

## Option 4: Polluting Industries Must Take Responsibility

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**“The public and private sectors alike must do what is necessary to stop global warming. Those who are historically responsible for polluting our atmosphere have a clear obligation to be part of the solution.”** – Al Gore, former United States Vice President, 2013

It is time that heavy fossil fuel-using industries take responsibility for their long history of greenhouse gas emissions, and the harmful environmental impacts that have ensued. Trans- and multi-national industries, particularly firms in the business of producing oil, gas, and coal, are disproportionately accountable for historic and current fossil fuel emissions. These corporations are directly responsible for the irresponsible production and distribution of fossil fuels for consumption by individuals, communities, and other industries. They also are enormously heavy fossil fuel emitters in their own right. A mere 90 companies are responsible for two thirds of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions since the start of the industrial revolution. It is no stretch to say that these 90 companies are largely to blame for global climate change.

Climate change is a global problem with the potential to impact all countries on Earth. The costs for appropriate, effective mitigation and adaptation strategies are staggering, both economically and in terms of human suffering. These costs will be felt most acutely by countries in the Global South, which have contributed the least to worldwide greenhouse gas emissions yet are the most vulnerable. These communities are also the least able to afford the costly solutions it will take to stem climate change and adapt to a new normal. However, countries in the Global North should not be stuck with the bill either – rapidly industrializing countries such as China and India are now overtaking the historically greatest emitters such as the U.S. The Kyoto Protocol, which required binding emissions reductions only from countries in the Global North, unfairly distributed the burden on those countries that are already taking steps to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Yet attempts to focus on individual countries will allow the truly responsible parties – heavily polluting industries – to move to countries with less strict requirements. Thus, any attempt to address climate change must impact all industry globally, not just in a select few countries.

The fairest solution is to make those industries accountable which have not only contributed the most to creating the climate change crisis, but who have profited from it at the same time. It is only fair that those who have benefited the most from emitting fossil fuels now do their share to fix the problem which they created. These industries must bear the expenses of climate change mitigation and adaptation, acknowledge their responsibility, and take the lead on developing and investing in new technologies to help us move past our reliance on fossil fuel energy. Policies to cap current and future greenhouse gas emission levels, combined with new

standards to ensure future industries are held to strict sustainability standards, will help smooth the transition to an economy that is far less dependent on fossil fuels.

### Option 4 is based on the following beliefs

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- Justice requires accountability for those who have profited the most from fossil fuel use.
- Those industries most directly responsible for historic and present greenhouse gas emissions must bear the costs of addressing their impacts.
- Major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions must be coupled with sustainable technological solutions and new, sustainable industry standards to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.
- Multi- and trans-national industries must be subject to international agreements on climate change.