt Earth's ecosystems, which sustain all life on earth, including humans.

Americans elect government officials to address the pressing problems of the day. When they fail to acknowledge the reality of climate disruption, openly talk about it, or pursue meaningful policies to address it, they are abdicating the responsibility we have given on them. Many elected officials have been able to evade their moral duty to deal with the climate emergency by keeping their positions fuzzy or unknown. The more that the positions of state and local elected officials are clarified and publicized, the more knowledgeable voters will become, and the less that officials can hide from the issue.

Climate disruption is a non-partisan issue, and grading the position of elected officials is not about encouraging people to vote for any particular candidate. It is about forcing *all* elected officials to acknowledge their moral duty to act to reduce climate disruption.

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### **The IMAC Report Card As A Model**

The report card described in this guide is modeled after the Congressional report card developed by the National Climate Ethics Campaign for Interfaith Moral Action on Climate (IMAC). During the week of Earth Day 2012, IMAC released the report card so that IMAC members could know where members of Congress stand on their moral obligation to address climate disruption. To view the IMAC report card see:

<http://www.interfaithactiononclimatechange.org/congressional-scorecard.html>

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## **How to Create a Climate Report Card for the State and Local Level**

This handbook will walk you through the research process and grading system for creating and publicizing a report card for your members on the position of local officials on the climate emergency. The report card can be applied to your state legislature, governor, mayor, city council, county board, public utility, water district and other local elected officials.

The moral position of state and local elected officials on the climate emergency can be determined by their positions on three key questions:

Q1. Do they openly acknowledge that the Earth's climate is changing and that those changes are primarily due to human activities?

Q2. In their work do they openly talk about the horrific human suffering and death, social injustice, and damage to the Earth's ecosystems resulting from unchecked climate change that make it a deeply moral issue that requires aggressive policies to address?

Q3. Do they demonstrate their personal commitment to addressing the climate emergency by voting affirmatively on energy, emissions, transportation, or other climate related ordinances or policies?

Based on research described in the following pages, officials can be given a rating of A, C, or F on each question, with an A being good, C being modest or unsure, and F being poor. At the end of this document there is a template that can be used as a model for your report card, modeled after the IMAC Congressional report card. When completing your research, write short justifications for the grades you assign to local officials in the template provided in Appendix A on page 8. Remember also to save webpage links or copies of your sources in the template provided in Appendix C on page 10.

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### **I. Determining Your State & Local Official's Position on the Climate Emergency**

By follow the steps described below, you can determine your state and local official's grade on addressing climate change. Not all of these resources will be available for every local official, particularly for small cities or modest positions. If a step does not apply to your official, move on to the next.

- I. Start by performing a Google search of the local officials official website. Search the issues/priorities section for the phrases "climate change," "global warming," "carbon," and "greenhouse gases." Look at the way these phrases are used on the website in order to determine whether or not the official acknowledges that climate change is occurring, is human-caused, has serious consequences, and requires rapid action. Keep track of your sources and record as many quotes as possible (in Appendix C: Notes) that clarify the official's position on the climate emergency.

2. If there is not an issues/priorities section on the website, search for “climate change,” “global warming,” “carbon,” and “greenhouse gases” in the website’s general search box. Look at how these phrases are used in press releases, speeches, or other materials on the website.
3. Search for the terms “environment,” “energy,” “renewable,” and “sustainable” on the official’s website. Look at how these terms are used. If the official clearly links sustainability initiatives to combating climate change, then he or she deserves an “A” on question 2. However, if he or she only refers to economics or energy security or energy independence (which could be a way to promote more domestic oil drilling, coal mining, and other actions that undermine the climate), then he or she should receive an “F” on question 2 for failing to openly discuss climate change.
4. Perform a Google search of the official’s name and “climate change” (or each of the other related phrases mentioned in steps 1-3). Record quotes from the official that demonstrate his or her position on climate change. Try to use direct quotes from the official that are posted on reputable sources, rather than unsupported commentary or speculation about the official’s views on climate change. Be sure to save a link to the sources in Appendix C.
5. Search past posts on the official’s social media pages for mentions of climate change and related phrases (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.)
6. Look at editorials and news stories in local newspapers to determine if the official regularly talks about the need to address climate change. These stories could be found through a Google search or by searching for [OFFICIAL’S NAME climate change] on a local newspaper’s website. Libraries also often have archives of newspapers, so talking to a local librarian could assist with this research.
7. Call your local official to ask him or her questions these questions:
  - a. Does he or she acknowledge that the Earth’s climate is changing and that those changes are primarily the result of human activities?
  - b. In their campaigns and ongoing work does he or she openly talk about the profound moral implications associated with unchecked climate change and that it is thus a moral issue that must be rapidly and aggressively addressed?
  - c. Has he or she demonstrated a personal commitment to addressing the climate emergency by voting affirmatively on energy, transportation, emissions or other climate-related ordinances and policies as demonstrated by those deemed significant by the League of Conservation Voters, League of Women’s Voters, or other similar organizations?
8. Call your official’s office and ask for copies of public statements or speeches concerning energy, transportation, or other climate change-related issues.
9. Write a letter to your official to ask him or her the three questions described above.

10. Find out if there is a local League of Women Voters, League of Conservation Voters or other local policy assessment or conservation groups that have already gathered information on the official's position on energy, transportation or other climate change-related ordinances and legislation. The assessments completed by organizations can be used to determine how you grade state and local officials on Question #3. Record significant votes and your sources in Appendix B of the report card template found at the end of this document.
11. Analyze the official's mailings, pamphlets, and other public documents to determine if he or she ranks addressing climate change as a top priority. Save these documents to serve as justification for why you gave the official a certain grade.

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## II. Assigning the Grade

It is now time to assign a grade to your local official. Examine your research and apply the system below to determine whether they deserve an A, C, or F on each question.

### Question 1:

#### A

- He or she openly acknowledges on their website, in publications and/or speeches that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities.

#### C

- It is unclear from his or her website, publications and/or speeches whether he or she openly acknowledges that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities.

#### F

- He or she does not openly acknowledge that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities.
- He or she questions/denies the scientific consensus that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities.

### Question 2:

#### A

- He or she openly discusses the profound moral consequences associated with unchecked climate change on their website, in publications and/or speeches.

#### C

- He or she actively promotes sustainability initiatives, but does not explicitly mention climate change in publications and/or speeches.
- He or she discusses climate change on their website, in publications and/or speeches, but it is unclear whether he or she acknowledges that climate change is a profound moral issue that requires immediate action.

**F**

- He or she does not refer to the seriousness of climate change or the need to reduce carbon emissions in their website, publications and/or speeches.
- He or she questions climate change science or references anti-climate change science in their website, publications and/or speeches.
- He or she openly denies that climate change is occurring in their website, publications and/or speeches.

**Question 3:**

**A**

- He or she votes affirmatively for pro-climate action on 70-100% of related ordinances, policies or legislation.

**C**

- He or she votes affirmatively for pro-climate action on 50-69% of related ordinances, policies or legislation.

**F**

- He or she votes affirmatively for pro-climate action on 0-49% of related ordinances, policies or legislation.

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### **III. Putting It All Together**

After you have gathered research and assigned a grade to your local elected official, it is time to put this information into a report card. On the following pages you will find a template that can be used as a model for your report, including an introduction and summary page:

Appendix A: Grade Determinants

Appendix B: Significant Climate Change Votes

Appendix C: Notes

Each of these documents should be completed to provide a concise summary of your local official's grades, as well as the sources you used to determine the grades. Make sure the report looks and reads professionally before it is released.

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### **IV. Publicizing Your Scorecard To Your Members**

After the report card is completed, you can alert your members by:

- Sending it to all members and constituents
- Writing about it in Opinion Editorials for your local newspapers and blogs
- Sending it to all state and local elected officials
- Giving talks about it at your meetings and gatherings

## Sample Report Card on the Climate Emergency For State and Local Elected Officials

Climate disruption is the most important moral issue of our time, yet many elected officials **[insert name of your state, community, targeted agency]** fail to talk about or act on this crisis. Despite ample warnings from the U.S. National Academy of Science and the academies of science from almost every nation on Earth, many elected officials have failed to meaningfully address the rapidly deepening climate crisis. This is a moral and ethical failure of the highest order.

This report card grades elected officials in **[insert name of your state, community, targeted agency]** on whether or not they acknowledge the reality of human-induced climate change, openly talk about the profound moral consequences of allowing it to remain uncontrolled, and support policies to address the climate emergency.

We believe climate disruption is the most pressing moral issue of our time for three reasons: First, because left unchecked it will produce untold unjustifiable human suffering and death here and abroad. Second, because the people and nations that have contributed the least to the problem will, at least initially, be impacted the most. Third, because it will disrupt Earth's ecosystems, which sustain all life on Earth, including human.

**[To personalize the report, add information here about your organization and/or your reasons for developing the document]**

Climate disruption is a non-partisan issue, and this report is not intended to encourage or discourage people from supporting any particular candidates. The purpose is to force *all* elected officials to acknowledge their moral duty to openly talk about and act to reduce climate disruption.

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### Methods

In this report card, the positions of **(insert name or elected body)** on the climate emergency are determined by how they fare on three issues:

Q1. Do they openly acknowledge that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities?

Q2. In their reelection campaigns and/or ongoing work do they openly talk about the seriousness of the impacts associated with unchecked climate change and that it is thus a moral issue that requires new policies to address?

Q3. Do they demonstrate a personal commitment to addressing the climate emergency by voting affirmatively on energy and emissions legislation deemed significant by the **(insert League of Conservation Voters, League of Womens Voters or other)**?



## Appendix A: Grade Determinants

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### Example (this is not a real person or based on a real person):

State Senator, District 1

Joe Smith, State Senator, (D): A, A, C.

Representative Smith acknowledges that the Earth's climate is changing primarily due to human activities. He openly discusses the seriousness of the impacts associated with unchecked climate change on his website, in his election campaign materials, and in press releases. However, he does not vote affirmatively for climate-related bills as determined by **(state name of organization)**

[State, County, City, or District]

[Name], [Position], (R or D): Q1, Q2, Q3

[Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q1 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q2 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q3 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned].

[State, County, City, or District]

[Name], [Position], (R or D): Q1, Q2, Q3

[Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q1 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q2 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q3 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned].

[State, County, City, or District]

[Name], [Position], (R or D): Q1, Q2, Q3

[Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q1 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q2 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned]. [Insert appropriate justification sentence for Q3 here, based on your research and the grade you assigned].

**Appendix B: Significant Climate Change Votes**

**[Year] Climate Change-Related Legislation for [State, Level of Government]**  
**[Briefly describe your voting record source/s].**

1. **Example (not a real bill):** Renewable Energy Tax Incentive, Pro-Climate Vote = Yes
2. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)
3. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)
4. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)
5. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)
6. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)
7. [Name of Bill], Pro-Climate Action Vote = (Yes or No)

| <b>Name of Local Official</b>   | <b>%<br/>[Year]*</b> | <b>Grade**</b> | <b>1.</b> | <b>2.</b> | <b>3.</b> | <b>4.</b> | <b>5.</b> | <b>6.</b> | <b>7.</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Ex: Joe Smith,<br>State Senator | 55%                  | C              | -         | +         | +         | -         | +         | -         | +         |
|                                 |                      |                |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|                                 |                      |                |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|                                 |                      |                |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|                                 |                      |                |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |

**Key:**

**+ = Pro-climate action vote**

**- = Anti-climate action vote**

**? = No Vote or Absent (which counts as an anti-climate vote)**

\*This column shows the percentage of pro-climate action votes, based off the local official’s votes on the climate disruption legislation in this table.

\*\*This column shows the grade that was determined by the pro-climate action voting percentage from the previous column: A = 70-100%, C = 50-69%, and F = 0-49%.

## Appendix C: Notes

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### Example (this is not a real person or based on a real person):

State Senate District 1

Joe Smith, State Senator, (D): A, A, C.

Website issues section explicitly refers to climate change or global warming: Yes.

“I believe climate change is occurring and it is caused by human activities.”

<[www.linktojoesmithswebsite.com](http://www.linktojoesmithswebsite.com)>

“We need sustainable and renewable energy.” (Quote from flyer distributed during Representative Joe Smith’s 2012 election campaign. See attached photocopy of the flyer, found at the end of this document).

[State, District, Town, or County]

[Name], [Position], (R or D): Q1, Q2, Q3.

Website issues section explicitly refers to climate change or global warming: (Yes or No).

Insert quotes from website, press releases, speeches, campaign materials, or other sources you found during your research. For each quote, include a link to the webpage or attach a photocopy of your source if appropriate.

[State, District, Town, or County]

[Name], [Position], (R or D): Q1, Q2, Q3.

Website issues section explicitly refers to climate change or global warming: (Yes or No).

Insert quotes from website, press releases, speeches, campaign materials, or other sources you found during your research. For each quote, include a link to the webpage or attach a photocopy of your source if appropriate.