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Leadership on Climate Change:
The Future of our Earth and its Inhabitants
Is Our Responsibility

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Candlelight Vigil
Sponsored by Students at Rowland Hall/St. Marks
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High school students at Rowland Hall/St. Mark's have organized this event tonight because they, unlike so many of our elected officials and others, have read and understood the science – and they know about the future catastrophes facing them and others around the world if we do not take responsible, radical, and relentless action to combat climate change.

This is the most urgent issue facing our planet. If we do not act effectively and urgently, billions of people will experience the horrendous effects of melting ice caps and glaciers, rising oceans, dislocation from their homes, draughts, desertification of previously productive lands, destruction of water resources, and more. The ignorance and irresponsible inaction by many of those who claim to be leaders is utterly astounding.

Let us join tonight in communicating that we're *not* going to take it any more. We are not, through silence and complacency, going to be part of the problem.

We *have* the solutions. Let us pledge, here and now, that we're going to do whatever it takes to achieve them. It can be done – but only if we unabashedly face and tell the truth and no longer allow the greedy or the ignorant to take us on the disastrous course we've been on. We owe far more to young people and to those who come along in the future.

We cannot be content with simply obeying and going along with those who are so irresponsibly failing to take the measures necessary to avoid irreversible, disastrous climate chaos.

In the face of impending irreversible, catastrophic climate disruption, we have allowed presidents, Congress, government regulators, state legislatures, many governors, including Utah's current governor, and most of our municipal elected officials, to dither, delay and become distracted.

We're here to say, "No more dithering. No more delay. And no more distractions."

Why hold more debates when the scientific facts establishing the impacts of burning fossil fuels on the warming of the earth have been established for decades – some of them for more than a century? In 1824, Joseph Fourier wrote about the warming of the Earth from the atmosphere. In the 1850s John Tyndall discovered the heat retention properties of what we now know as greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane.

On a local level, some of Utah's top scientists wrote about the scientific consensus concerning climate change when former Governor Huntsman appointed a blue ribbon task force to study the matter. Those scientists agreed that the earth is heating up, that Utah is experiencing significant warming and it will get worse, and that human activities are a substantial cause.

On the national level, the National Academy of Sciences has agreed that the burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – is warming the earth – and at a rapidly increasing rate. In fact, every major U.S. national scientific organization that deals with atmospheric and earth sciences has agreed.

On an international level, the largest scientific collaboration in history, the International Panel on Climate Change, has explained that the causal connection between the burning of fossil fuels and the increasing warming of our planet is “unequivocal”. Every nation's science academy rendering any findings on the issue has agreed.

It is simply irresponsible and morally appalling that people who could be providing leadership on this issue have failed us all. And the consequences will be tragic.

Those who fail to do everything possible to protect the earth's inhabitants – present and future – from the devastation of climate chaos cannot claim any religious or humanitarian values, because their actions and inaction betray every fundamental religious and humanitarian tradition. Acting to protect our earth and its inhabitants is of the highest moral imperative.

Of course, many elected officials have failed in their jobs.

Of course, many of them have displayed appalling ignorance.

And, of course, they should – and must – be held accountable.

But let *us* not just be finger-pointers – unless we point our fingers back at ourselves and commit to decisive action.

Let *us* take up the torch of responsibility. Let *us* recognize it is *our* job.

We won't see sufficient measures to combat climate change without us pushing, and pushing, and pushing. It will be really tough and it will take sacrifices, but let it be known that we *are* up to the task!

If anyone thinks the job was done when we elected a new president, they need to think again. Don't forget, this president was the man who, in accepting his party's nomination, touted the virtues of clean coal.

The truth needs to be understood: No coal is clean coal.

We know that if we don't stop the burning of coal, our earth will be a very inhospitable place – eventually largely uninhabitable.

Will we offer our children the cop-out that “Yeah, it's really tragic, but our elected officials didn't do their jobs”?

Or will we be able to tell them, “Yes, *we* reversed the trend toward cataclysmic climate change because *we the*

people finally stopped blaming others and took up the charge ourselves”?

Don't think the job will get done by an occasional demonstration, an occasional march, or an occasional meeting with your representatives.

We need to push, every single day, with a unified message – as if it's a matter of life and death – because it *is* a matter of life and death!

We *cannot* prevent irreversible, catastrophic climate change if we don't stop burning coal.

From this day hence, let every city council member, every mayor, every state legislator, every governor, every representative in Congress, and our President know that they will *never* be re-elected, they will *never* have our support, if they don't do all it takes to end reliance on coal.

Recall the words of Alfred Russel Wallace in his 1903 book, *Man's Place in the Universe*:

“It has been the consideration of our wonderful atmosphere in its various relations to human life, and to all life, which has compelled me to this cry for the children and for outraged humanity . . . Let everything give way to this. . . Vote for no one who says ‘it can't be done’. Vote only for those who declare ‘It shall be done’.”

Those who push coal, those who accommodate coal, are making war against young people and the next generation.

They are destroying species. They are destroying our atmosphere and rendering our world inhospitable to life. *They* are the enemy – creating a far greater threat to peace and security than all the terrorists in the world combined. If we don't fight them to a degree that corresponds to the harm they are causing, then *we* are complicit.

The moral imperative is clear: *We must* radically and urgently alter our course. Half-measures like those proposed by the current administration thus far, are, in the long run, equivalent to doing nothing at all. If we're not going to quickly achieve massive reductions in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide, then any measures are simply pretense and p.r.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, we weren't content with half measures – manufacturing a few more tanks and bombers, but basically continuing with business-as-usual. The people of our nation made enormous sacrifices and pulled out all the stops, defeating the forces of fascist world domination.

After the world learned about the destruction of the ozone layer, we weren't content with simply continuing with the use of chlorofluorocarbons and business as usual. We met the challenge, through collaboration, creativity, and commitment.

Now, more than ever, we must demand an end to business as usual. We must demand – we must act to achieve – an end to the burning of coal. *Period.* That must begin with an immediate moratorium on the construction of new coal-burning power plants – and a phased-in elimination of those currently in operation.

Getting beyond half-measures – taking sufficient steps in sufficient time – will occur *only* if we do *our* job.

If our nation can retool our manufacturing capacity and pull together to fight a world war, we are certainly capable, with effective leadership and tenacious citizen activism, to radically retool and dedicate ourselves to saving our world through a commitment to renewable sources of energy, mass transit, clean cars, rewarding green jobs, and the preservation of the world's forests.

No more dithering. No more delay. And no more distractions. You who are here are in the vanguard of a new day. A safer, healthier, sustainable new day!

By accepting the charge, you have a great responsibility, and also a remarkable opportunity. Let each of us honor that responsibility and opportunity by turning these candles tonight into torches – and carrying them to create the pressure for real change – responsibly, radically, and relentlessly!