SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES FOR A GREEN NEW DEAL
The Southern Communities for a Green New Deal is an organizing and movement building project of the Southeast Climate & Energy Network. This policy platform is the product of the thought leadership of over 100 leaders and advocates from across the South including the members of SCEN, Kingdom Living Temple and Justice First, Dogwood Alliance, and Gulf South for a Green New Deal.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Southeast Climate and Energy Network (SCEN) along with the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy (GCCLP), Kingdom Living Temple and Justice First, and Dogwood Alliance spearheaded the project, Southern Communities for a Green New Deal (SCGND). Though the vision of the Green New Deal (GND) reflects the kind of federal mobilization and transformations we need, it does not properly address the problems that are unique to the South. Our region has a unique need of sustainable development due to its systemic underinvestment, over-extraction, and poor infrastructure. The South is also unique in its biodiversity, culture of resiliency, and diversity to our nation that serves as one of the largest economic engines in the world.

We have found that while many people are talking about a just transition, very little has been done to make this a reality. As we transition from a carbon-based, extractive economy to a clean renewable energy and regenerative land-based economy rooted in justice and equity, those communities with a legacy of pollution and ecological destruction must not be left behind. Southern communities living on the fenceline and frontlines of environmental injustice and the climate crisis must be included in Green New Deal policies.

The vision of the Green New Deal is to address the climate crisis and create millions of new jobs while ensuring justice and equity. Southern Communities for a Green New Deal goes beyond the Green New Deal Resolution to include visions and demands that take into account the unique realities of the South. This policy platform is the product of a bottom-up, community-based approach to building alignment around shared vision, values, and goals in a way that prioritizes the lived experiences of Southern frontline communities as opposed to the traditional top-down or corporate approach to problem solving and decision making.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Southern Communities for a Green New Deal policy platform outlines the key issues facing our communities as the global climate crisis worsens and provides a list of our key demands as a foundation for any Green New Deal policies enacted at all levels of government. As is outlined in the Green New Deal House Resolution, we believe that we can and must address the global climate crisis while also achieving justice and equity. Southern communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, people of color and poor, Queer, and disabled communities, have historically organized to pressure the federal government to take action to ensure equity and justice. While this has been a key strategy to protect the life and liberties of Southern communities, often federal actions fall short of its aim and/or are generally met with resistance from Southern state governments charged with implementation.

The lived experiences of Southern communities are evidence of these shortfalls, and if we are truly to achieve justice and equity, we must learn from the past and approach addressing the global climate crisis differently in order to transform the material conditions of our communities. This is why as part of this policy platform we included a set of indivisible values that we believe are equally as important are as our demands and should inform the design and implementation of Green New Deal policies. The Southern Communities for a Green New Deal Values are as follows:

- **Commit to Indigenous sovereignty.** Our economy takes from the land without repair and from people more than it gives and all without concern for the consequences to the point of global imbalance and destruction. This is a practice rooted in settler colonialism and the on-going harm to Indigenous Peoples.
- **Follow frontline leadership.** It is the leadership of frontline communities that will provide the critical insights toward the kind of community driven transformations we need.
- **Be inclusive.** All forms of injustice share a common practice: people are excluded from the decisions that negatively impact them. This must end. All communities must have the power to collectively self-determine their futures.
- **Advance human rights & rights of nature.** We envision a new legal framework that respects the rights of nature and reflects the scientific evidence that the health of humans and the natural world are fundamentally interconnected.
• **Advance equity and justice through repairing past harm.** It is possible because the same ideas, values, systems, and institutions driving the climate crisis are also driving and exacerbating other forms of systemic oppression and violence.

• **Invest in transformative solutions that match the urgency and severity of this crisis.** Incremental change will not work. Transformative change means adhering to the science of emission reductions and shifting the core philosophies of the underlying social and economic systems.

• **Reject the privatization of natural resources.** The inherent value of humans and the natural world that cannot be monetized and privatized. We reject the false destructive dichotomy of choosing between our healthy and jobs.

• **No Sacrifice Zones.** Communities that have become sacrifice zones should be prioritized for repair and economic opportunities in Green New Deal policies. This value also extends to workers and local economies that depend on the industries that need to be phased out or shifted.

A discussion on the issues facing Southern communities and our demands has been organized in this policy platform in five broad categories: energy, water, forest & land, economy & labor, and democracy. While it was helpful to organize in this way, the issues and demands should be understood as intersecting, and thus, policies that impact for example, land and forests should also take into account our demands listed all the other categories. Below highlights key issues and demands from each section.

**ENERGY**

The majority of the existing energy infrastructure in the U.S. exists in the South in part because of the corrupt relationship between this sector and state and local governments. This relationship has exacerbated the clean energy divide, stymied innovation, and led to disproportionate health and environmental impacts while saddling already struggling families and communities with high utility bills.

We cannot afford anymore investments in the fossil fuel energy. We must eliminate subsidies, halt all new infrastructure projects, redirect investments to advance local and community control of clean, renewable energy production and distribution, and make these companies pay for the public health and environmental degradation costs. And we must prioritize environmental justice and frontline communities.

We oppose false solutions such as carbon pricing, primarily investing in carbon capture (rather than reducing carbon), utility-only controlled renewables, biomass, nuclear, and loans with interest charges for energy efficiency and renewables.
WATER

Our water and sewage infrastructure is crumbling, unsafe, and unaffordable for many Southern communities. Additionally, our water resources are poorly regulated and managed threatening water quality and quantity. Finally, Southern communities, particularly coastal communities, are vulnerable to flooding as a result of sea level rise, increased rain events, and poorly designed land use and planning.

We must invest in equitable water and sewer infrastructure upgrades and new technologies that take into account the unique conditions in Southern communities, manage and regulate water resources in a way that ensure and prioritizes that everyone has access to safe, affordable drinking water and takes a holistic approach to water quality and quantity. We must advance solutions that protect biodiversity and preserves water as a collective resources (end privatization). We must also rethink the way we design our communities and implement green infrastructure solutions. We must carefully evaluate climate solutions to ensure communities are not negatively impacted in ways that shifts or adds to existing harms, such as the climate related gentrification that have pushed communities into more vulnerable areas so wealthier people can live on higher ground and sea walls that have caused increased flooding in rural communities.

LAND & FOREST

The South is the world’s largest wood-producing region, with a rate and scale of forest destruction from industrial logging that is estimated to be four times that of South American Rainforests. Destruction of forests and industrial scale agriculture are significant drivers of the global climate crisis, threatens biodiversity, emits significant amounts of air, soil, and water pollution that disproportionately impacts environmental justice communities. Land use policies and weak regulations and enforcement protect the interest of private landowners and profits of corporations over the health and well-being of whole communities and the planet.

We must shift the forest and agricultural industries toward more sustainable practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while protecting public health and repairing past harm. To achieve this, we must restore and preserve soil and forests by stopping new industrial polluting expansions, particularly in environmental justice communities, ending corporate subsidies, strengthen and enforce existing regulations, divest from industrial scale agriculture, invest in localized food economies and green jobs, stop the use of biomass as clean energy source, clean-up toxic sites, and provide land reparations to environmental justice communities.
**ECONOMY & JOBS**

Every aspect of our economy will be impacted by the global climate crisis. This will particularly harm Southern communities, workers and small business, particularly Black and minority businesses that are already vulnerable to economic downturns and face additional obstacles because of weak labor laws, discriminatory practices, and social safety nets. For too long, Southern workers have been given the false choice between their health and the environment and living wage jobs, and while the Green New Deal has the potential to create significant economic opportunities through the creation of millions of jobs, if not done right can also perpetuate structural inequities and harms that are baked into the design and practices of our economic and political systems. For example, the collapse of the coal industry in Appalachia is just one example of what can go wrong as we transition.

We must center justice and equity. We must strengthen and enforce labor protections, provide training and resources to environmental justice communities and industry workers to ensure they are able to access and benefit from the transition, and advance solutions that shifts ownership and governance of natural resources and production to workers and communities. We must embody the belief and practice that all human beings have an inherent value that is not tied to their economic output. This means we must expand the social safety net to ensure everyone has access to education, healthcare, safe, affordable and climate resilient housing, transportation, safe and healthy food, clean water, and healthy environment and recreation.

**DEMOCRACY**

The decisions politicians make are greatly influenced by corporate interests rather than the concerns and needs of communities. This is especially true of Southern communities where budget shortfalls results in cuts to critical infrastructure and social services while protecting tax breaks and incentives for corporations. Southern communities are also hostile places for refugees and immigrants, poor, and communities of color who are deemed criminal and threat to individual privileges. Finally, voter suppression is rampant in the South and is expected to only worsen as the climate crisis does.

We must divest from corporate control of our government, particularly corporations that harm our communities. We must make democratic participation easier. We must take a human rights based approach to immigration, public safety, and community planning, and ensure communities and the next generation are prepared for the climate reality.
The Southern region of the United States is experiencing more climate crisis impacts than any other region in the US. In order to form a comprehensive policy plan, it is imperative to define the communities within the region that are overwhelmingly facing the impacts of the climate crisis and environmental injustices, define these specific impacts, and highlight some of the unique characteristics of our region. We define the South as the following thirteen Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Environmental justice communities are defined as being predominantly Black, people of color, Indigenous peoples, and low income communities who disproportionately experience the environmental and health impacts of the polluting economy. Frontline & vulnerable communities, as defined in GND Resolution, include: Indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, communities facing industrial pollution and resource extraction, depopulated rural communities, incarcerated and detained, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth.

However, frontline communities can be unrelated to identity and can defined as communities that are directly impacted by climate disasters or climate transitions, such as people who live in coastal cities as well as workers and cities historically reliant on coal, oil, gas economy that now face challenges as those industries phase out.
Those who have been historically impacted (i.e., vulnerable communities) and communities defined by geography (such as coastline communities) will face a new reality of an evolving and worsening climate crisis. In addition to the social, economic, and health impacts of the climate crisis, our region will be catastrophically hit by hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, extreme cold, extreme heat, torrential rain, tropical storms, devastating winds, flooding, and sea level rise.

According to Census figures from 2010, 55 percent of the Black population of the US lives in the South, and Black communities, especially in the South, are disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution and ecological devastation due to industrial-scale resource extraction. These communities have been historically affected, and still face, racial, economic, and social injustices such as divestment, gentrification, redlining, over-policing, and higher rates of imprisonment. Furthermore, Black communities, particularly in the Black Belt region, encounter significantly higher rates of generational poverty.

Two of the top three states with the highest Hispanic/Latinx populations are in the South (Florida and Texas), and Hispanic people make up 16.6 percent of the region's population. Like Black communities, Hispanic communities are more likely to face environmental pollution than white communities. Furthermore, Hispanic communities (especially those in Florida along the coast) are heavily impacted by hurricanes and flooding.

Many Southern workers are forced to choose between higher paying and often dangerous jobs in the fossil fuel industries or the low wage work in retail and service industries. Because of the lack of worker protection laws, all workers are vulnerable to exploitation, particularly those working in retail and agriculture where women, people of color, immigrants, and undocumented migrants make up the majority of the workforce.
In the face of historical and ongoing oppression, the South remains a unique and resilient region. It is critical as we advance a vision for a Green New Deal that also advances equity and justice that we recognize that the South has a painful history of colonization, white supremacy, wealth disparity, and cultural and physical genocide of Native Americans and enslaved Black people. Power and wealth was, and still is, tied to land ownership and corporate monopolies. For example, Black Americans own less than one percent of rural land.

No matter how violently we are hit from natural and social disasters, the region has always had a rich history and culture of resistance, faith, creativity, innovation, care, and cooperation. The Southern states were the birthplace of Civil Rights organizing and the Environmental Justice Movement, the largest labor uprising in US history, the West Virginia Mine Wars, and have a deep history of cooperatives. We are also home to the creation of many music genres (such as blues, bluegrass, gospel, jazz, and country) and arguably the most exquisite cuisine in the nation. Whether it be steel from Alabama, whiskey from Tennessee and Kentucky, tourism of Louisiana, Texas, and Florida, or produce from the farms and fisheries in Georgia, Mississippi, and the Carolinas, we are the country’s manufacturing and agricultural backbone. In summary, as the South changes, the world changes with us.
The South is home to one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world and is the largest economic contributor to the US GDP. The combined economy of the South ranks among the highest globally. The Southeast is the world’s largest wood-producing region. Texas and Florida are among the nation’s largest agricultural producers, and the Gulf South is the epicenter of the fossil fuel and petrochemical industry.

Despite the South being one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, a vital melting pot of cultural diversity, and the largest economic contributor to the US’s GDP, the region is severely impoverished, overwhelmed by injustice, and unprepared to adapt and mitigate against climate change. The South has crumbling infrastructure or a complete lack thereof, and the highest rates of poverty in the country. Low-income communities tend to reside in climate-vulnerable locations, and disaster recovery is difficult to achieve. Additionally, poverty rates are higher in rural areas, where communities have a lack of access to human services programs and other resources. This map highlights that a majority of the persistent poverty areas are located in the South.

The South’s economic philosophy of extraction and exploitation for profit evolved from the lasting legacy of slavery and colonialism. This model is clearly unsustainable and hurts vulnerable communities. When we think about transitioning to a more sustainable economy, transitioning the South is necessary for transitioning the nation.
Climate Impacts, Environmental degradation, environmental injustice, and the global climate crisis are complex issues that are interconnected, often sharing overlapping root causes and will have compounded and intersecting impacts for Southern frontline communities as the climate crisis continues to worsen. According to a study by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, scientists predict that the South, especially coastal communities, is presently and will continue to be hit the hardest by climate change. Southern communities will suffer the largest loss of GDP, face higher rates of mortality due to climate-related disasters and weather patterns, increase in energy consumption, and increase in the percentage of high-risk labor. Its agricultural yields are expected to plummet. Scientists predict the region will also endure the most coastal and land damage. To make matters worse, “death by structural poverty” is a real concern for the Southern frontline communities. The combination of poverty, lack of access to healthcare, exposure to environmental pollution, redlining, the endurance of racial discrimination, and the location of these communities being predisposed to natural disasters create the kind of compounding issues that make it harder for communities to deal with and survive climate impacts. The region is notorious for its coal ash deposits, abandoned mines, orphaned wells, leaking pipelines, and superfund sites, most of which are placed in communities of color and low-income communities.
Sea Level Rise and Flooding. Southern coastline communities, in particular, are at a high risk of sea-level rise. In places such as South Carolina and Florida, for example, sunny-day flooding is happening more frequently. In 2019, the three highest rates of sea-level rise were reported in Texas and Louisiana. Many homes along the coast will begin to experience chronic flooding (more than 26 times a year) over the next two decades. Some areas of the South, such as the Gulf Coast region, could face sea-level rise six times faster than average. As climate change causes people to move, climate gentrification is also becoming an increasing issue.

The map below shows the number of homes at risk of chronic flooding (more than 26 times a year) in high sea level rise scenario by 2100 where the global average sea level is projected to rise about 6.5 feet. Moderate models of sea level rise predict 1.2 million households will be impacted by 2100.

Extreme Weather and Heat. The year 2020 was been the most active season on record not only in terms of the number of storms but also the number of dangerous storms. The 2020 hurricane season produced 30 named storms with 12 making landfall.
Six of those were major life threatening hurricanes that resulted in the loss of lives and devastated communities. Following patterns of previous years, in 2020 we also saw hurricanes continue intensify more rapidly. Last year was a preview of what is to come as the climate crisis worsens.

As global temperatures continue to rise, the threat of extreme heat will have a grave impact on Southern communities. Scientists predict that the Southernmost parts of the United States will be impacted the most. In addition to already warmer climates, heat stress will also disproportionately impact Southern communities because of existing social vulnerabilities, such as lack of access to healthcare and inability to afford air conditioning. Southern workers who labor outdoors will face additional risks due to the lack of worker protections and anti-union labor laws in the South. Without global action, the Southern region will experience a deadly rise in temperatures by 2050. The average number of days per year where the heat index exceeds 100 degree fahrenheit will double, the number of days exceeding 105 degree will quadruple.

The graphs show the average number of heat waves and the average number of days in fifty major US cities. Both have nearly tripled since the 1960s. The increase in the number of days of the heatwave season has been especially large in the Southeast.

Source: United States Global Change Research Program's Indicator Platform

Southern Communities for a Green New Deal
Fossil fueled economy. If the South were its own country, it would be the 8th largest CO2 emitter in the world and is home to five of the top ten largest emitters in the country, which not only has national implications but global repercussions as well. Four of the top five largest climate polluters in the U.S. power sector serve the South and the runners-up are distant. These big utilities are the same bad actors responsible for the largest coal ash spills in U.S. history, nuclear power hazards, and the production of the largest amount of the pollution in the U.S. power sector linked to asthma. The Southern states, particularly the Gulf South and Appalachian region, rank among the top producers of coal, gas, and oil. Most of the nation’s infrastructure for extraction, processing and refining, transportation, and waste disposal is in the South. Texas, alone, accounts for 31 percent of the nation’s oil and gas production. Eight of ten of the nation’s largest refineries are in the South. A majority of the nation’s pipelines are also located in the South, particularly, Louisiana and Texas.

Forest Destruction. Protecting standing forests is as vital to solving the climate crisis as transitioning away from fossil fuels. Logging is the largest driver of carbon loss from Southern forests, accounting for 92% of forest emissions in the region, far greater than all emissions from wildfire, conversion to development and agriculture, storm damage and other causes of tree mortality combined. The climate, health and economic impacts of the forest industry on frontline communities and workers are largely ignored when it comes to the development of national and state climate and green jobs policy.

Agriculture. Industrial agriculture is one of the biggest contributors to climate change. Due to our economic system’s profits for mega-farms and monoculture, industrial agriculture fails to allow crop rotation that would capture carbon dioxide. The industrial livestock industry, such as chicken farms or cattle farming, use a lot of land and water. The current system encourages soil depletion, fertilizer and manure waste, and other unsustainable farming practices. To make matters worse, farmworkers, are subjected to some of the worst working conditions that include facing issues of sexual harassment, exposure to pesticides, heat stress, and economic exploitation. Thus, the structural changes needed are not only a climate issue, but an issue of inequality as well.
VALUES & PRINCIPLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL GREEN NEW DEAL IN THE SOUTH

All of the solutions proposed in a later section share common values and commitments. These values must be integrated within the design and implementation of ALL climate solutions holistically.

Commit to Indigenous Sovereignty. The climate crisis signals the failure of an economic system rooted in a philosophy of extraction, exploitation, and the colonizing idea of private ownership of the Earth’s natural resources for the creation and concentration of wealth and power. Our economy takes from the land without repair and from people more than it gives and all without concern for the consequences to the point of global imbalance and destruction. We must acknowledge the on-going harm of colonization and make a commitment to Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous peoples and their traditional practices, values and beliefs should be centered in the development of land-based, climate solutions. We have a lot to learn from Indigenous Peoples and their approach to living in harmony and balance with nature.

Follow frontline leadership. We are not starting from scratch. Southern communities on the frontlines of intersecting and compounding forms of oppression have been demanding change for a long time and advancing equitable and community based solutions. It is these communities and leaders that we must look towards for the kinds of solutions that will meet the needs of our communities as we mitigate against and stop the worsening climate crisis.
VALUES & PRINCIPLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL GREEN NEW DEAL IN THE SOUTH

Be inclusive. All forms of injustice share a common practice: people are excluded from the decisions that negatively impact them. Communities and workers must have the power to make decisions about their labor and the ownership and management of their collective resources, particularly those communities and workers that are most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis. We need political and economic solutions rooted in democratic community control and power that put the interests and collective well-being of people over corporate profits.

Advance Human Rights and the Rights of Nature. Human beings are part of nature. The land, air, water, trees, and all living creatures have value and must be protected for our collective survival. There is an inherent value of all humans and the natural world that cannot be monetized and privatized. Our current legal framework is fundamentally flawed because it is based upon a false notion that humans are separate from and not a part of nature which it defines as a "resource," to be owned, used, and degraded for the profits of a few. We envision a new legal framework that respects the rights of nature and reflects the scientific evidence that the health of humans and the natural world are fundamentally interconnected. We can create wealth for our communities by repairing and protecting nature, by shifting our economy towards a regenerative and sustainable one, and by creating systems of care that respect the inherent dignity and value of every human being and of nature.

Advance equity and justice through repairing past harm. It is possible because the same ideas, values, systems, and institutions driving the climate crisis are also driving and exacerbating other forms of systemic oppression and violence. They intersect, and we have a responsibility to each other and future generations to uproot these systems of harm and replace them with systems of care and regenerative sustainability. When we divest from these systems of harm and redefine for ourselves how our government and economy can be structured to meet our collective needs, we create pathways for repairing generations of past harm. We get to reparations for Indigenous and Black people. This is how we build a future we all deserve.
VALUES & PRINCIPLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL GREEN NEW DEAL IN THE SOUTH

Invest in transformative solutions that match the urgency and severity of this crisis. We are in a climate emergency and simply do not have time to incrementally reform systems that are failing us - that have been failing some of us for a very long time. Transformative change means shifting the core philosophies of the underlying social and economic systems. We must adhere to the widely-accepted scientific guidance that global GHG emissions must be reduced to net-zero by mid-century in order to have a 50% chance to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. For better chances, we must move even faster.

Reject the privatization of natural resources. The inherent value of humans and the natural world cannot be monetized and privatized. Our extractive and exploitive economy has created a false choice between protecting health and the environment and creating wealth. We reject this destructive dichotomy and move from a place of abundance and regeneration.

No Sacrifice Zones. Not everyone is currently sharing in the costs of an extractive and polluting economy. Some communities, particularly poor and communities of color, disproportionately bear the burden of the environmental and health impacts. We must commit to solutions that do not continue this harmful and unjust practice. Solutions must minimize harm and distribute fairly the costs and benefits. Achieving fairness after generations of past harm requires us to include climate reparations as part of the solution. Communities that have become sacrifice zones should be prioritized for repair and economic opportunities in Green New Deal policies. This value also extends to workers and local economies that depend on the industries that need to be phased out or shifted. We must ensure that workers and communities have what they need to weather the transition and position them to benefit from a green economy. We reject the practice of pitting workers and environmental justice communities against each other even in the transition. We value community health and well-being. All communities have a basic human right to a safe place to live, work and play with clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, fresh food to eat, healthy, good-paying jobs, a stable climate and access to unspoiled nature. Equal rights under the law must include the right for every individual to live and thrive, without pollution and ecological devastation.
PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE SOUTH

In the following section, we outline the key priority areas that must be included as part of a Green New Deal for Southern Communities. They are energy, water, forests and land, economy and labor, and democracy. Each of these priority areas have elements that necessarily intersect and thus, should not be thought of as separate issues but rather critical parts of a holistic approach to addressing the climate crisis. Each subsection provides an overview of the issues (and intersecting issues) related to the priority area and the fundamental demands articulated by Southern communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis. These are the solutions that we declare are necessary to create material changes for our communities while protecting and preparing for the current climate reality and advancing the necessary shifts to stop it from reaching catastrophic levels.

ENERGY ISSUES

The majority of the US existing energy infrastructure exists in the South and thus, a just transition is not possible without including Southern workers and communities. Governments must do a better job of supporting workers and communities as the nation moves away from fossil fueled energy to clean, renewable energy. We are witnessing in coal towns across the South what happens to communities and workers when an industry collapses without a funded transition plan. Communities are left with polluted land and water, and workers burdened with serious health issues and few job prospects all while corporations extract as much money as they can from the remaining assets of these companies. A just transition requires that we center communities and workers, not corporate greed and profits, and advance energy democracy.

Our region is home to high levels of corruption, and the relationship between Public Service Commissions and utility monopolies is blocking energy innovation. The for-profit, investor owned utility companies in the region have significant political influence in the South (i.e., companies giving campaign money to the officials that are supposed to regulate the businesses). Additionally, Southern utility companies, such as (but not limited to) Southern Power and Duke Energy have higher profit margins than other utilities in the nation, and yet they spend the least on energy efficiency programs. These powerful entities are refusing to transition to clean energy quickly and aren’t divesting from fossil fuels fast enough. They are able to continue to do so in large part because of their stranglehold on our state and local politics.
**The clean energy divide is real.** It is a product of deliberate policies that systematically block access to capital for those who bear the highest burden of energy and health costs associated with pollution of dirty energy. Most of the persistent poverty counties in the U.S. are in the South, and low-income households are systematically disqualified from affordable loans for home energy upgrades with judgments that they are not creditworthy. In addition, the federal investment tax credit for solar power has effectively excluded low-income households from a path to ownership and will continue to do so until the tax credit is reformed to be paid directly rather than through tax filings. Also, lack of incentivizing policies, like renewable portfolio standards, net metering, and community solar makes accessing affordable solar power immensely difficult in the South, especially for poor communities, and although the South has enormous solar potential, most Southern states rank in the bottom 50% of solar energy usage.

**The energy sector is one of the biggest polluters of greenhouse gases and other toxic chemicals.** The South is home to three of the top five greenhouse gas polluters in the country. Current energy infrastructure and waste disposal is harming marginalized communities and vital ecosystems. Coal ash sites (such as the cases of Kentucky, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia), oil spills in the Gulf (which impact Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida), pipelines endangering Indigenous lands, and nuclear waste (like in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) are catastrophic to the air, water, and soil of the region and to the health of fenceline communities.
Southern communities overwhelmingly face an energy burden. Even with the lowest electricity prices, the average utility bills in the South are among the highest of any region in the country. A significant percentage of Southerners live in energy inefficient houses with poor insulation or older homes. This fact threatens the health of households that are impacted by poor indoor air quality and industrial air pollution and will have deadly consequences for households that are unable to afford A/C or heat in extreme weather as the climate crisis worsens. There is weak, or lack of, legislation that promotes energy efficiency, and safe affordable housing. Landlords have no incentive to pay for the housing upgrades that lower energy costs. Because a majority of low-income households are renters, we must address this issue.


At a glance Energy Insecurity Statistics:

- 15.4 million households (35%) report experiencing any energy insecurity.
- 7.5 million households (17%) have received disconnection or stop service notices.
- 5 million households (11%) have had to keep temperature at unhealthy levels because of the cost of energy.
- Black Americans pay more for their energy than any other group in the United States. The legacy of residential segregation continues to exclude communities of color from healthy and affordable housing.
Remove obstacles barring frontline and environmental justice communities from access to energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy. We must address the disproportionate energy burden of low-income families and communities, particularly frontline communities by creating incentives and establishing programs that make all homes for renters and homeowners safer, more energy efficient and climate resilient while protecting housing affordability and ensuring that gentrification does not result from it. Policy incentives and programs such as renewable portfolio standards, net metering policies, community solar, expanding energy efficiency and weatherization programs, and creating equitable financing solutions would encourage renewable energy growth and technological innovation. Policies also need to ensure affordability as upgrades to homes are made to keep people and families from being priced out of their own homes and communities.

Advance local and community control of energy production and distribution. More than 10 million people in the rural South already have an ownership stake and a right to vote on Board members to govern the utility company that serves them. Most of these rural electric cooperatives are financed by the federal government, even electric cooperatives that do not assure fair elections, open meetings, and other basic democratic governance practices. Democratizing rural electric cooperatives is essential to assuring democratic member control, which is one of the principles of cooperatives. Local communities should own and control their energy and benefit from the job and entrepreneurship opportunities. Local control in rural and low-income communities can stimulate much needed economic growth. Community owned micro-solar grids could provide energy stability and decrease the energy burden for frontline communities. Incentivizing rooftop solar, instead of relying on large utility-based solar farms would also reduce land use.

No more investment in extractive energy systems and infrastructure. We define extractive as fossil fuels, nuclear, waste to incineration, and biomass. We must rapidly decarbonize the energy sector and transition to clean renewable energy. All planned fossil fuel and other dirty energy projects must be halted (fracking, pipeline architecture, etc.), and fossil fuel plants should be decommissioned.
Invest in all cost effective energy upgrades to homes and buildings on inclusive terms. Every utility commission and oversight board must approve access to all cost effective building energy upgrades on inclusive terms, regardless of income, credit score, or renter status. Efficiency investments are a priority to reduce energy burden. Also, furnaces and water heaters using fracked gas must be rapidly replaced everywhere with electric heat pumps without increasing costs for low-income households. Millions of smart chargers for electric vehicles must be financed and installed on inclusive terms sooner than auto companies stop making fossil fueled cars. These upgrades should also not price people and families out of their own homes and communities.

Avoid false solutions such as carbon pricing, primarily investing in carbon capture (rather than reducing carbon), utility-only controlled renewables, biomass, and loans with interest charges for energy efficiency and renewables. False solutions prolong transition, sacrifice one community for another, exclude vulnerable and impacted communities from accessing and benefiting from transitioning to green economy and climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Break up utility generation monopolies. Allowing all new utility-scale renewable generation to be publicly owned would add competition to utility companies, stirring economic growth, facilitate a timely just transition from fossil fueled energy, and break up investor owned utility influence in energy decisions.
**ENERGY DEMANDS**

“True energy democracy means that every American has a choice of how their energy needed to illuminate and power their home is delivered. It means people power, it means Democracy!” -- Rev. Michael Malcolm, Alabama Interfaith Power & Light

Accelerate retirement of fossil fueled assets financed by the federal government on the condition of funds for bill relief and clean energy investment. Non-profit utilities with billions of dollars of federal loans for fossil fueled power plants should have the opportunity to retire and replace them. Like federally insured loans forgiven for small businesses who have committed the funds to national interests like paying employees during the pandemic, federal Hardship Loans to non-profit utilities should be forgiven when funds are used for bill relief and investment in clean energy solutions on inclusive terms.

Hold fossil fuel companies accountable for public health and environmental degradation costs. Utilities and fossil fuel industries should provide the funding necessary for cleaning up polluted areas and communities. We must impose and enforce regulations to ensure these companies pay their fair share of the harm they have caused to the health of our communities and the environment. Paying their fair share includes paying for clean-up costs and stranded assets without shifting costs to customers. Rate payers should not have to pay for the rate hikes investor owned utilities impose for their stranded assets, such as abandoned coal plants, and gas pipelines. Accountability must NOT include a carbon tax that prolongs our dependence on fossil fuels and creates opportunities for fossil fuel companies and politicians to further divide our communities over the climate crisis and the need for a just transition.

Provide fully-funded, robust education and representation services to the general public in rate cases determined by utility commissions to ensure community involvement and promote equity. Many Southern communities are overburdened with intersecting and compounding injustices that create barriers for civic engagement and fair representation. We can remedy this by making investments that enable communities to fully and adequately participate and represent their interests.
Throughout history, humans have built communities and civilizations around water, and we will continue to do so. However, the climate crisis and the political and economic drivers that underpin it are bringing about a crisis of water in the United States and globally. Our water is polluted. Fresh water is depleting faster than nature can replenish it, and too many communities don’t have access to safe drinking water. This is clearly not a system that values water as necessary for our survival. Water is a shared resource for people, not a commodity for profit and unregulated use by large corporations. We must recognize that the cost and harms of inaction greatly outweigh what it will cost to mitigate and adapt in response to the worsening climate crisis.

**Sea level rise and flooding are huge problems along coastal areas in the South.** The climate crisis is creating a situation in which water is a threat to the health and preservation of our communities and exacerbating existing social injustices. As the sea level rises and climate events such as hurricanes worsens, our communities increasingly become inundated with water.

**Common practices for community and economic development exacerbate flooding.** Historically speaking, for the past two centuries, city planners have walled off and drained water to build more communities in a way that exacerbates flooding while perpetuating social and health issues. This is especially problematic in the context of the worsening climate crisis.

**Our water resources are polluted and poorly managed and regulated.** Agriculture, forestry, and industrial activities account for about 90 percent of water we use. This system will not last, particularly as the population grows and climate events such as droughts, forest fires, and extreme weather increase and worsen. The energy, agriculture, forest, manufacturing, and petrochemical industries are also responsible for polluting our water. For example, ground water pollution from coal fired power plants is severe, particularly in the Southeast. Utilities have produced more than 100 million tons of coal burning wastes, including ash and scrubber sludge each year for several decades now. Nearly half of the nation’s rivers and one third of lakes are polluted. Clearly, the EPA has not done enough to ensure our water is safe. This fact is made worse in the South where state agencies charged with enforcement of CWA are weak and underfunded. Additionally, because CWA does not cover water quantity, most Southern states have weak regulations or not at all in regards to water quantity.
Our water and sewer infrastructure is unsafe, unaffordable, and crumbling. Addressing this issue, particularly in rural communities, will require some degree of federal investment in infrastructure. For many Southern communities drinking water access is costly or often unhealthy. In rural Martin County, Kentucky, for example, nearly 50% of people cannot afford their water bills. Many residents are also getting brown, unsafe water from their tap or not water at all due to widespread water line breaks. This issue across the South is so dire that the federal government should declare an emergency and immediately provide disaster assistance (either in-kind or cash) for those who can’t afford their water or are receiving no or unsafe drinking water.

The failure to update and invest in water and sewer infrastructure and technologies threatens water quality as untreated wastewater is dumped into our rivers and oceans. It is an issue of access throughout the South, particularly in poor rural communities and communities of color. Jails and prison are also often overlooked. Mississippi and Alabama prisons, for example, are under investigation for inhumane living conditions including serious and life threatening water and sewer violations. We need to think outside the box on how to deal with our wastewater. For example, areas in Black Belt are environmentally and infrastructurally vulnerable to improper wastewater treatment because the soil doesn’t perk appropriately for septic areas. Even when the money is available and/or residents express their health and safety concerns, such as the case of Timmonsville and Florence South Carolina, investments are not made because local decision makers do not make it a priority. Many elderly and low-income residents in rural communities get their water from wells because they cannot afford to connect to their county’s rural water system. When flooding occurs their electric pumps often stop working leaving them with little or no water to drink. Flood waters also contaminate wells with herbicides, pesticides, and effusion from septic tanks. They must have their water tested and know how to chlorinate their wells before final testing to ensure that the water is safe to drink again. This additional cost burden is especially difficult for those that already cannot afford the regular maintenance.

Climate related gentrification and displacement due to flooding, rising sea-levels, and hurricanes is becoming a huge problem. Climate change effects are exacerbating gentrification because richer people can afford to move away from the physical impacts of flooding, rising sea-levels, and hurricanes. Communities of color and low-income communities are more likely to live in climate-vulnerable areas, or be pushed out to these dangerous areas. Valencia Gunder coined the term “climate gentrification” as a way to understand and explain what was happening to her neighborhood in Miami, Florida. Climate gentrification can occur before a storm as development patterns shift to higher ground as in the case of her community in Miami or after a storm where communities are displaced as a result of the devastation and the redevelopment decisions that price communities out of their neighborhoods as in the case of New Orleans.
Take a holistic approach to protect water quality and water quantity. Southern communities, like all others communities throughout the world are connected to each other by water. The Jefferson-Mississippi-Missouri River system, the world’s fourth largest river basin, for example collects water from over 40% of the U.S. before draining into the Gulf of Mexico. States throughout the Southeast are connected through a shared watershed. A holistic approach takes into account that what is done upstream impacts water quality downstream, and the depletion of water resources in one part of the country threatens water quantity elsewhere. We need policies and management of our water resources based on geographical considerations of water connectivity. We must embrace a paradigm shift in the way communities live with water and our solutions must be equitable, diverse, and inclusive of the communities impacted the most.

Invest in equitable water and sewer infrastructure. Water and sewer infrastructure must be a top priority. Money needs to be made available to counties so that those with wells can be connected to the rural water and critical infrastructure upgrades and necessary technological advancements can be made to ensure everyone has access to safe, clean drinking water and our ground and waterways do not become polluted.

End the privatization of our water and make corporations pay their fair share. Water is a valuable collective resource. We need to rethink how we manage, distribute, and pay for it especially in light of the worsening climate crisis to ensure every person has access to safe and clean drinking water.
Pursue pumping stations as a solution to sea level rise. There are two solutions that are often put forward to counteract the climate impact we call sea level rise, construction of a sea wall/levee and the installation of pumping stations. However, one consequence is that water contained by the sea wall/levee is simply displaced downriver, where rural and low-income community residents often live. To combat this, flooding can be reduced in rural communities by installing pumping stations and setting up a core of community workers who will ensure that all of the drainage ditches are cleaned out and maintained. Pumping stations have the ability to remove water from the flooded area. To ensure the pump stations do not overflow, there should be continuous building and maintaining of the machines.

Advance green infrastructure solutions. Green infrastructure reduces and treats stormwater at its source while delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits. We need policies and programs that ensure local and state government prioritize green infrastructure solutions as part of their development activities.

Protect biodiversity and repair harm. We can protect the quality and quantity of our water by protecting our soil, forests, wetlands, and the biodiversity of our natural environment. We must repair natural, forested buffers, create buffer zones to stop clear cutting along rivers and streams, and implement more sustainable agricultural and development practices. It is critical that as we shift away from a fossil fuel based economy and more sustainable agriculture practices that we strengthen existing laws and enforcement to protect our water. This includes removing exemptions from the requirements of the CWA. Agriculture and forestry, for example, benefit from these exemptions.

Combat climate gentrification. We must combat climate gentrification by affirmatively furthering fair, affordable, safe, and accessible housing linked to reliable public transportation. We can protect home ownership by providing material resources to families—especially communities of color and other vulnerable communities, for elevating and flood-proofing homes.

“We have the opportunity to make truly transformative shifts in the way we manage our water resources to ensure that we protect clean water for all people, while also protecting the natural waterways on which we all depend.”
-- Martha Hunter, Alabama River Alliance
The Southeast is unique in that it is home to 40% of the forests in the United States. It is imperative that we preserve forests in order to protect frontline communities and combat climate change. The voices of those bearing the brunt of the impacts of the forest industry are consistently marginalized in favor of the profit and private interests of corporations, forestry professionals and landowners. It’s time to transform the forest economy across the rural coastal plain of the South to build greater economic equity, restore community health and enhance climate resiliency in vulnerable communities.

The South is the world’s largest wood-producing region, with a rate and scale of forest destruction from industrial logging that is estimated to be four times that of South American Rainforests. Tens of millions of acres of Southern forests, some of the most biodiverse forests in the world, have been converted to industrial monoculture pine plantations that are sprayed with toxic herbicides and fertilizers. Remaining natural forests are logged routinely, leaving behind degraded carbon stocks, natural flood protection, water filtration and other important life-supporting services.

Large paper mills, wood pellet mills and other wood product manufacturing facilities emit significant amounts of air, noise, and water pollution. Pollution impacts the health of surrounding communities and factory workers, particularly those working in paper mills. Logging trucks add to the pollution and tear up rural roads creating a safety hazard in rural low-income areas that lack public funding for road maintenance. Tax breaks for industry contribute to this problem. Logging consistently ranks as the most dangerous job in America.

Industrial forestry and deforestation deeply impact biodiversity. Deforestation is the loss of forest to development, or agriculture while industrial forestry is the large scale logging and regeneration of trees for wood products. Both of these practices result in loss of habitat for key animal species that entire ecosystems rely on. Loss of biodiversity leads to catastrophes such as pandemics, less food production, less medicine production, and less climate resiliency as a whole. Our survival depends on biodiversity, and if forest destruction rates continue, scientists predict we would lose several hundred species of plants and animals a day.
The wood pellet biomass industry has accelerated across the South in recent years, with disproportionate forest, climate and community impacts in environmental justice communities. There is an alliance between fossil fuel and biofuel industries. Like other polluting industries, wood pellet mills are disproportionately being sited in low income communities of color already overburdened with pollution. In the past decade, the South has become the world’s largest exporter of wood pellets to fuel power stations in Europe under the guise of “renewable” energy. The wood pellet industry is touted by industry and government as providing “green, renewable energy jobs” despite scientific evidence that burning trees for electricity will accelerate, not mitigate climate change and that pollution from wood pellet manufacturing poses significant health risks to nearby residents.

The destruction of forests is a major driver of climate change, has negative climate resiliency impacts and exacerbates existing structural inequality. Logging, including in wetland forests along rivers continues unabated and largely unregulated. Communities bearing the brunt of the impacts of these industries are the same communities experiencing extreme flooding linked to climate change. Overall, deforestation and forest degradation from industrial forestry causes significant carbon emissions, exacerbates flooding, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Large-scale clearcutting of forests, including along rivers and in wetlands has degraded natural flood protection and water purification functions across large watersheds throughout the region.
“We will not be able to solve the problem of industrial logging in the South unless we center the voices of people who bear the brunt of the impacts of this industry.” -- Danna Smith, Dogwood Alliance

**Industrial regulations and enforcement are not working.** Influence of forest and agricultural industry/developers has resulted in their exemption from many regulations. Additionally, the permitting process is inadequate to address the health, environmental injustices and climate issues that arise. Unregulated growth of wood pellet mills, pipelines, industrial agriculture (including Concentrated Animal Feedlot Operations - CAFOs) and other dirty, extractive industries has exploded across the region, and doesn’t give the land and forests enough time to recover.

**Land use policies contribute to racial and environmental injustices.** Forest policy has largely been designed to ensure economic returns for forest landowners and an abundant, low-cost supply of raw material for wood manufacturing facilities. Most forestland in the South is in private ownership, and there is a long history of unjust policies that have excluded Black, Native American, and people of color from owning and retaining land. With only a small fraction of land in public ownership, many of these rural communities also lack access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Additionally, the forest industry doesn’t necessarily add jobs to the frontline communities impacted by pollution. The rural Black Belt is at the epicenter of industrial logging throughout the South. Communities are divided as a result of choosing between health and jobs. The costs and benefits are not equally shared. For example, green spaces tend to be available to richer and whiter communities, while frontline communities are left with abused land.

**Industrial scale agriculture is a significant driver of the climate crisis.** Industrial agriculture accounts for about 30% of greenhouse gas emissions as a result of farming and grazing methods widely used by the industry, the deforestation and destruction of habitats, and acidification of our oceans through agricultural waste, pesticides, and fertilizers. Monoculture and other unsustainable farming practices deplete the soil. Depletion of our soil has affected local rain cycles contributing to increased droughts that will only worsen as temperatures increase. Farm animals, particularly cows, significantly contribute to methane releases that are known to accelerate rising temperatures. The acidification of our oceans depletes their ability to absorb carbon dioxide.
**No new expansions.** There should be no more expansion of polluting industries and real estate, commercial, and industrial development that threatens environmental justice communities and protected lands and water supply, such as what is happening Everglades in Florida. Existing polluting facilities in environmental justice communities should be phased out.

**Biomass, biofuel and wood pellets should not be considered renewable energy.** Protecting existing natural forests from logging and deforestation is the most effective climate mitigation strategy regarding forests and should be prioritized. Replanting and restoring forests is also vital; however, in doing so we must avoid monocultures and minimize invasive species. Investments in land protection in rural communities should go through local community controlled funds, not into the hands of government or traditional land conservation organizations. The expansion of community owned forests and other public lands that are protected from industrial extraction is critical to climate mitigation, resiliency and building healthy communities. Protecting and restoring forests in areas that have suffered the most at the hands of industrial extraction must be a priority to achieve equity. Additionally, all clean energy solutions must ensure that forests are preserved.

**Divest from corporate industrial farms and factories and advance localized and sustainable agriculture.** Sustainable farming practices with Indigenous knowledge should be an utmost priority, and unsustainable agriculture should be banned. Invest in small, localized farms as part of local and regional sustainable food economy. Remove and redirect tax subsidies from the agricultural industry toward incentivizing and educating communities, especially in food deserts, to grow their own food (e.g., rooftop gardens) to address food insecurity and decrease carbon emissions from transportation.
Strengthen and enforce existing regulation. There should be a reevaluation of the current permitting process that allows for automatic permits, disproportionately resides in environmental justice communities and fails to consider climate and forest impacts. Transparently reporting on and setting carbon emission reduction standards for the forest industry is vital to achieving the rapid phase down of carbon emissions necessary to avoid climate chaos. Furthermore, exemptions of forest and agricultural industries should be removed. Clearcutting of forests along rivers and in wetlands should not be allowed. It is also necessary to reject policies that result in the commodification of nature or perpetuation of economic disparity (i.e. Carbon markets).

Invest in improving health outcomes in EJ Communities. This would include community and worker education and transparent disclosure about the health impacts of polluting industries. Also investments are needed to ensure these communities have access to affordable and quality healthcare as well as parks and other such greenspaces.

Advance green job creation and forest industry transition. Remove tax subsidies from the forest industry and forest landowners except for those that provide economic incentives to transition away from polluting mills and industrial forest extraction. Any incentives for landowners and companies for transition also need to be balanced with equitable tax and other direct financial and economic benefits to non-landowners and historically marginalized community members, including investments in green jobs such as outdoor recreation and forest restoration, that support keeping forests standing. In addition, governments need to research transitioning to smaller-scale forest product production models, including assessing alternative raw materials to wood in the production process.

Advance land reparations and environmental justice. Alleviate taxes on heritage property for Black and Indigenous land retention. Provide funds for new public land acquisition to increase access for those who are historically marginalized. Prioritize Indigenous and elder knowledge of land in the management of public land. Clean up all toxic sites that have been polluted by these industries. For example, there are thousands of sites of land and water damaged by coal mining that continue to pollute communities throughout Appalachia. Cleaning up abandoned coal mine lands could serve as a source of jobs in impacted communities. Fund equitable and just relocation of communities near polluting industries. Also, provide funds for relocation and home adaptation for communities as necessary in high risk flood zones.
For too long, Southern workers have been given the false choice between their health and the environment and living wage jobs. A just transition is not only necessary to stop the worsening climate crisis but an opportunity to create millions for living wage jobs that don’t threaten our health and the health of our communities and restores and repairs past harm to the environment and public health. It is critical, however, that as we transition that Southern workers are able to reap the benefits, particularly environmental justice communities and those currently working in these industries (i.e. fossil fuel, petrochemical and utility workers). Additionally, we know that other industries (i.e. farmworkers, fisherfolks, retail and hospitality workers) will be impacted by the worsening climate crisis as extreme heat and weather events worsen, sea levels continue to rise, and the social and economic impacts of these threats exacerbates existing structural inequalities.

“The situation we are in is rooted in exploitation, capitalism and greed. As we move from a fossil fuel economy to a clean energy economy, we need to make sure we are not replicating these same systems. We cannot go to the usual suspects. We cannot go to utilities and corporate America to lead the transition. We need community led solutions.” -- Rev. Leo Woodberry, Kingdom Living Temple & Justice First

The extractive polluting economy that centers profits over people is causing the climate crisis. Our current fossil fueled and extractive economy is unsustainable and fails to provide workers, families, and communities with the means to thrive. It relies on resources that will eventually run out, such as natural resources like land and forests, fossil fuels, water, etc. and exploitive structural policies and practices that endanger the health and well-being of workers, communities, and the whole planet. Our economic and political systems are structured to advance and protect the concentration of wealth and power. Corporate profit interests are incompatible with a sustainable economy and planet.

Every aspect of our economy will be deeply impacted by the climate crisis. Economic sectors like food production, tourism, outdoor recreation, human health, labor productivity, businesses, infrastructure, and more are extremely vulnerable to weather disasters, droughts, wildfires, flooding, and pollution, threatening job security and safety. This is particular problematic in a economy that is already shrinking due to outsourcing labor and advancements in technology and where protections for workers and communities are weak and rarely enforced.
There is not enough support for small businesses. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses are not being supported by government agencies and do not have the funding or infrastructure needed to sustainably transition. Minority and small businesses are hurting during COVID-19 and not getting the relief they need. Racism and privileging corporate interests, rather than protecting workers, is prevalent in relief packages. Furthermore, clean-up and procurement contracts are not going to local and minority owned businesses. They usually go out of the state businesses or large corporations. Minority businesses often lack capital resources to compete for contracts.

There are weak labor laws throughout the South. COVID-19 is revealing the lengths to which corporations fail to provide safe working environments to workers nationally, and this is especially true in the South where there are weak labor protections and political leaders pushing anti-union agendas. Many Southern states advance a “pro-business” agenda that weakens environmental regulations and worker protections while providing tax dollars and tax breaks to subsidize companies that fail to create living wage jobs and/or too few jobs and are polluting the environment and driving the climate crisis. Overall, the ranking for labor protections and wage policies, such as mandates for equal pay, union-organizing, living wage, project labor agreements, paid sick leave, rights of public employees, etc. is extremely low for the region. In fact, states like Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina score the lowest in the entire country.

Southern states have weak social safety nets. Despite being a region with the greatest number of people living in poverty, many Southern states and local governments have cut funding for critical services. Especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the economy worsens and unemployment rates soar, states are gearing up to make up for budget shortfalls by making deep cuts in public infrastructure and social safety nets. This means even less money for roads, public education, water and sewer infrastructure, libraries, hospitals, and health insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits and more.

Industrial collapse threatens communities and workers. Many communities are concerned about the transition away from fossil fuels, and rightly so, if what is happening in Appalachia is any indication of what to expect. Appalachia is the first in the nation to experience full scale divestment as the demand for coal declines. These once prosperous communities are being devastated as the vulture capitalists that exploit every opportunity to extract wealth from the remaining assets while leaving workers and communities with no economic prospects, a polluted environment, and a public health crisis. The uncertainty about the future and the high paying jobs so many workers have come to rely on to feed their families is bound to have material and psychological impacts on workers, families, and whole communities that simply can’t be quantified.
Invest in more sustainable and regenerative use and production of our natural resources. We can create millions of living wage jobs as we transform our energy, transportation, agricultural, manufacturing, construction industries to be more sustainable and regenerative. We can create millions of living wage jobs in production of renewable and clean energy, production of electric cars and other forms of transportation, cleaning up and repairing the mess the polluting economy has made, building climate resilient roads, bridges, levees, canals, pumping stations and safe, climate resilient and energy efficient homes and buildings, updating critical water and sewer, sustainable local food systems, management and protection of our natural resources, in innovative sustainable technologies, and education.

Shift the control of and wealth creation towards workers and communities. It is imperative that as we make shifts that we advance equity and justice. This means we need to rethink our approach to facilitating the creation of new markets. Business as usual will not do. We need to divest from the policies, programs, and fiscal incentives that support the existing extractive, polluting, and exploitative markets and invest in those that benefit small businesses, cooperatives, workers, and communities, particularly frontline communities. We need to prioritize local democratic and community/worker control of our resources and economy while repairing historical injustices and harm.

Guarantee living wages and access to healthcare. Living wage jobs and pay equity, access to healthcare and other benefits are necessary to ensure workers (including formerly incarcerated and people with disabilities), families, and whole communities have what they need to thrive in the face of a worsening climate.
**ECONOMY & LABOR DEMANDS**

**Strengthen and enforce existing labor protections and protect workers’ right to economic self-determination.** As the climate crisis worsens, we will need to expand existing labor protections to account for a more hostile and unpredictable climate that will necessarily impact the size of the workforce and the work environments, particularly outdoor jobs. We need to go beyond existing laws and protect workers' right to participate directly in company governance through codetermination, cooperatives, and other configurations. Income inequality is rooted in who governs and who owns production. When a worker contributes labor to create value-added jointly with others, then they have a right to participate in how that value-added is produced and distributed. We must recast the firm to equalize power and ownership, so that our production process equitably and efficiently serves everyone. This means pursuing policies that equalize capital ownership—such as Inclusive Ownership Funds, a Social Wealth Fund, and policies that support worker-cooperatives—and that democratize the workplace in addition to the elimination of “right to work” and “at will” employment laws and other barriers to safe employment, including the formerly incarcerated and labor organizing.

**Provide training and other resources to ensure a just transition where no community is left behind.** We need to have sector re-training (for fossil fuel, agricultural, construction, auto-manufacturing, and timber jobs) to green jobs. These workers and frontline communities should be prioritized for the investments. Federal funding that would be used for fossil fuel subsidies could pay for this. We must leverage existing institutions such as colleges and high schools to train for the necessary new green job-workforce and significantly increase funding for local organizations that are more accountable to the community and workers in frontline and vulnerable communities that colleges are not able to reach. We must also provide other transition support, such as child care, job/wage guarantees, community development funding, and healthcare for workers whose health and lives have been devastated by these industries, such as miners with black lung disease in Central Appalachia.

**Expand the social safety net.** In addition to training, we need to ensure transitioning workers have what they need to live - food, water, housing, transportation, etc. We must ensure that all people - children, students, unemployed people, elders, and people with disabilities - are worthy of support because our value is not measured by our contribution to GDP. We must ensure that everyone has access to education (student debt forgiveness), healthcare (healthcare for all), safe, affordable and climate resilient housing, transportation, equitable access to broadband internet, safe and healthy food, clean water, and healthy environment and recreation to guarantee a resilient economy.
DEMOCRACY ISSUES

Our democratic institutions have protected and advanced the extractive polluting economy. Corporate control of our government is a threat to our very survival. We need to expand our democracy particularly to those most and worst impacted by intersecting and compounding crises and injustices. We need to transform our democracy to make it more accountable and transparent to the people and to reign in the concentration of wealth and power that has caused so much harm to our communities.

“Expanding democracy must be part of the solution. Frontline communities must be listened to and have the ability to self-determine what is best for them.”

--- Alex Easdale, Southeast Climate Energy Network

The people most negatively impacted are excluded from the government decision-making processes. The decisions politicians make about where to build, what to build, and how to spend our fiscal resources are greatly influenced by corporate interests rather than the concerns and needs of people. Even when impacted communities participate in the legally required public process, their concerns are often not a factor in the final decisions. This creates a sense of hopelessness and apathy toward governance that further undermines our democracy.

Disaster recovery money never fully goes to those who need it most. There are many examples, including Katrina and the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion, of how federal money benefited large and usually out of state corporations more than it did local businesses and workers; how it was redirected away from those who needed it most (those that have still not recovered) and spent on economic development pet projects and/or gentrifying of low-income communities, and in some cases even stolen.

Climate disasters threaten democratic participation. What happens to voter turnout when people are displaced due to flooding, hurricanes, and sea level rise? The South has a history of voter suppression that continues today. Southern states have passed laws and implemented policies and practices that make it harder for people to register and vote. And it is likely to get worse as a result of portions of the Voting Rights Act being overturned. Just this year, storm damage forced polling places to relocate in Southeast Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Laura, and two million people were without power just a few days before the election because of Hurricane Zeta. Republican leaders leverage the pandemic to push a false narrative about voter fraud that provides justification to voter suppression laws in the South.
There is a lack of understanding and/or political will for addressing the climate crisis. The climate crisis has become a politicized issue with increasing polarization among the political parties over the last decade. Most of the Southern states are controlled by Republicans who in large part either deny or refuse to take the climate crisis seriously and are advancing policies and fiscal priorities that make our communities less safe in the face of the climate crisis. It should be said, however, that while addressing the climate crisis is part of the Democratic platform, there are many elected officials within the party that have ties to fossil fuel industries and advance market based that are harmful policies that reproduce and exacerbate existing inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. There is also lack of knowledge and authority among local elected officials about the severity of the climate crisis and the kinds of solutions they can advance. Southern states often use preemption and home rule laws to circumvent the ability of local governments to advance climate, environmental and other equity based policies.

All levels of government are ill equipped to handle the increasing migration and movement of people from within and outside our borders as a result of the climate crisis. We have witnessed over the last four years the inhumane nature of the US immigration policies. During Hurricane Katrina (2005), over a million people across the Gulf Coast region were temporarily displaced. Hundreds of thousands of families never returned to their homes, the majority of them Black, Brown, and poor. Displaced people and families were called refugees despite not crossing international borders. This label was meant to identify them as the other, the victim, people who are not supposed to be there in order to justify barriers for economic recovery, inclusive social integration, and the healing required for climate disasters and climate trauma. The number of people fleeing to this country and crossing state borders will continue to increase as the global climate crisis worsens. The United Nation predicts that by 2050, there could be as many as 1 billion people displaced due to the climate crisis. We must care about how people who are crossing borders today are treated as the reality of the climate crisis forces more and more people to cross domestic and international borders for safety.

Local and state decisions regarding budget shortfalls are harming communities. Often budget shortfalls result in cuts in critical infrastructure and social services that make communities less resilient. Other decisions to stimulate the economy and expand the tax base usually involve economic investments in low wage job creation, such as a building of a sports stadium to fuel tourism, expansion of polluting facilities, such as the expansion of the petrochemical industry that is taking place in the Gulf South, and the building of jails and prisons as in the case of Appalachian region where the coal industry is collapsing.
DEMOCRACY DEMANDS

Divest from institutions and policies that harm communities and invest in healthy, sustainable, and climate resilient communities. Policies and fiscal expenditures that prioritize corporate interests, privatization of public resources, and the expansion of policing and prisons harm our communities. We need to divert funding away from these and instead prioritize equitable investments in critical infrastructure, such as water and sewer, public education, workforce development for green jobs, public transportation, and safe, affordable housing, healthcare, and trauma informed community based mental healthcare. Investments should prioritize local and living wage job creation, cooperatives, and small minority businesses. They should also be established through community led participatory decision making processes and with community led oversight.

Make registering to vote and voting easier. Remove barriers to voting. Require same day and automatic voter registration, mail in ballots, and repeal voter ID laws. Upgrade voting technology. Ensure fair and just redistricting.

Require climate education curriculum in schools. Our young people need to be prepared for the climate reality that they are inheriting. We are doing them a disservice by not providing them with education about the climate crisis and the political and economic transformations and green technology solutions needed to address it.
Advance human rights based immigration and refugee policies. We must enforce policies that acknowledge the humanity, dignity and value of all refugees and to celebrate their courage, resilience, and contributions in the fleeing of their homeland and the assimilation of some place new, where they are too often met with hostility and are penalized through labor exploitation and criminalization. We must establish a new social attitude and see migration as a benefit and as a necessity for our global survival, not as a threat to our individual privileges. We must get ready for the realities of migration caused by the worsening climate crisis. Key to our survival will be our ability to care for refugees. We must perfect our process of integrating migrating families as we build a democracy for all people. All people, especially refugees deserve safe housing, healthy food, clean water, healthcare and the freedom from over policing and exploitation of their labor no matter who they are and where they are from.

Advance equitable disaster planning and recovery. As with other policies and programs, disaster planning and recovery must be driven by community led participatory processes and create community oversight to ensure accountability and transparency of implementation. Federal government must educate and resource local governments to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate. Ensure that rebuilding advances sustainability and green infrastructure, stimulates local economies, and creates safer, energy efficient weatherized homes and buildings while protecting affordability and ensuring that communities that want to stay and rebuild can and do.
The Southern Communities for a Green New Deal (SC4GND) program is an extension of Southeast Climate and Energy Network’s (SCEN) ongoing work of climate justice in the South. Initially launched as a project of the US Climate Action Network (USCAN) in 2008, SCEN stands as the largest regional collaborative of clean energy and climate change advocates and organizations from twelve Southeastern states. SCEN was born from the need for climate and clean energy organizing in the South - realizing that only a strong network of coordinated national, regional, state and local organizations can transform the way the Southeast produces and uses energy, while advancing environmental justice and equity.

The vision, values, and demands within this policy platform serves an organizing tool for further alignment, coordination, and leadership development across the South. On behalf of the SCEN and the nearly 100 Southern leaders consulted in the writing of this policy platform, we invite you to sign-on to this platform, use it as a tool in your advocacy and organizing work, and join us in growing the Southern movement. to advance a Green New Deal reflects the uniqueness and needs of our region.