



Leading the Public into Emergency Mode

A New Strategy for the Climate Movement

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Imagine there is a fire in
your house.

What do you do?
What do you think about?

You do whatever you can to try to put out the fire or exit the house. You make a plan about how you can put out the fire, or how you can best exit the house.

Your senses are heightened, you are focused like a laser, and you put your entire self into your actions. You enter emergency mode.

The climate crisis is an unprecedented emergency. It is, far and away, the United States' top national security threat, public health threat, and moral emergency. Humanity is careening towards the deaths of billions of people, millions of species, and the collapse of organized civilization. States under severe climate stress, such as Syria, are already starting to fail, bringing chaos, violence, and misery to the region and political instability to Europe. America's political system is also starting to convulse as the two-party system is showing signs of fragility.

How we react to the climate crisis will shape centuries and millennia to come. Given the stakes, and the extremely short timetable, it is imperative that we strive to maximize the efficacy of our actions — from ourselves as individuals, from our nation, from the global community of nations, and from the organizations that are trying to avert this catastrophe.

In this paper, I will introduce the concept of “emergency mode” which is how individuals and groups function optimally during an existential or moral crisis — often achieving great feats

through intensely focused motivation. I will argue that the *goal of the climate movement must be to lead the public out of “normal” mode and into emergency mode.*

This has huge implications for the climate movement’s communication style, advocacy, and strategy. Because emergency mode is contagious, the best strategy is for climate activists and organizations to go into emergency mode themselves, and communicate about the climate emergency, the need for emergency mobilization, and the fact that *they are in emergency mode*, as clearly and emphatically as possible.



I founded and now direct a national grassroots organization called **The Climate Mobilization** (TCM) that is based on an understanding of emergency mode, as well as **the transformative power of climate truth**. We launched in late 2014 and began spreading the Pledge to Mobilize and advocating for WWII-scale climate mobilization at the People’s Climate March in New York City. We are still small and poorly funded, but we are growing all the time, and our supporters are immensely dedicated — they have entered emergency mode! They are busy starting and running TCM chapters across the country and planning for our upcoming **National Day of Action for Climate Mobilization** on July 10th. We have also been very successful in recruiting **elected leaders and candidates for elected office** to take the Pledge to Mobilize. In the last week alone 4 new candidates for US Congress have committed to championing a WWII-scale climate mobilization, including Tim Canova, who is running against Debbie Wasserman-Schultz in one of the most closely watched congressional races in the country.

This paper is based on a combination of theory and practice — I have researched social movements, flow states, and more, to develop the concept of emergency mode — and these ideas have been developed and refined through my experience in running TCM and attempting to communicate about the climate crisis to people from all walks of life. I will make specific suggestions for the climate movement in the second half of this paper. But first, we must understand emergency mode.

Emergency Mode: Optimal Functioning in an Existential (or Moral) Crisis

Most psychological and sociological writing about the climate crisis has warned climate “communicators” of the risks of triggering primitive and pathological responses to crisis: “fight or flight”, panic, and the devastation caused by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Because of these bleak portrayals, many political and organizational leaders have dared not convey the horrifying truth of the climate crisis, since they operate under the mistaken belief that the only response to emergencies is panicked chaos!

But aside from panic, individuals and groups can also respond to emergencies with reason, focus, dedication, and shocking success. Emergency mode is the mode of human psychological functioning that occurs when individuals or groups respond optimally to existential or moral emergencies. This mode of human functioning, markedly different from “normal” functioning— is characterized by *an extreme focus of attention and resources on working productively to solve the emergency*.

We are all, at times, confronted with emergency situations. Children, and adults who are overwhelmed by the situation for whatever reason, enter either panic mode, in which they act without thinking, or are paralyzed and unable to act. Children, for example, will often hide during house fires. However, healthy adults respond to emergencies by entering emergency mode.

| | Normal Mode | Emergency Mode |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Priorities | Many balanced priorities | Solving the crisis = One top priority |
| Resources | Distributed across priorities and saved for future. | Huge allocation of resources towards solution |
| Focus | Distributed across priorities | Laser-like focus |
| Self-esteem Source | Individual accomplishment | Contributing to the solution |

Emergency mode occurs when an individual or group faces an existential threat, *accepts* that there is a life-threatening emergency and *reorients* by:

1. Adjusting their hierarchy of priorities so that solving the emergency is the clear top priority
2. Deploying a huge amount of resources toward solving the crisis
3. Giving little priority to personal gratification and self-esteem enhancement for their own sake, and instead seeking them through engagement with the emergency. People seek to “do their part” to solve the crisis and build their skills to contribute more effectively.

Emergency mode is a fundamental departure from “normal” mode of functioning. In normal mode, the individual or group feels relatively safe and secure, does not recognize any immediate existential or major moral threats — either because there is none, or because they are in denial — and therefore:

1. Maintains a portfolio of priorities
2. Attempts to distribute focus and other resources wisely among them.
3. Gives considerable weight to personal gratification, enjoyment, and achievement

Long Emergencies

Usually emergencies take hours or days to resolve, but people can and do also enter long emergency modes that last for years. These “long emergencies” include diseases like cancer, which is life-threatening but not immediately curable, acute poverty, in which the person struggles daily with the emergency of meeting basic needs, and war. For these long emergencies, the business of normal life must be integrated into the emergency response. For doctors, nurses, paramedics, crisis counselors, hostage negotiators, firefighters, police officers, soldiers, and (hopefully) climate campaigners, emergency mode is a regular, on-going experience.

There is also *moral* emergency mode, when an issue—usually regarding freedom or equality—becomes elevated to the status of an existential threat. People in moral emergency

mode are the driving force behind most, if not all, successful social movements. These people have decided that nothing, not even survival, is more important than the struggle. They dedicate themselves to it fully and utilize all of their capabilities in the service of victory.

Emergency mode often involves a specific, particularly intense type of flow state. Flow is an “optimal state of consciousness where we feel our best and perform our best.” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the psychologist who pioneered the study of flow described it as:

Being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one...your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost.

In short emergencies such as a fire, individuals stay in an emergency flow state the entire time. If the individual is in long emergency mode, however, these emergency flow states are experienced frequently, but other elements of life, such as rest, recreation, and close relationships, are also maintained. Indeed, balancing one's intensive work on solving the emergency and all other activities is one of the most challenging elements of facing a long emergency.

On the other hand, living in emergency mode can be extremely rewarding. Flow states in general are sought after, and a key indicator of psychological health. People enjoy being fully engaged in activity — “in the zone” — utilizing their entire capacity, whether they are playing sports, performing musically, studying intensely, or responding to an emergency. As Csikszentmihalyi described the rewards of flow:

“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times...The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”

I have spoken with Emergency Room doctors, firefighters, and climate campaigners who report being hooked on the sense of purpose, feeling that they are useful, and the relief from self-involvement that their immersive work provides.

People must feel basically competent to handle the emergency in order to enter emergency mode. If people don't know what to do during an emergency, they may panic, despair, or resist going into emergency mode at all. This is why having structures such as a designated phone number to call in case of any emergency (9-1-1), or a designated place to go (the Emergency Room) during medical crises are so helpful—they provide clear steps for people

confronting emergencies, making it much easier for people to enter emergency mode. The more the climate movement can provide structures for people's engagement — clear directions and support for people who are ready to tackle the climate emergency — the more people will go into emergency mode. Effective, transparent leadership is also critical in enabling people to enter emergency mode. Confidence that leaders and decision makers are competently addressing questions of strategy and policy for the emergency mobilization allow participants to focus on their contribution.



Essential to long emergencies is the human capacity for dedication and commitment — the mind state that brings a person back, over and over, to the emergency issue despite inevitable interruptions and temptation to avoid the issue. It also takes a good deal of courage, and ability to stay calm under intense stress. The famous “Keep Calm and Carry On” posters from wartime United Kingdom addressed this challenge. We could translate them into this framework as meaning, “Avoid Panic Mode and Stay in Emergency Mode.”

Groups in Emergency Mode

In emergency mode, members of groups — such as organizations, or even whole countries — work productively together in a coordinated way to solve a crisis. The vast majority of people contribute their best effort and available resources. People fill different roles and take on complementary projects in order to ameliorate the crisis. While the profit motive and self-interested behavior are not eliminated in a long emergency, working for the common good to create solutions, rather than focusing on their own comfort or advantage, becomes the norm. People gain satisfaction and pride from helping the group or the wider emergency project, and they feel motivated, even driven to do so.

Humans evolved in tribes, and *group* success was vital to the survival of each individual. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt describes human nature as “90% chimpanzee and 10% bee” to illustrate our evolved, combination of social but self-interested (chimpanzees) and group-oriented behavior (bees).

We are like bees in being ultra social creatures whose minds were shaped by the relentless competition of groups with other groups. We are descended from earlier humans whose groupish minds helped them cohere, cooperate, and outcompete other groups. That doesn't mean that our ancestors were mindless or unconditional team players; it means they were selective. *Under the right conditions, they were able to enter a mind-set of "one for all, all for one" in which they were truly working for the good of the group, and not just for their own advancement within the group.*

By far the most powerful trigger for the "hive switch" is a catastrophic event that clearly signals the arrival of an emergency, particularly an external attack. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor led the United States to "flip the hive switch" and enter emergency mode in an incredibly powerful, productive way.

The United States in Emergency Mode: WWII



After years of stubborn, isolationist denial of the threat and clinging to "Normal Functioning" as Germany swept through Europe, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor ended American isolationism and initiated the example par excellence of America in emergency mode: full-scale mobilization.

Economic mobilization is an emergency restructuring of a modern industrial economy, accomplished at rapid speed. It involves the vast majority of citizens, the utilization of a very high proportion of available resources, and impacts all areas of society. It is nothing less than a government-coordinated social and industrial revolution. Mobilization is what happens when an entire nation enters emergency mode, and the results can be truly staggering.

In *Climate Code Red*, David Spratt and Philip Sutton highlighted the differences in normal political mode and emergency mode, drawing heavily from WWII:

| Normal political-paralysis mode | Emergency mode |
|--|--|
| Crises are constrained within business-as-usual mode. | Society engages productively with crises, but not in panic mode. |
| Spin, denial, and 'politics as usual' are employed. | The situation is assessed with brutal honesty. |
| No urgent threat is perceived. | Immediate, or looming, threat to life, health, property, or environment is perceived. |
| Problem is not yet serious. | High probability of escalation beyond control if immediate action is not taken. |
| Time of response is not important. | Speed of response is crucial. |
| The crisis is one of many issues. | The crisis is of the highest priority. |
| A labor market is in place. | Emergency project teams are developed, and labor planning is instituted. |
| Budgetary 'restraint' is shown. | All available /necessary resources are devoted to the emergency and, if necessary, governments borrow heavily. |
| Community and markets function as usual. | Non-essential functions and consumption may be curtailed or rationed. |
| A slow rate of change occurs because of systemic inertia. | Rapid transition and scaling up occurs. |
| Market needs dominate response choices and thinking. | Planning, fostering innovation and research take place. |
| Targets and goals are determined by political tradeoffs. | Critical targets and goals are not compromised. |
| There is a culture of compromise. | Failure is not an option. |
| There is a lack of national leadership, and politics is adversarial and incremental. | Bipartisanship and effective leadership are the norm. |

During WWII, conservative business titans joined labor leaders and liberal bureaucrats — after years of bitter acrimony over the New Deal — to focus America’s industrial might against the Nazis and Imperial Japan. Factories were rapidly converted from producing consumer goods to producing tanks, guns, bombs, and planes — shattering all historical records for war production.



All hands were on deck. Young men sacrificed their lives fighting for their country. Women surged into factories to produce war materiel. Scientists and universities pumped out research on behalf of the war effort leading to huge technological and intellectual breakthroughs. More than 10% of the population relocated, often across state lines, in order to find a “war job,” and more than 40% of vegetables were grown at home, in Victory Gardens.

During this multi-year emergency, the United States also managed to maintain — and in some cases expand — its basic systems including infrastructure, education, health care, and child-care, and in large measure made sure that the basic needs of the civilian economy were

met. Soldiers and civilians alike needed to balance hard work with rest and relationships. However, the entire country was suffused with a sense of national purpose, and a great amount of energy.

Citizens invested their available cash reserves in war bonds. Taxes were also increased significantly, particularly on high earners, who paid a steep “Victory Tax,” the most progressive tax in American history. The top marginal income tax rate on the highest earners reached 88% in 1942 and a record 94% in 1944. A tax on excess corporate profits provided about 25% of revenues during the war. The federal government instituted a sweeping rationing program in order to ensure a fair distribution of scarce resources on the home front — and to share the sacrifice equitably. Gasoline, coffee, butter, tires, fuel oil, shoes, meat, cheese, and sugar were rationed, and every American received a fair share. “Pleasure driving” was banned, the Indy 500 was shut down, and a national speed limit of 35 miles per hour was established. Comprehensive wage and price controls were put in place to combat inflation.



By entering emergency mode and mobilizing for total victory, the United States accomplished truly staggering feats. After the attacks on Pearl Harbor, when the United States finally entered WWII, President Franklin Roosevelt laid out terrifically ambitious production targets for tanks, ships, guns, and airplanes. FDR set a goal of producing 60,000 planes in two years. People were deeply skeptical about whether such a feat could be accomplished. And yet, by 1944 the United States had produced 229,600 planes — more than three times the original, highly ambitious, goal! In response to a cutoff of critical rubber supplies in Southeast Asia, the federal government launched a crash program that scaled up synthetic rubber production from under 1% to about 70% of total U.S. production — a *100-fold* increase — in about four years. In 1943, reclaimed rubber from citizen scrap drives provided about 50% of domestic rubber production.

We also made huge advances in the sciences. The first computer was invented, as were blood transfusion and radar technology. The Manhattan Project successfully built the world's first atomic bomb in less than three years — a morally catastrophic but nonetheless stupendous feat of planning, cooperation and scientific ingenuity.

Why Hasn't The Climate Crisis Triggered Emergency Mode?

Emergency mobilization on this scale is precisely what we need if we are to prevent a global cataclysm and restore a safe and stable climate. We need to transition away from fossil fuels and carbon-intensive agriculture as soon as possible, draw down all the excess CO₂ and cool the planet below present levels. This will happen only with public planning coordinated by the federal government, global cooperation, massive public investment, forceful regulations and economic controls, and full societal participation.

There is a **hidden consensus** among experts and leaders in the climate movement that these transformative changes can only be accomplished in time with a massive, WWII-scale mobilization. This metaphor has been used by figures as wide ranging as Bernie Sanders ([video](#)), climate scientist Michael Mann, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune, Ted Turner, *New York Times* Columnist Thomas Friedman, and Bill McKibben, the Founder of 350.org.

All of these thought leaders agree that we should enter emergency mode and mobilize — but they don't seem to have a strategy about how to make this happen; they are not actively campaigning for a WWII-scale climate mobilization. Perhaps they don't understand how emergency mode works, or they don't believe that they could actually lead such a shift. Or maybe they think it can never happen.

Stuck in carbon gradualism. Most of these thought leaders, like most climate organizations, and most Americans, are still stuck in the stultifying morass of **gradualism** and business as

usual. Politicians argue over whether to cut emissions insufficiently (the position generally held by Democrats), or not at all (the position generally held by Republicans). The crisis is hardly mentioned by the presidential candidates or the media. The established environmental movement advocates for very gradual actions like the Clean Power Plan that will lead to continued fossil fuel use for decades or a revenue-neutral carbon tax that Republicans will be, theoretically, unable to oppose. Even groups like Greenpeace and 350 call for a multi-decade, gradual transition away from fossil fuels.

Furthermore, virtually no mainstream environmental groups call for actions to draw down (or sequester) excess greenhouse gases, which must begin now on a massive scale and are essential if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe and restore a safe climate. Many groups act as though a net zero emissions-only strategy can protect us and that there is a sizable “carbon budget” left. However, CO₂ concentrations are high enough *right now* (~405 ppm) to cause at least 2°C warming above pre-industrial levels, according to Michael Mann. Anyone who has followed the climate science in recent years should know that 2°C of warming would cause a world-historical catastrophe. Furthermore a net zero emissions-only strategy will actually cause a substantial burst of further warming in the short-term, as the cooling effect of aerosol emissions from coal-fired power plants is eliminated. James Hansen calls this humanity’s “Faustian Bargain.” If “all” we do is switch to 100% renewables, the public will surely become very confused and angry with us when the planet starts warming up even faster!

The psychological capacity for both normal mode and emergency mode arose over hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution. Individuals and groups who usually manage broad and diverse interests, but are able to snap into intense focus when in danger, have the best overall survival prospects. The challenge is *when* to enter emergency mode, when to continue business as usual, and how to trigger a switch in mode.

The factors that trigger an emergency response are also products of evolution. Psychologist Daniel Gilbert **argues** that humans are wired for a reflexive response to threats that are “intentional, immoral, imminent, and instantaneous.” When threats, such as terrorism, contain all of these characteristics it can trigger significant over-reactions. But if a threat, such as the climate crisis, does not contain these elements and is instead unintended, caused by actions that are regarded as normal and moral, with the worst impacts in the future and the disaster unfolding over decades, then an emergency response will not immediately be triggered and the risk of under-reacting is very high.

We cannot count on people entering emergency mode reflexively. Instead, we will need to use our intellects and power of communication. We must educate people. We humans can use our intellect to understand what is happening and *choose* to treat the climate crisis as an emergency.

Helplessness. A sense of helplessness is preventing many people from entering emergency mode in response to the climate crisis. Our political system seems intractable, the culture in the thrall of denial, and the scale of the crisis is staggering. Widespread feelings of helplessness also represent the failure of leadership from official climate movement leaders and politicians to offer an honest assessment of the crisis, advocate for solutions that actually stand a chance of working, and invite individuals to take part in that solution.



The Bernie Sanders campaign is a contemporary example of how hope of transformative success, including a credible leader who promises to implement change, can turn mass dissatisfaction, anger, and despair, into mass engagement. To go into emergency mode on climate change, people need to believe that restoring a safe and stable climate is possible — that the political will can be achieved by the climate movement, and that the rapid transition can be coordinated by competent leadership.

Massive dissatisfaction, anger, despair, and fear lie beneath the surface of the American electorate on the climate crisis. A recent [poll](#) by Randle and Erkseley investigated how people from the US, UK and Australia evaluate the current threats facing humanity with some staggering results:

Overall, a majority (54%) rated the risk of our way of life ending within the next 100 years at 50% or greater, and a quarter (24%) rated the risk of humans being wiped out at 50% or greater. The responses were relatively uniform across countries, age groups, gender and education level, although statistically significant differences exist. Almost 80% agreed “we need to transform our worldview and way of life if we are to create a better future for the world.”

A quarter of respondents think that humanity has a 50% chance of near-term-extinction, and almost all respondents agreed that transformative change is necessary — yet we are continuing with business as usual and daily life as usual! This suggests a paralyzing degree of helplessness across society. It also suggests that if the climate movement can offer the public a credible social movement and economic mobilization framework and evidence of credible leadership to prevent the rapidly approaching climate catastrophe, then we can expect passionate and dedicated support.

Both Emergency Mode and Normal Mode Are Contagious

Since climate change does not automatically bring people into emergency mode, the question becomes “How can we effectively trigger emergency mode in others?”

The answer is:

1. Going into emergency mode yourself.
2. Communicating that as clearly as possible.
3. Creating a plausible path towards solving the crisis, to which people can contribute.

The way we respond to threats — by entering emergency mode or by remaining in normal mode — is highly contagious. Imagine the fire alarm goes off in an office building. How seriously should you take it? How do you know if it is a drill or a real fire? Those questions will be predominantly answered by the actions and communications of the people around you, particularly people designated as leaders. If they are chatting and taking their time exiting the building, you will assume that this is a drill. If people are moving with haste, faces stern and focused, communicating with urgency and gravity, you will assume there is real danger and exit as quickly as possible.

The concept of “Pluralistic Ignorance” which I addressed at length in a [2014 paper](#) helps to explain this contagion. Psychologist Robert Caladini describes pluralistic ignorance:

Very often an emergency is not obviously an emergency...in times of such uncertainty, the natural tendency is to look around at the actions of others for clues. We can learn, from the way the other witnesses are reacting, whether the event is or is not an emergency. What is easy to forget, though, is that everybody else observing the event is likely to be looking for social evidence, too.

Or as researchers Latané and Darley put it, “Each person decides that since nobody is concerned, nothing is wrong. Meanwhile, the danger may be mounting to the point where a single individual, uninfluenced by the seeming calm of others, would react.”



This is a critical point, with grave implications for the climate movement. To evaluate whether we are currently in a climate crisis, the public will look to each other — and particularly to the climate organizations, writers, and leaders. Are they calling it an emergency? Does the tone of their writing and statements convey alarm and a passionate desire for massive action to avert imminent crisis? Are they demanding an *emergency* response? Are they *acting* like it's an emergency? Are they

themselves in emergency mode? If the answer to these questions is “no,” the individual will conclude that there *must not be an emergency*, or that emergency action is hopeless because the leaders are apparently unwilling to coordinate emergency action. This suggests the sad, dangerous conclusion that NGOs who advocate carbon gradualism are actually *preventing* the public from entering emergency mode.

Let us consider how successful social movements have gone into emergency mode themselves in order to achieve tremendous change. I will then offer specific suggestions for the climate movement.

Successful Social Movements Utilize and Spread Emergency Mode

ACT UP. In the 1980s, HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, was decimating the gay communities in New York, San Francisco and other large cities, and it was spreading at a horrifying speed. The government was failing the victims — giving them virtually no help, and failing to

research and treat this growing epidemic. The government's failure to act swiftly and effectively, or even acknowledge the epidemic, was largely due to pervasive homophobia.

Larry Kramer — the now iconic AIDS activist — founded ACT UP because existing AIDS groups had failed to enter emergency mode and were continuing to seek solutions through business-as-usual channels, such as holding meetings with government officials and asking for help — strategies that were not working. Kramer helped found and build the Gay Men's Health Alliance — but broke with them over disagreements about strategy and tactics. Kramer criticized GMHA as wanting to be "the Red Cross" because they were focused on appearing mainstream and upstanding and "a morgue" because they were helping people die rather than fighting "for the living to go on living."

Emergency Language. Kramer knew that he was fighting for his own life and the life of his friends. He had no interest in "business as usual." He wanted the government to act on AIDS now — to start researching the illness, finding treatments, treating the sick, and preventing transmission. Kramer treated AIDS with deadly seriousness and encouraged as much (realistic) fear as possible. He told crowds of gay men that if they didn't fight back, they would be dead in a few years. Kramer referred to AIDS repeatedly as a "Plague" and the politicians who ignored it as "Nazis" and "Murderers." ACT UP's symbol was a pink triangle—symbolizing the genocide of gay men during the Holocaust. He was inviting others, especially other gay men, to join him in emergency mode, focused intensely on solving the crisis.



Silence=Death

ACT UP's slogan, "Silence=Death" referred not only to governmental and media silence on AIDS, but the entire cultural silence around homosexuality. Many gay people were closeted, hoping to protect their careers and avoid discriminatory, dehumanizing reactions from a homophobic culture.



The silence around gayness — with most people keeping their sexual orientation at least partially private — posed huge problems for the movement. Gay men, including gay doctors, were *not able to work together with maximum impact, or communicate the emergency* to the public, while still in the closet. Larry Kramer wrote in his prescient, biting, landmark essay **1,112 and counting:**

Why isn't every gay man in this city so scared shitless that he is screaming for action? Does every gay man in New York want to die?... I am sick of closeted gay doctors who won't come out to help us.... I am sick of closeted gays. It's 1983 already, guys, when are you going to come out? By 1984 you could be dead.

Every gay man who is unable to come forward now and fight to save his own life is truly helping to kill the rest of us. There is only one thing that's going to save some of us, and this is numbers and pressure and our being perceived as united and a threat. As more and more of my friends die, I have less and less sympathy for men who are afraid their mommies will find out or afraid their bosses will find out or afraid their fellow doctors or professional associates will find out. Unless we can generate, visibly, numbers, masses, we are going to die.

The push to come out and live out of the shadows without shame was prominent and incredibly powerful throughout the AIDS movement. How many people came out in response to the AIDS crisis? How many individual conversations were had in families, among friends, among colleagues? Perhaps millions. It had a profound impact as the public learned that people they loved and respected were gay, and in danger.



Education and Advocacy. Because the government was failing to provide answers and effective treatment, ACT UP took on significant educational work as well. The Treatment + Data Committee took on the task of becoming experts in the biology of HIV/AIDS— seeking to understand the virus and various treatment options. A glossary of AIDS treatment terms was created and passed out at meetings. ACT

UP also produced and advocated *A National AIDS Treatment Research Agenda*, which laid out ACT UP's specific demands for what drugs should be developed and how the process should unfold.

Protest. ACT UP regularly held creative, militant (though non-violent) protests — demanding that the government launch a crisis response to the AIDS crisis. As described by Paul Engler in *"This is an Uprising: How Non-violent Protest is Shaping the Century"* (2016):

Members of ACT UP successfully shut down trading on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. They chained themselves inside pharmaceutical corporations and blockaded offices at the FDA, plastering posters with bloody handprints to the outside of the agency's headquarters. They stopped traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and interrupted mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Using fake IDs to enter CBS headquarters, they jumped onscreen during Dan Rather's nightly news broadcast, reeling off a string of chants before the network cut to a long, unplanned commercial break. ACT UP draped a giant yellow condom over the Washington home of Senator Jesse Helms, one of the movement's most ardent and homophobic adversaries. And during a 1992 memorial in Washington, the group's members held a procession to scatter the ashes of friends and lovers who had died of AIDS onto the White House lawn. Public health administrators disliked by ACT UP members were sometimes hung in effigy at protests.

These events demonstrated the fact that the members of ACT UP were in emergency mode — that they recognized an existential threat, and that addressing that threat was their top priority, channeling their energy, focus, and resources towards resolving the emergency and restoring safety.



By demonstrating their courage and tenacity, ACT UP grew in size and power, drawing more people into emergency mode. New members contributed their skills, resources, and networks to the cause. By keeping their protests non-violent, ACT UP invited participation from a larger group. Erica Chenoweth has demonstrated that non-violent campaigns are much more likely to be successful at involving significant portions of the population, and more successful at accomplishing their overall goals.

(Partial) Success! With its combination of public protest, private acts of courage, and education & advocacy, ACT UP accomplished many of its aims. AIDS patients won the right to participate in every phase of the drug development process. They won major funding for research, which led to the discovery and deployment of antiretrovirals, a class of drugs that is very successful in treating HIV, potentially keeping the disease from ever becoming AIDS.

ACT UP's success laid the groundwork for mainstream acceptance of homosexuality, as well as the continuing struggles for gay rights and equality. It also forever changed the way pharmaceutical drugs are researched and developed.

ACT UP's work has not been completed, however. AIDS has become a global epidemic, with more than **36 million people** currently infected, and 1 million people dying from AIDS every year. There is still no cure and no vaccine, something that Larry Kramer and many others continue to work on.

It took contributions from researchers, doctors, nurses, policymakers, public health officials, journalists, government officials, and more — who worked tirelessly for more than 30 years — to create conditions where more than 16 million people are receiving highly-effective HIV treatment in all parts of the world (though 20 million are not treated). Activists could never accomplish such a feat alone. But what ACT UP did accomplish was to get people and institutions, especially the Federal Government, and also local governments, hospitals, universities and more — to treat HIV/AIDS like the crisis it was.

Implications for the Climate Movement: Lead the Public into Emergency Mode

Like ACT UP, the climate movement is responding to a direct existential threat. Understanding that emergency mode allows individuals and groups to function in an enhanced, optimal way, delivering their peak performance, has critical implications for the climate movement.

We must exit normal mode and abandon the gradual policy advocacies and enervated emotional states that accompany it. Instead, we must seek *to restore a safe climate at emergency speed*. To accomplish this, the climate movement must lead the public into emergency mode. First we must go into emergency mode *ourselves*, and then communicate about the climate emergency and need for mobilization with clarity, dedication, and escalating assertiveness.

Those of us who have entered emergency mode — who understand the mobilization imperative — need to get talkative and loud. We need to spread our message as far and wide as possible. We must not stay “closeted” and appear that we believe everything is fine, or that the Obama Administration or the Democratic Party are well on their way to containing the crisis, once the Republicans and the Supreme Court get out of the way. Rather we need to “come out” as being in emergency mode and in favor of a WWII-scale climate mobilization that rapidly sweeps away business-as-usual — to our friends, family, neighbors, fellow climate activists, and the public. Like ACT UP we need to spread our message as clearly, loudly and in the most attention-grabbing ways we can.

Unique Strategic Elements of the Climate Crisis

Seeking Consensus. While we must seek to learn as much as we can from ACT UP and other successful social movements, we must also recognize that the climate crisis poses a challenge unlike anything humanity has ever faced. Full-scale emergency mobilization requires a higher degree of participation and consensus than treating AIDS, implementing civil rights legislation, or even toppling a dictator.

ACT UP didn't bring the entire public into emergency mode, but because they entered emergency mode themselves they were able to apply pressure very strategically. ACT UP could be something of a gadfly — alienating many and still achieving their agenda. They were an oppressed minority that needed to move huge bureaucracies, and they did. The climate movement faces a larger task. We must effect change throughout our entire society. We want to “wake America up” to the scale of the threat, and the need for mobilization, as America woke up to the need for WWII immediately following the attacks on Pearl Harbor.

Thus we must seek to be as inclusive as possible, while unwaveringly demanding WWII-scale climate mobilization. Our tone must balance emergency-mode, steadfastness, assertiveness, and inclusiveness. Pope Francis calls for people to have an “ecological conversion,” and we must adopt the attitude of understanding and forgiveness for individuals past denial or climate-damaging activity.

Addressing Helplessness. Many people who understand the scope of the climate crisis are paralyzed by fear and helplessness. Empowerment, the solution to helplessness, is a key element of all social movements. Gene Sharp, the author of *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, a guidebook for non-violent revolution against dictators, advises would-be revolutionaries to spread a version of the “The Monkey Master Fable” in which a group of monkeys are enslaved by a cruel human master who demands that they gather food for him. After years of submission to this, the monkeys realize that there is no legitimacy to their master’s reign. They tear down their cage and escape. They now have more food, as well as freedom, and their former master starves without them. This tale demonstrates the basic principle that dictators are dependent on the cooperation of citizens, and “if enough of the subordinates refuse to continue their cooperation long enough despite repression, the oppressive system will be weakened and finally collapse.”

In the case of the climate crisis, we must educate, or remind people that:

1. Social movements can cause immense, rapid change.
2. During WWII, America mobilized and achieved a transition more rapid and complete than anyone thought possible.
3. We as citizens have the power to change the direction of this country, and if we successfully build political will for full-scale climate mobilization, the results will be staggering.

The Transformative Power of Climate Truth. While the climate movement has many imposing forces aligned against it, we also have a uniquely powerful strategic asset — the truth. The truth is that no human endeavor can succeed on a planet beset by catastrophic climate change. None of our values, joys, or relationships can prosper on an overheated planet. There will be no “winners” in a business-as-usual scenario: Even wealthy elites are reliant on stable ecosystems, agriculture, and a functioning global civilization. For that reason, among others, solving the climate crisis has the potential to be the most unifying endeavor in human history.

Emergency Communication

How can we most effectively communicate the climate emergency to the public? I propose the following strategies, based on my theoretical understanding of emergency mode and the **transformative power of climate truth**, as well as my experience building The Climate Mobilization.

It is important that we keep emergency communication crystal clear otherwise people will — rightfully — suspect that we are not giving them the full story. Then, I will offer specific communication strategies including: person-to-person conversations, community education, advertising, and protest.

Emergency Threat. In order to lead people into emergency mode, it is critical that the emergency threat is paired with an emergency solution (whenever it is available). First and easiest, the climate movement must fully adopt the language of immediate crisis and existential danger. We must talk about climate change as threatening to cause the collapse of civilization, killing billions of people, and millions of species. These horrific outcomes await us during this century, possibly even in the first half of it if things truly slip out of control. This is not a matter of “protecting the planet for future generations” but protecting our own lives and those of the people we care about. We are in danger *now* and in coming years and decades. The climate crisis is, far and away, our top national security threat, top public health threat, **and top threat to the global economy.**

Emergency Solution. Climate groups must match this emergency rhetoric with an emergency advocacy. Suppose that someone told you, “Help! My house is on fire! Can you please pour a glass of water on it? One glass is all it needs!” You would be confused. If we are really dealing with a house on fire, how could a solution be so simple and easy? You would suspect that there was no crisis, just exaggeration. Likewise, when the scale of the necessary response to the climate crisis is minimized, it prevents people from entering emergency mode. We need to “come out” as in emergency mode – climate “alarmists,” as horrified by the crisis, and as ready to make major changes in our life and the economy, for the duration of the emergency.

We cannot be silent about the fact that emergency mobilization can only be coordinated by a “big” government that is granted the power to spend without limit to save as much life as possible. We must acknowledge that gradual approaches that prioritize political expediency and the alleged wisdom of the “free market” over the common good are doomed to failure.

We need to eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions in years, not decades, and remove excess greenhouse gases from the atmosphere until a safe climate is restored. This will take a whole-society, all-out effort. It will also require significant changes in the American lifestyle.

Even if we undertake rapid, all-hands-on-deck mobilization that drives the economy to zero emissions and removes massive amounts of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, action *may* need to be taken to quickly cool the planet. Solar radiation management interventions – approaches meant to reflect a small amount of sunlight away from the earth and quickly cool the planet – carry very significant risk, and must be researched extensively in a transparent, public program before deployment is considered.

However, the danger of the climate crisis is so tremendously great that it might turn out to be beneficial to temporarily deploy solar radiation management technology in conjunction with an emergency-speed elimination of emissions and a huge carbon drawdown effort if we are to prevent a catastrophic, irreversible “continuous thaw” of the Arctic permafrost and other extreme climate changes. If solar radiation management technologies are deployed to temporarily limit warming or cool the planet, they must be democratically governed in cooperation with the world community, and massive financial resources must be devoted to comprehensively protect vulnerable communities from any adverse effects.

Let go of False Narratives. Representing the truth, and moving the public into emergency mode means letting go of false or misleading narratives that shield the public (and ourselves) from the frightening truth, such as:

- 2°C or 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels represent “safe limits” to global warming.
- “Our grandchildren” may be in a “climate emergency” sometime in the future if we don't change.
- We still have a sizable global “carbon budget” left to safely burn before things get really out of control.
- The transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions can be a multi-decade effort. (I.e., we can continue emitting greenhouse gases for decades longer!)
- Extremely gradual emission reduction strategies — such as the Clean Power Plan — are huge steps forward.
- Climate justice and other social justice objectives are compatible with carbon gradualism.
- It's not worth solving the climate crisis and saving billions of lives unless we simultaneously create a utopian society.
- Ending emissions will be “cheap,” “easy” or “painless” and can be accomplished smoothly but slowly via market-based policy instruments alone (such as an emissions trading system or a carbon tax).
- If we only reduce the fossil fuel industry's stranglehold on politicians, the problem will solve itself.
- The climate crisis is only a dirty energy or electricity issue that can be solved without massive ecosystem restoration, the transformation of industrial and animal agriculture, and a revolution in land use and soil management.
- A zero emissions-only strategy (without drawdown and possible cooling) is all that is needed to protect us from climate catastrophe.
- Carbon drawdown approaches and solar radiation management should not be discussed as legitimate options or studied since they will only distract from emissions reduction and societal transformation.
- The broader overshoot, sustainability, and mass extinction emergencies relating to exponential global population and consumption growth are not worth mentioning or factoring into our policies as we respond to the climate crisis since they are overwhelming, not widely accepted by the public, and seem far away.
- We are “fucked” — absolutely nothing we can do will help the situation. Science shows humanity will definitely go extinct by 2030 and all those calling for actions to avert catastrophe are spreading delusional “hopium.”

Overcome Affect Phobia. Communicating with this level of honesty will require an *emotional* shift in the climate movement. Climate organizations are going to have to get more comfortable expressing and inviting uncomfortable emotions.

The climate movement has generally emphasized facts and avoided feelings. This is probably in part because scientists report the unfolding climate crisis to us in their objective, often emotionally detached style. Also, because the emotions that the climate crisis inspires are *so intense*, the climate movement, it seems, has tried to avoid them as much as possible.

Affect phobia is often official. For example, Columbia University's popular CRED Guide to Climate Communications contains a section, "**Beware the Overuse of Emotional Appeals**," in which they caution presenters to avoid telling the whole truth about the climate crisis, as this would cause "emotional numbing." So presenters are given strategies including choosing a specific "portfolio of risk" to communicate — such as the link between climate and disease — rather than the whole, frightening truth.

Affect phobia can also be found in almost any discussion within the climate movement about what to say or what to advocate. "Fear doesn't work as a motivator" so we shouldn't "make people" afraid. I have had the uncanny experience of advocating that a climate event adopt the ambitious "net zero by 2025" timeline, to be told by others on the planning committee, "We agree with you! We totally agree that is what needs to happen. But we can't say that — it will turn people off!"

While it is accurate that climate truth overwhelms some people, the climate movement should be focused on *turning people on* — getting more people to enter emergency mode as activists. Further, some people will be "turned off" by climate truth temporarily, but will process it over time and then enter emergency mode later. With the truth, we give people the opportunity to face the facts and their feelings, and move forward productively. Without the truth, we deny them this chance.

Another critical reason for organizations and leaders to overcome affect phobia is to provide a safe space to discuss the crisis in the fellowship of others who understand. People who understand the climate crisis are often alienated, feeling that they must act "as if" things are OK in order to get along.

Climate advocacy organizations should create a place where people can process the reality and implications of the climate crisis together. This kind of supportive, generative atmosphere can only occur when the truth is embraced, and we are able to tolerate the emotions that the truth inspires. If the organizational culture is to stay perpetually cheerful and stay away from the horrifying truth of our situation, people will not feel free to express their true feelings. A frequent reaction that new people have to joining The Climate Mobilization conference calls is, “It’s such a relief to hear people speaking truthfully, and meet so many people who understand what’s really going on.” Sometimes, people cry on our calls, and we treat it as a normal reaction to an incredibly difficult situation.



If you feel the urge to say, “But people can’t handle the truth,” question whether you may be reacting to *your own* anxiety and your own difficulty processing the climate crisis. Of course it’s difficult! Of course people will feel afraid, angry, and grief-stricken. Those are rational, healthy reactions to the surreal and nightmarish reality we find ourselves in.

Strategies for Spreading the Message:

The climate movement should leverage the inherent power of climate truth, and the deep human desire to avert a catastrophic future. The climate movement should be shouting the truth of the climate emergency from the rooftops — constantly searching for the most effective ways to amplify this message.

The list below is not meant to be a comprehensive list. The climate movement should be continually testing new methods of communicating the climate emergency, and scaling up

the most effective ones. The book **"Beautiful Trouble"** outlines techniques that activists have used for a variety of projects around the world and is very helpful for brainstorming, as is Gene Sharp's list of 198 Methods of Non-violent Action, and appendix of **Dictatorship to Democracy**.

Person-to-Person Conversations. The most basic, and highly effective, mode of climate activism is talking to people you know about the crisis and need for mobilization. In the same way that ACT UP called on gay men to come out of the closet so that they could build collective power, we should "Come out" as being firmly in emergency mode! We need to talk about the fact that we are deeply alarmed and terrified of the climate crisis, but that a solution is possible! We must tweak ACT UP's slogan and make it clear that Climate Silence=Death!

If we are silent, our understanding does not become power. **2015 Polling** from Yale's Climate Communication Center found that only 4% of Americans hear people they know talk about climate change at least once a week, and only 12% once a month! And yet the same study shows that 11% of Americans are "very worried" about climate change! It's time for this group to get talkative and loud.



We must overcome our anxiety about having hard conversations and embrace the fierce urgency of now. Every week we delay mobilization is a month for tipping points to be hit, species to go extinct, and states to fail. Lots of people are already dying on our watch. 1,000 children are **dying every day** from climate change-linked starvation & disease.

To facilitate these urgent conversations, The Climate Mobilization uses the tool the **Pledge to Mobilize**, in which citizens agree to support political candidates who support mobilization, *and to spread the Pledge to others*. One major goal of this Pledge is to provide a structure for conversations about the climate crisis to happen. It is easier to call a friend and say, "Hey, have you been following the climate crisis? I recently took this Pledge to Mobilize and I would be interested in talking to you about it."

Emergency Education and Outreach. Further, activists who have become expert in the climate crisis and the need for mobilization should give presentations to congregations, professional associations, unions, colleges, and community groups.

Public presentations should be offered regularly in cities across the country on the climate crisis and need for immediate, emergency mobilization. These presentations should be advertised, not as a way to "get informed", but rather as an appeal to the public's sense of

threat and danger, “How can I protect my family from the climate crisis?” Or “The Climate Crisis: How much danger are we in and how can we reverse it?” These presentations should explicitly invite the participants to take part in the movement to implement an emergency climate mobilization. One of the primary tasks for all interested in getting involved will be spreading climate truth and effective strategies to others.

Advertising and Guerrilla Advertising. Climate groups with financial resources should purchase advertising space in print and TV warning the public about the near-term threat of a collapse of civilization, and the need for WWII-scale climate mobilization. (See above section on “overcoming affect phobia”) Climate groups that cannot afford to purchase ad space should engage in a guerrilla marketing campaign in which the climate emergency (and the need for climate mobilization) is communicated through things such as hanging banners from prominent buildings, opening public advertising displays and replacing them with climate emergency posters, stickers, graffiti, and more.



Further, the climate movement should train rapid response teams across the country to educate and demonstrate after super-storms and other global warming-supercharged “natural” disasters hit. These are important moments — moments where the coming horrors of the climate crisis are made manifest. The media often focuses intensely on disaster zones, and live demonstrations, with banners calling for WWII-scale climate mobilization displayed at disaster sites, have the potential for tremendous symbolic value.

Lobbying and Pressure Campaigns. The climate movement should launch an intense pressure campaign targeting elected leaders, media outlets, universities and thought leaders. The campaign should call on leaders to courageously face reality, enter emergency mode, and protect civilization.

These pressure campaigns should escalate in degrees of assertiveness, all the way to disruptive protest. However, even in a protest, we must maintain an open, welcoming attitude. Thus, while we will need to be quite confrontational and unwavering, we are not “against” our targets of protest. We gain nothing from demonizing them. We *need* these leaders to do the right thing. The tone should not be primarily angry, but urgent and insistent. Burning figures in effigy, for example, would probably not be helpful.



Rather, the tone should be serious and patriotic. We are calling on America to lead the world in heroic, world-saving action! Protests should involve elements of protestor sacrifice, such as risking arrest or hunger strike, to generate empathy from the public. Maintaining strict non-violence is critical to winning widespread public support and is non-negotiable.

Tactics and demands will differ depending on the particular target — but the basic idea is to challenge powerful people and institutions to:

1. Face the crisis
2. Enter emergency mode, and thus
3. Use their considerable powers and resources to protect civilization from collapse.

Primary Targets of this campaign should be:

Elected leaders and candidates. James Hansen first testified before Congress in 1988 about the dangers of climate change, and for the next 28 years, denial, woefully insufficient gradualism, and paralysis have dominated Washington's response to the climate crisis. Our elected leaders are failing to protect us. It's up to us to bring them out of complacency and denial and into emergency mode. These efforts should start with outreach and lobbying, ideally from constituents who tend to be ideologically aligned with the legislator in question, and escalate into pressure campaign and then to protest.

Climate advocates should seek to discuss the climate crisis and need for mobilization with their elected representatives and their staff. Constituents should ask their leaders to take a heroic stand and champion a WWII-scale climate mobilization. The Pledge to Mobilize is a tool that facilitates these interactions. The Pledge provides structure—a concrete set of demands and a clear way that the Congressperson can endorse them—by signing. TCM provides outreach materials, and education materials, so the constituent can be ready to defend the demands of the Pledge. This strategy has proven successful thus far—a growing number of **elected leaders and candidates** for office have signed the Pledge to Mobilize.

In the event that asking and educating are not sufficient, campaigners should escalate the pressure behind their request. Demonstrating outside of or even occupying congressional offices as well as state houses and city halls, with, sit-ins, die-ins, hunger strikes, mobilization parties, political theater and humorous action, and other disruptive action can be utilized to draw the public's attention and put increasing pressure on politicians to mobilize.

All elected leaders and candidates, regardless of party, should be targeted, with a focus on Congress. Both Republican climate deniers and Democrat climate gradualists should be challenged to enter emergency mode and informed that we will be interrupting their "normal mode" until they decide to champion emergency climate action.

The media — especially television news — is another critical target for educational outreach followed by pressure campaign and escalating disruptive protests. **A Media Matters study** found that, ABC spent a total of 13 minutes in 2015 covering climate change. That's 13 minutes — *total — across all ABC news shows, for a year*. NBC spent 50 minutes and CBS 45 minutes. Fox News spent 39 minutes, and most of it was skeptical of climate science.

This is beyond pathetic — it is a crime against humanity. A shocking, dismal failure of television news to serve the public interest. These television stations need to be clearly told that their silence and passivity is endangering humanity and it will not be tolerated. The climate movement should demand that television stations give climate change at least 500 *hours* of climate coverage in 2016. It should be a topic of daily focus and consideration, as well as a regular topic for in-depth reporting. Through its silence, television news is betraying us, and putting us in danger.

Further, newspapers, magazines, and other media should be pressured to do in-depth reporting about the scale of the climate crisis and what an emergency climate mobilization would be like.

Universities will be called upon to not only divest their endowments from fossil fuels and reinvest in renewables, but to openly acknowledge the existential nature of the climate crisis and need for emergency action, and to make the climate crisis the primary focus of curricula, research, and funding. New School University and United College have already taken similar steps.

Thought Leaders and Leaders of Civil Society. If people in the public eye, and in the public esteem go into emergency mode, they will significantly influence the broader public. Staying in normal mode, however, contributes to inaction and passivity. “It’s not my issue” is unacceptable. Business leaders (e.g. Warren Buffet and Jeff Bezos), thought leaders (e.g. Paul Krugman and Ta-Nehisi Coates), community leaders, and religious leaders should also be invited – with an escalating degree of assertiveness – to learn more about the climate emergency and the need for climate mobilization. These invitations to leadership could include public challenges, social media campaigns, and potentially individually targeted disruptive protest.

Fossil Fuel Infrastructure? Currently, the majority of climate protests and demonstrations take place at the site of fossil fuel projects, such as pipelines, oil trains, and export terminals. There is a certain intuitive logic in targeting fossil fuel infrastructure directly. However, I am skeptical about whether this is an ideal strategy for leading the public into emergency mode. These protests send a very clear, “NO!” message, but are unclear on the “Yes!”. Of course, the fossil fuel industry has been a terrible actor in helping to create the climate crisis, and they certainly deserve to be protested against. But if the goal is to bring the public into emergency mode, we need to focus on the way forward. We don’t want to just shut down one pipeline. We need to shut down *all* the pipelines, and we need to do it at emergency speed. And to do that, we need to engage Congress, the media, thought leaders, and the public.

I assume that many activists will continue to be drawn to fossil fuel infrastructure protests. I recommend to them that they work as hard as possible to communicate *the way forward* (emergency mobilization off fossil fuels and carbon intensive agriculture, plus carbon drawdown to cool the earth back to a safe level) as much as possible in their verbal and non-verbal communications. This can be as simple as wearing Rosie the Riveter bandanas while protesting, displaying a banner demanding WWII-scale climate mobilization to restore a safe climate, and including the demand for net zero emissions by 2025, plus large-scale drawdown, in press releases and web materials.

Strategic Evaluation: We Can Do This.

In this paper, I have proposed a strategy for the climate movement based on my psychological and historical understanding of emergency mode. I have shown that our species can perform incredibly well when faced with emergencies, as long as we see a viable solution or a well organized effort to find a solution and feel that we can productively contribute to the solution. I have also shown that emergency mode is contagious, as long as we communicate clearly about the scale of the threat, and the mobilization we need.



I am confident that if the climate movement at large adopted emergency language, the WWII-scale climate mobilization advocacy, and communicative strategies described here, we would successfully lead the nation into emergency mode. Against us are the power of denial and dissociation and the ability of fear and helplessness to paralyze people and nations.

Against us also are a wide array of entrenched

corporate and political interests and many decades of ideological propaganda about “small government” and “the market.”

But on our side is the extremely potent truth — what science tells us and is becoming more apparent all the time — as well as the human desire to survive and protect other people and species. Another important strategic advantage is the WWII experience with the home front economic and social mobilization, which provides a recent historical example of extraordinary, improbable American success through mobilization. It’s hard for most people to imagine how we could possibly tackle the climate crisis because of the scale and urgency of what must be done — but the WWII-scale mobilization concept makes it much easier.

Part of my confidence comes from The Climate Mobilization’s remarkable success as a volunteer-powered grassroots organization. In the year and a half since launching, we have experienced rapid growth, and exceptionally high dedication levels from our volunteers. We have organizers working across the country to educate their community about the need for climate mobilization; we have held events across the country calling for WWII-scale climate mobilization; we have recruited numerous **elected leaders and candidates** for Congress; finally, in this presidential election two candidates — Jill Stein ([video](#)) and Bernie Sanders ([video](#)) — have used that metaphor.

The Climate Mobilization has had significant success with a tiny budget and constrained capacity — we’ve spent less than \$100,000 since our launch in 2014 relying heavily on volunteers for all tasks. So imagine what would happen if larger, more established climate

groups dropped gradualism, went into emergency mode and started fighting for emergency mobilization with large, experienced staffs and budgets— foundations give **more than a billion dollars a year** to climate organizations and projects—for major local organizing efforts, as well as advertising, video production, and more. They would experience major, continual growth in highly dedicated membership and power. Groups should invest in old fashioned, off line organizing—training and developing their membership, creating as many community leaders as possible, and working in as many different communities and sectors, as possible. The movement should take on more and more ambitious and large-scale emergency communication projects, continuing to build momentum behind the demand for emergency mobilization to restore a safe & stable climate.

We are now in a time of tremendous consequence. Incredibly, our choices matter a great deal to the future of humanity and all life on earth. It's time to leave gradualism, business as usual, and normal mode behind until we have solved the climate problem. The time has come to enter emergency mode.

Next Steps:

Enter Emergency Mode with **The Climate Mobilization**. We have a “Mobilize Yourself: Step-by-Step program that will help you develop your skills and impact.

Support Our Work with a **Donation**.



About the Author

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Margaret is the Founder and Director of The Climate Mobilization. She was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She earned her BA in Social Anthropology from Harvard and her PhD in clinical psychology from Adelphi University. Her life plan was to be a psychoanalyst in private practice, a writer, and have a family. Those plans began to feel less appealing as the reality of the climate crisis increasingly broke through her defenses. She entered emergency mode, and began writing about psychology and climate change on her blog [The Climate Psychologist](#). She developed the Pledge to

Mobilize strategy with the other cofounders of The Climate Mobilization and allies around the world.

Paper Designed by Ryan Medlin and Katharine Woodman-Maynard.

Cover illustration by Jenny Blizard.

Further Reading:

The Climate Crisis:

[Climate Reality Check](#) and [Recount](#) by David Spratt

WWII Homefront mobilization

[No Ordinary Time](#) by Doris Kearns Goodwin

[Freedom's Forge](#) by Arthur Herman

WWII Scale Climate Mobilization

[The Case for Climate Mobilization](#) by Ezra Silk and Margaret Klein Salamon

[Unprecedented](#) by David Griffin

[The Great Disruption](#) by Paul Gilding

[Striking Targets](#), Philip Sutton

Climate Emergency

[Road to Cop 21 and Beyond: the Missing Lessons of Paris](#) by Michael Hoexter

[Climate Code Red](#) by Philip Sutton and David Spratt

Social Movements:

[This is an Uprising](#) by Mark and Paul Engler

[The Power of the Powerless](#) by Vaclav Havel

[From Dictatorship to Democracy](#) by Gene Sharp

ACT UP and Larry Kramer

[1,112 and counting](#), Larry Kramer

Films:

[How to Survive a Plague](#)

[Larry Kramer: In Love and Anger](#).

[The Normal Heart](#) (This is a play that Kramer wrote about his break from the Gay Men's Health Alliance, recently, adapted into a film.)

Flow States:

[Flow](#) by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

[Flow Genome Project](#)