

Pa Climate Convergence Testimony

Good afternoon! My name is Rick Heinze and I am the Board chair for the Center for Coalfield Justice which works for environmental and social justice in Washington and Green counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. I feel that I am in a unique position to comment upon issues related to climate change for several reasons: 1) For almost three decades, CCJ has worked directly with the residents of this area to support and assist them regarding fossil fuel extraction 2) Washington county is the most fracked county in Pennsylvania, and 3) (perhaps most importantly) I have watched and learned about this important issue for over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century. This paper is actually being presented on my 76th birthday.

The facts about climate change are not new; even the oil companies scientists issued dire warning in the 1950's. But most of us never heard these warnings. I was lucky enough to have been on a college campus in 1971 that felt like the second earth day was worth celebrating with a series of speakers and workshops. This was likely my first introduction to global warming, and it immediately grabbed my interest. I became part of the green movement. I remember wondering at the time, if this issue is so important, why isn't the government addressing it? Oh well I thought, there is plenty of time to deal with it!

Finally, a man I could like, Jimmy Carter, was elected the 39th President of the United States and served from 1977 to 1981. President Carter erected solar panels on the White House and pledged that 20% of fuel used in the US would be renewable and we would gradually wean our country from its addiction to fossil fuels. I was excited. Finally, the government had a vision and would protect its people and the climate from the health hazards of fossil fuels. We would gradually transition to renewable energy in such a fashion that the change would hardly be

felt economically. I was overjoyed! We had a plan! But my joy was short lived as President Reagan, on his first day in office, ordered the panels removed from the White House, and pledged his allegiance back to big oil.

The green movement persisted, and many important environmental measures were enacted, but most did not go far enough or fast enough to ward off the climate disaster.

Finally in 2015, it seemed we had come to our senses! The United States along with 196 countries agreed to a legally binding treaty to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees centigrade. Unfortunately, almost no country is abiding by its pledges and no G20 country (which cause about 80% of damage) is on course to meet its goals. Our federal government entities have repeatedly failed to respond to this crisis and ensure the health of our planet and its citizens.

Let's look at Pennsylvania. The people of Pennsylvania showed great wisdom in amending its constitution in 1967 by passing article 1, section 27. It reads:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and esthetic value of the environment.

Unfortunately, the courts have interpreted this amendment to give power to the legislature to regulate by law the extent to which an entity is able to infringe upon our right to a clean healthy environment and pay little attention to the environmental harm associated with the action. In other words, if environmental harm happens while following legislative guidelines, there is no foul.

Now let's look at recent happening in sw PA. Many of you may not realize that a significant health study has recently been completed in

our area. The PA Health and Environmental Study, conducted by the University of Pittsburg School of Public Health. The study looked at the association between environmental risk factors (e.g., living near fracking sites) and three areas of childhood health: adverse birth outcomes, childhood cancer, and asthma attacks and severity. In each case a significant outcome was evident. Babies born near these sites were about one once smaller than one would expect, children living within one mile of wells had 5 to 7 times the chance of developing lymphoma when compared to children who lived further away, and lastly people living near (within 10 miles) of wells in the production phase had 4 to 5 times rate of asthma attacks. The fossil fuel lobby, as is their habit, has already denounced this study, questioning the methodology and results. Although this may have been the first health study that people in the area have heard of, in reality there have been more than 2000 studies which link fossil fuel extraction to adverse health outcomes.

Isn't it time we got real on the subject? Fossil fuel extraction of any kind is not good for the health of people or the health of our climate. Unlike in 1981 when President Carter's proposal could slowly ease in the transition to clean, healthy renewable power, we have now backed ourselves into a corner. It needs to happen **NOW**. We can no longer play political games with the health of the planet and its people. We are in the midst of a climate emergency and our response needs to be an emergency response, not the band aid responses we are used to.

Thank you for your time!

CC