

A Matter of Degrees: A Look Back at Vice President Kamala Harris on Climate Leadership, Justice, and Solutions

DR. WILKINSON: Well hello, Leah Stokes!

DR. STOKES: Well hello Katherine Wilkinson, it's been a while.

DR. WILKINSON: It has been a minute. In fact, it has been over a year since our last episode, which is a little bit hard to believe. What have you been doing these last 12 months, Leah?

DR. STOKES: Too much probably, you know, research, raising twin toddlers, battling the fossil fuel industry, a fair amount trying to make sure that our climate laws are implemented well, preventing climate chaos. Oh, and the other thing is I've been writing a book. That's been eating up a fair amount of my time.

DR. WILKINSON: I tell you what, middle age, it is a juggle and frankly, a lot of heavy lifting.

DR. STOKES: Mm-hmm. Yes, and what have you been up to, Katherine?

DR. WILKINSON: Let's see, I've been running an organization, training educators across the US and Canada, trying to continue the work of growing the climate leadership that we need. Also training an exceedingly cool horse.

DR. STOKES: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILKINSON: I definitely, definitely got Olympics fever this year watching Simone Biles win yet another three gold medals. And I've also been on a hard journey with my dad through hospice. Um, so you know, all the things.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, life can be like that, right? The highs and the lows all at once. And I guess that might make sense for why we haven't released an episode for a year.

DR. WILKINSON: Yeah, we've been doing a lot and that's part of why we've been pretty quiet here in pod land. But even though we have not been telling stories for the climate curious, a lot has happened in the world of climate.

DR. STOKES: It's been a pretty busy year.

DR. WILKINSON: Let's just recap some highlights to look back over where we've been.

DR. STOKES: Well, probably the biggest thing is that the Inflation Reduction Act alongside the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the CHIPS Act, it's been flowing down through state, local, city, county governments. And we are really seeing the effects. Heat pumps and electric vehicles and solar panels and batteries. They're all flying off the shelves and people are getting jobs in this good paying, clean economy of the future. It is exciting to watch.

DR. WILKINSON: In fact it's really exciting in my home state of Georgia, we've now become the number one state in the country for new clean energy jobs. We've seen more than 30,000 jobs and \$23 billion in investments statewide. So go Georgia.

DR. STOKES: This feeling never gets old. The idea that the world is changing and we're headed to a better future, you know, and Georgia, like everywhere else, is just getting started.

DR. WILKINSON: And thank goodness we are getting started because there's another very big and much less good thing that has been happening in the past year, which is that the world is getting hotter.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, I mean, basically, since we stopped recording for a year, the planet has been careening through one after another hottest month. In fact, pretty much since we recorded our last episode, there have been 13 consecutive months that broke a global heat record. I don't know. Maybe we should make podcasts and the planet will stay cooler. What do you think, Katherine?

DR. WILKINSON: I would love it if A Matter of Degrees had the ability to put that record to an end. Because yes, exactly as Leah said, last June was the hottest June ever. Then July was the hottest July ever, and on and on for 13 straight months.

DR. STOKES: The reality is that the climate crisis is happening now. We can see it on our doorsteps.

DR. WILKINSON: And all of this means that we are in a pivotal moment in the work to heal our planet. And it is one that is going to shape the history of Earth, humanity, all the beings we share this planet with for a very, very long time.

DR. STOKES: It may sound dramatic, but it's true, right? We've got these starkly different paths ahead of us this year in 2024. And whatever happens in this time, we're gonna look back and see, did we rise to that climate challenge or did we let our hope for a better future slip away?

DR. WILKINSON: Which is why we are back in your podcast feed, peddling possibility and transformation. Over the next couple of months, we're going to release a short series of episodes that discuss this moment that we find ourselves in, what the problems are, what solutions are at hand, how we can curb global heating while building a just and thriving clean economy and ultimately a safe and healthy world.

DR. STOKES: Well, I'm in, I'm excited. So where do you think we should start, Katherine?

DR. WILKINSON: Well, I was thinking, Leah, that we should start with someone who has played a key role in getting us to this moment we find ourselves in today. And in fact, she's been a leader on climate for decades now. She cast the deciding vote to pass the Inflation Reduction Act. She also just so happens to have been in the news quite a bit recently. Do you have a guess, Leah, who I'm talking about?

DR. STOKES: Do you think I just fell out of a coconut tree? Or do you think I was watching her cast that vote live on C-SPAN? Because it was definitely the latter. And I do believe you're talking about our vice president, Kamala Harris.

DR. WILKINSON: I'm so glad you're safely still in the tree, Leah. Yes, in fact, way back in our last season, you and I had the chance to sit down and talk climate in front of a live audience in San Francisco with Vice President Harris.

DR. STOKES: And I was very excited to talk to her, you know?

DR. WILKINSON: You were. You were next level, Leah, I will say.

DR. STOKES: I mean, come on, how often do you get to hang out with somebody who is as excited as our vice president is about heat pumps, electric school buses, environmental justice? I mean, she has been fighting for communities against polluters for decades.

DR. WILKINSON: It was a really, really inspiring interview. And with a lot of climate and Kamala conversations going on now, we thought that this deserved a little boost in your feed.

DR. STOKES: So here it is, our live episode with our Vice President Kamala Harris way back in October 2022.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 19, 2022

Remarks by Vice President Harris in a Conversation on Climate on "A Matter of Degrees" Podcast

Cowell Theatre
San Francisco, California

3:15 P.M. PDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Great to be home. (Laughs.) Hi, everybody. (Applause.) Thank you all. Hi.

DR. STOKES: Well, I should hang out with you more often. People really like you. (Laughter.) Vice -- Vice President Harris, we're deeply honored that you could join us for this special live recording of our podcast.

It's a show called "A Matter of Degrees." It's a climate podcast, for those who don't know it. And I'm joined by my co-host, Dr. Katharine Wilkinson, and I'm Dr. Leah Stokes.

And our pod- -- our podcast tells stories for the climate curious. So, thank you all for coming today and joining us for this conversation on climate leadership.

DR. WILKINSON: We like to ask all of our guests on the show a little bit about their personal climate journeys. So, Madam Vice President, what led you to recognize the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to fight for climate justice? And how did you end up in this work?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: So, as you said, I'm -- I'm a Bay Area kid. I grew up here. And from elementary school on, it was a big part of the discussion about the challenges our country is facing and what we need to do about it.

I hope I don't come off with too much bravado when I say that the Bay Area really is a home of that movement, if not "the" home. (Applause.)

And as you also mentioned, my -- my parents met when they were graduate students at UC Berkeley in the '60s. (Applause.) And they were active in the Civil Rights Movement. And -- and so I grew up at this -- in this very interesting time in this incredible place -- this incredible place -- where there

was activism that was around -- you know, we called it “ecology” then, right? We had different names for it. But there was the activism that was that and the Civil Rights Movement.

And so everything in the environment growing up was about a fight for justice and a fight for the freedom to live and be. And when I think about the environmental movement, the environmental justice movement, it, at its core, really is about that and much more. But it is about that.

And so that's -- that's how I grew up. And then, of course, you know, I remember being very young during one of the most significant droughts that California ever experienced, in the '70s, and what that -- what we learned as kids about what you need to do in terms of conserving water and recycling water and -- and the precious nature of it all.

And so it just was very much a part of everything I knew, that I learned from the earliest stages about everything that was important. This was one of those big things. Yeah.

DR. WILKINSON: I think that role of our context and our community in shaping our paths is so powerful. And I love that you brought us right into the heart of the matter, which is about a life-giving present and hopefully a life-giving future. So, thank you.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Absolutely right. Absolutely right. And -- and the need to fight for it and not take it for granted. And that was so much a part of how I was raised at that time in this place, the Bay Area. But it is also so much about what the movement is today. Yeah.

DR. STOKES: Yeah. And I love how you also center people. You know, too often we think the environment, climate, that it's not about people, but this is actually about all of us -- right? -- making sure that we have a livable future, making sure that children don't have exposure to pollution, especially children of color. You know, that's really what this is about. It's about people.

So I wanted to talk next about a really exciting thing. You might have heard of it. Congress just passed a law called the Inflation Reduction Act. (Applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: (Laughs.)

DR. STOKES: Yeah. I do believe there were some people who even voted for it in the audience here, including Madam Vice President herself.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Broke more ties than John Adams in the first year. (Applause.)

DR. STOKES: Yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That's what they tell me. (Laughs.)

DR. STOKES: That was a very important vote you took, yes. Because this is the largest piece of climate legislation in American history and one of my favorite parts of the climate bill is that there are now rebates and tax credits to help Americans get a heat pump.

“What is a heat pump?” you ask.

AUDIENCE: Wooo!

DR. STOKES: Oh, all my friends in the audience know already. Well, let me just remind you.

A heat pump is an efficient electric machine that can both heat and cool your home with no gas necessary, no fossil fuels required. (Applause.) It's very exciting. Yes.

And the cool -- very sexy -- sexy heat pumps. Yes. (Laughter.)

And, actually, one of the organizations I work with, called Rewiring America -- well, first of all, a guy dresses up as a heat pump for Rewiring America. It's very cool. But they also have a calculator on their website.

So if you go to RewiringAmerica.org, you can find out how much money that you can get to help electrify your home, whether it's getting an electric car, getting a heat pump, a heat pump water heater, and, even for low- and moderate-income Americans, getting an induction stove.

So I could go on and on about heat pumps for a while. But this isn't about me, this is about you. So I would love --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: So what do I think about heat pumps? (Laughter.)

DR. STOKES: Well, obviously, you must love them. But I would love to hear: What are some parts of the Inflation Reduction Act -- this -- this amazing new law that you are most excited about?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I mean, so much. So much. I'm -- one of the things that I'm very excited about is what we have been doing in terms of electric vehicles. And I have a particular fondness, I must tell you, for electric school buses. I love electric school buses. (Applause.) I really do. And we're manufacturing them in our country. I've been to the manufacturing plants. I've been on these electric school buses.

And think about it: Aside from the pandemic, on a daily basis, 25 million children in our country every day go to school on those diesel-fueled school buses. And hundreds, thousands of school bus drivers are driving those buses, which are -- then these people -- these children, these adults -- are inhaling what is toxic air.

And so, I think about it in terms of the manufacturing piece of it. I think about it -- and U.S. manufacturing. And I -- and I say that with a sense of pride. I think about it in terms of the jobs that we are creating that are those jobs to manufacture it. I think about it from the context of public health. And I think about it in the context of education.

Because there is so much about this movement that really is the intersection between the economy, between what we must do that is about public health, what we must do that recognizes that those dangers to public health invariably affect our most vulnerable of our population and, in particular, children who, when exposed to these toxins, when exposed to pollution, it can impact their ability to learn.

And so that's one of the things I'm very excited about. I'm very excited about the tax credits. And so -- think about it: We're now giving tax credits, because of the Inflation Reduction Act, at point of sale. That's really im- -- for electric vehicles. That's very important.

Because the reality is, for most people, to try and fill out a tax form and figure out which credits you

can apply for, it's complicated. And so we're now making it more simple. But also, at point of sale getting the credit. So basically, it's off the sticker price, because a lot of folks can't wait until they get the -- the refund later in the year. And so it's a very smart policy, in terms of doing that kind of work to encourage that.

And then the other piece of the credit is that, for the first time, not only is it at point of sale, but it applies to used vehicles as well as new vehicles. And that's very important because the majority of car sales in America are for used vehicles. I think something like 75 percent.

So when we're thinking about how the intersection between environmental policy and tax policy -- right? -- tax policy when it's doing the right thing hopefully will encourage good behaviors and smart behaviors -- this is that intersection.

DR. STOKES: Yes, it's so true. (Applause.) I mean, look, yeah. This law is really transformative. And I think we're only beginning to see its effects. We've seen big announcements already in the billions of dollars for folks doing manufacturing here in the United States. And those electric vehicle incentives are going to be a huge game-changer when it comes to jobs here in the United States.

So I think it's -- you know, we really are only at the beginning of what the Inflation Reduction Act is going to do. And it's really a testament to your leadership that that bill was able to get across the finish line.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And there's another piece of it that I'm equally -- I mean, they're, you know, in equal parts excitement.

DR. STOKES: There's a lot to talk about.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes. Yes. But the env- -- the environmental justice piece. And as many of you from the Bay Area and San Francisco may remember, when I was DA of San Francisco, I created one of the first environmental justice units of any DA's office in the country. And that was back in 2005. (Applause.)

And here's how that came about: As we know, there is a community in San Francisco, Bayview-Hunters Point -- (applause) --

AUDIENCCE MEMBER: Yeah!

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes. There you go. Oh, I'm glad to see.

And at the time, the annual household income in Bayview-Hunters Point was about \$15,000 -- one-five. And what we were finding is that polluters were dumping in Bayview-Hunters Point. And this is the kind of phenomena that you see around the country where in low-income communities and communities of color, you see a disproportionate -- you know, bad actors, treating these communities like dumping grounds.

And so I went after them as a prosecutor, and then we created an environmental justice unit to talk about the importance of all that the Inflation Reduction Act will do, in terms of reduction of emissions and mitigation and adaptation. But also, in this movement, there has to be some recognition for the important -- importance also of enforcement and making sure that we create incentives that include disincentives for bad behaviors and consequences when those bad behaviors

occur. And so that's what I did back then.

And then for our bill now, the work of EJ being investing in communities.

I was talking with a group of friends just before this: investing in communities in a way we don't tell the community what we've done for them. We ask the community what do they need and let them inform us -- (applause) -- of what is in their best interest, right?

And so doing that in a way that we also support community-based organizations that, for example, will help the residents of that community with rebates, which will occur under our policies; will help the community with mitigation and adaptation and resilience around job creation, hiring locally, training locally in those communities for these very important jobs that are jobs that require important skills that are there as part of the capacity of the community but need to be invested in.

So these are some of the components of the environmental reduction -- I mean, the Inflation Reduction Act that I think are very, very important in terms of investing in all communities. Because we also know that disproportionately low-income communities and communities of color throughout our country are most at risk for the greatest crises and challenges that we face.

DR. WILKINSON: And I love that these are jobs that we will need in every community -- from coast to coast, north to south -- every part of this country.

We've been talking about kind of the latest big climate news from the nation's capital. But we have seen the Biden-Harris administration really take climate up with gusto from day one.

So, setting up the National Climate Office in the White House, of course, making sure that every single federal agency is focused on how they can contribute to climate solutions. There have been other bills before the Inflation Reduction Act that have made really significant climate investments. We've seen the largest investment in public transit ever.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

DR. WILKINSON: The largest investment -- (applause) -- yes, that is worth clapping for.

DR. STOKES: Yes, we need to clap for public transit. Yes.

DR. WILKINSON: We have seen the largest investment in EV charging infrastructure ever. (Applause.) So much great stuff.

So what are some of the climate actions that the administration has taken that folks may not know so much about?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of it has to do with a real intentionality that we have to re-shift industries and do that in a way that we are emphasizing the importance of U.S. investment and U.S.-based R&D -- research and development.

The President and I both care deeply about the importance of investing in -- in scientists, in engineers, and that research. (Laughs.) (Applause.)

Many of you may know my mother was the scientist. She had two goals in her life: to raise her two

daughters and end breast cancer. She -- before she passed, her lab was at Berkeley -- at UC Berkeley. And -- (applause) -- yeah.

And so the President and I really are both, for very personal reasons, very passionate about that. And so there is this very -- a strong and purposeful focus on what we are doing with the -- with the act to invest in research and development.

There is a lot of what we're doing in terms of thinking about how we shift in terms of how we are growing industry and capacity to do U.S.-based manufacturing for a variety of reasons, and I'll mention two in particular. One which caught our attention during the pandemic, which is supply chain.

But the second has to do with the fact that we have, as a nation, over the years really -- we're not where we need to be, but we have evolved around the importance of clean industries, as compared to a lot of other nations. And so we see a benefit to investing here in production, understanding and believing that our standards are closer to where we should be as a globe in terms of manufacturing.

So those are some of the aspects of what we've done that I think aren't necessarily part of the public discourse, but are very important.

DR. WILKINSON: So, so important.

DR. STOKES: Well, you've sort of taken us to the next question. You know, this afternoon, we're talking a lot about what the United States has been doing. And there's a reason for that, because we have a wonderful administration in office right now that's actually doing stuff on climate change. So that is very exciting. But we know that climate change is a global problem, right?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

DR. STOKES: And on day one, President Biden put the United States back in the Paris Agreement. Very exciting. And after that, you've been going around the world talking to world leaders in your role as the Vice President, and we'd love to hear what that experience has been like. What are you hearing from other world leaders about climate change and about the United States' leadership under the current Biden-Harris administration?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And don't forget the Kigali Amendment.

DR. STOKES: Oh my gosh, how could I?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Which was, really, very significant.

DR. STOKES: We got to take a little pause for that. So for those who don't know, another thing that Congress did was they ratified the Kigali agreement, which is a really --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: To the Montreal Protocol.

DR. STOKES: Yes, to the Montreal Protocol, which will actually reduce warming by I think half a degree centigrade, if I'm right. It's a lot. It's a lot of --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It's a big deal. (Applause.)

DR. STOKES: Yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It's a very big deal.

DR. STOKES: Very big deal. And you could forget -- I mean, that's the thing; there's so much great climate policy, you could forget about some of them. That's what's so great about the Biden-Harris administration.

But -- but back to the world leaders.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, yes.

DR. STOKES: What are you hearing from them?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Okay. So, as Vice President, at this point I've met with -- in person or by phone -- my team tells me, 100 world leaders -- so presidents, prime ministers, chancellors, kings -- and on a variety of subjects.

But one of the subjects I raised in almost every discussion is this one. And the countries that I've talked with range from countries on the continent of Africa, to one of the newest world leaders, Albanese of Australia, to also recently I convened the Caribbean leaders. And I'm happy to report, for example, Australia, and -- and the new head of state there, is really committed, in a very personal way, to this issue -- which is a really great transition from the previous administration there -- and will be very significant because, of course, it is an Indo-Pacific nation, and we are an Indo-Pacific nation. And when we think about this region of the world and the collaboration between us, it is very important to have that kind of partner.

But the conversations range. The Caribbean nations, for example, they are acutely aware of the fact that they are some of the lowest emitters paying the highest price of emissions. And the question then becomes: What do we, who are some of the greatest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions -- what is our role and responsibility? I mean, you know, that was old saying: One person sneezes and the other one catches the cold. Right?

And so meeting with the Caribbean leaders, they are extremely concerned because this is an issue that is not only about degrading manned [sic] -- land mass for them -- their island nations -- but also, extreme climate, extreme weather occurrences impact tourism. And tourism is the greatest contributor to their GDP.

So you see now the cycle, because if we are saying all nations must step up around reduction of emissions and mitigation, because that is -- part of the international rule and norm, if you will, in this movement is not only about emissions, but what each nation must take on as a responsibility for resilience and adaptation. They're saying -- look, I mean, our tourism and our GDP, therefore, have dropped pretty significantly. And we're not one of the greatest emitters, and here we are paying some of the greatest price proportionate to our population and our GDP.

So the conversation ranges from what we -- who our high-income nations can do and what we should do, what is our responsibility globally as well as domestically, and also how are we, as a world community, going to ensure that we are sharing resources in a way that the collective benefits.

Because, you know, be clear also: This is an issue, which is something where we should feel a great sense of collective responsibility for a number of reasons that are -- that can include very selfish reasons. When we see these extreme climate changes, such as drought, what does drought mean? It means that you can't grow food. And people can't live where they can't grow food, and so they move. And they will go to places that may speak a different language and pray to a different god, which may result in conflict. And that can just perpetuate itself.

And so, there is a connection -- I made this point years ago when I was in the Senate and got a lot of flak from a member of one political party, and it was the other political party. (Laughs.) And "What is she doing saying that the climate crisis is a national security issue?" Well, it is. Among the many issues, we talked about public health, we talked about education, we talked about the economy, we talked about manufacturing. We should also understand that it rises to being a national security issue if we don't see where this is headed. Yeah. (Applause.)

DR. WILKINSON: I'm trying to remember what year it exactly was that the Pentagon described climate change as a "threat multiplier."

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

DR. WILKINSON: The Pentagon, not the climate movement. The Pentagon.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Right. Right.

DR. WILKINSON: So we put out a request to our listeners to send us some questions in advance of this conversation. And we got a great question from our listener, Eduarda Hamilton (ph). And she wrote, "I'm in my 20s and I'm really happy to see strong and intelligent women discussing climate change," which I think is us. (Laughter.)

DR. STOKES: (Laughs.) I don't know.

DR. WILKINSON: Not sure, but we're going to take the compliment. She says, "It's a huge issue, especially for my generation."

My question is: What can you say to us who want to be leaders in our communities but don't know how? What can we do? Or to put it another way, how can everyone of every age be part of the solution?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It's a great question. And I'll start by saying that I truly do believe we are all born as leaders, and it's just a matter of when we decide to kick it in.

And so, I'll start there, which is that you are a leader. And then the question is how you choose to use your voice. I think that, in particular, young leaders in this moment, in this movement are going to be critical to where we -- where we are. And young movers have been -- leaders have been pivotal in the movement that we have seen.

You know, going back, again, to just thinking about the history of the greatest movements in our country, back to this Bay Area and the movements that started and grew here, students have always been a big part, if not the propelling part, of the leadership of those movements. And so young leaders have always been the ones who have the ability to see the consequence of a moment if we don't act.

And I would encourage her to also impress upon the people that she knows why she, in her 20s, will benefit or suffer from action or inaction on this issue. For example, our administration, as you know, has made a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030. The clock is ticking on this -- 1.5 degrees Celsius. And we're already at one degree Celsius.

DR. STOKES: 1.2, yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: 1.2. So, the clock is ticking. And it -- so it's not -- I actually would -- suggested also is not a luxury for any of us. We should each feel compelled as a matter of survival to engage actively.

I would also mention this: Among the issues that I'm working on right now, there is the issue of the attack on women's reproductive health. And I asked my team, actually, to do a -- I love Venn diagrams, let me just tell you. I really just love Venn diagrams.

So I asked them to do a Venn diagram for me on where -- from where are we seeing attacks on women's access to reproductive healthcare, voting rights, LGBTQ rights. And you would not be surprised to know that there was a significant overlap. When you then lay on which states are also attacking or obstructing smart climate policy, you will see a really interesting picture.

And so then, that tells you something, perhaps. But what it should tell you with a sense of optimism is there is such an incredibly ripe environment right now for coalition building, for bringing together all the folks who historically fought for voting rights, who fought for marriage equality, who are fighting for reproductive health rights and are fighting to have smart climate policy. And let's bring everybody into the room.

And I think sometimes our young leaders are the most and best equipped to see that and not have to be convinced of it, and then do it. So I would encourage her to do that also.

DR. WILKINSON: I love that. And I love the -- you know, coalition building sounds like this kind of wonky thing, but it has to do with conversation between two people --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Right.

DR. WILKINSON: -- and then another person and another person. And I think, so often, climate leadership can start at that level -- right? -- of taking someone by the arm and saying, "Hey, you care about reproductive justice. There is no reproductive justice on an unlivable planet, so come with me to this thing." Right? "Let's -- let's build that sense of relationship and trust around these critical issues."

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That too. But also, let's understand that there are common themes here that are underlying the point of it all -- back to the earliest discussion we had this afternoon about freedom, access. Right?

When we talk about environmental justice, for example, we are talking about access to clean water, to clean air. Seventy percent of the people who live in the poorest air quality regions of our country are people of color and poor people.

And isn't that -- isn't at the heart of that movement about everyone's right to have access to clean

water and clean air, a right to have access -- a right to have access to reproductive healthcare, a right to have access to the ballot, a right to marry the person you love?

These are the issues. (Applause.) Right?

DR. STOKES: Well, and that really takes us to our next listener question, which comes from two people, Marya Zlatnik and Robyn Churchill. And they both wanted to hear you talk about what you're talking about right now, which is the link between our health, particularly maternal health, and the climate crisis.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

DR. STOKES: And, you know, I would be remiss to not mention an amazing study which looked at: When mothers are exposed to pollution while they have a fetus in utero, you can detect the negative impacts of that pollution in their grandchildren, meaning two generations down the line.

So when we talk about pollution and how it affects mothers and children, it's really quite extreme. So what do you see are the links here between reproductive justice and the fight for that, which we're seeing so -- is so important right now, and the fight for climate justice?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yeah. So, maternal health is an issue I've worked on for a long time and -- and, in particular, the issue of maternal mortality.

In America today, Black women are three times more likely to die in connection with childbirth. Native women twice as likely. Rural women one and a half times. Again, part of it is (inaudible). Rural America -- almost anywhere in rural America, you will find healthcare deserts, no access to care, which results, of course, in problems in terms of during the course of pregnancy, much less childbirth and immediately after. And -- and so that is one of the issues, which is access.

One of the other issues is what we are seeing in terms of also racial bias. And when you talk about it in terms of Black women, we know that those numbers are -- regardless of her socioeconomic or educational level, it is literally the fact that when she walks into that doctor's office or that clinic, she is not taken as seriously as other women.

So there are a number of issues here. One is what we need to do in terms of the bias that exists in the healthcare system. And so I had a bill that was about teaching racial bias to healthcare providers, including having doulas do the teaching around how they should be more -- right? Yes. (Applause.) Doulas are just -- they should be teaching everybody, right? So there is that.

But then, to more directly answer your -- your point, that there is also the fact that we must recognize the stressors that can influence a pregnancy and the life of that child once born.

And so think about it from the context of this: Poverty is trauma inducing. And along with poverty comes -- well, we talked earlier -- 70 percent of the people who, in our country, live in poor air quality communities are low income or people of color, and usually some combination of the two. Right? And what that means in terms of the health and wellbeing of that woman.

We look at it in the context of access to transportation. What we are doing and what we did with the infrastructure bill is, in addition to the Inflation Reduction Act, will be an investment in public transportation and clean energy, and what that means in terms of being able to get to a doctor

wherever they are -- right? -- and do that in a way that is relatively easy.

We can look at it in terms of access to education. We can look at the issue of the interconnection between asthma and this issue, and the trauma associated with having children who, every other week or however frequently it is, you have to rush to the emergency room because they have asthma and can't breathe, and what that means for the health and wellbeing of that entire family unit.

So there's a lot of connection between these issues. And, again, I think it just -- it highlights the importance of the coalition-building to see the interconnection and to join arms between these movements, because human beings are multifaceted. And if you look at the whole person, your question, I think, highlights exactly how we should think.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, and even something as simple as being exposed to extreme heat, which we know is --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

DR. STOKES: -- happening more and more, that's a big stressor on pregnant women. It can increase the likelihood of miscarriages, for example. So there really are direct connections here.

DR. WILKINSON: I think we may be able to squeak in one more question.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Okay.

DR. WILKINSON: We know you have a very busy schedule today, and we're so grateful for the time you've taken for this conversation. But we wanted to ask you a question about the future.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes.

DR. WILKINSON: Your career trajectory has led you to address this issue in fascinating and important ways. And as you think about the way forward for climate leadership and climate solutions, what do you see?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: So, I head up the Space Council, as Vice President. (Laughter.)

DR. STOKES: It's so cool.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I am a space geek. I love space. (Laughs.) (Applause.) I love space. I just do. And I went down -- I was telling some friends, just now -- I went down to Cape Canaveral for, you know, the Artemis launch. I just -- anyway -- (laughter) --

And from time to time, I have had the incredible opportunity of talking with astronauts while they are in space.

DR. STOKES: Super cool. Very cool.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And it's just -- it's just an extraordinary experience. And -- and I have asked a few of them: "When you are in space, looking at Earth, has it impacted your perception in any way of Earth?" And almost to a one, they say, "I realized in a profound way how fragile our Earth is." And almost to one, they say, "And how interconnected we all are." And, I would add,

interdependent.

So, the future. I believe our future will be bright if we all can understand what the Earth and so many people are telling us about what the Earth is telling us about itself, about its fragility, and our responsibility -- who have benefited from the yield of this Earth -- our responsibility to care for it and to protect it.

And I do -- I've recently convened a bunch of university student head leaders. They were presidents of their university student association. Incredibly bright, powerful people who are leading in every way.

And when I look out at them, when I am here with all of the people who are here who are so committed, I am convinced that our future is bright, but we must work with a sense of urgency. We must be swift. We must understand that we are in a very specific moment in time. And this window is going to shut on us if we don't act with a sense of urgency.

But it doesn't have to shut on us if we act. And I think we are committed to doing that. I mean, I look at leaders like Congressman Jared Huffman, who is here.

DR. STOKES: Yes. Applause for Jared Huffman. (Applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Mayor Libby Schaaf of Oakland is here. Mayor London Breed of San Francisco is here. I look at the leaders we have, along with the leaders who are -- I'm looking at on this stage and across the audience. I -- I have a great sense of optimism that we do feel the urgency.

And fortunately, we have, as an administration, been able to do things like the Inflation Reduction Act. We still have so much more to do. I don't want to close this program without also thanking all the leaders who are here, who have been leading this movement and putting the pressure from the outside on government to do the kind of work that we have achieved. And that partnership and that synergy, I believe, will get us where we need to go. (Applause.) Thank you.

DR. STOKES: Well, this conversation has been such a blessing, and your leadership in office has been such a blessing. We would not be where we -- where we are today with landmark climate legislation in law without your leadership. So, on behalf of everyone, we're just all so grateful for everything you're doing.

And please join me in thanking the Vice President for this conversation today. You know, we're so happy you all came. We're so happy that she came. And this conversation is going to --

DR. WILKINSON: We're just so happy.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, we're just happy. (Laughter.) Yeah, see, the sign interpretation is very happy. Yes. (Laughter.)

This conversation will be up on the feed -- on the podcast feed on Thursday, so we would love for you to share this with your friends, your family, your colleagues. Share it far and wide.

And then, in the meantime, what I really want you to do is keep being leaders that the Vice President talked about. This is not -- this is not something for someone else to solve. This is something for each one of us in our lives to take on. I've dedicated my life to it. We've all dedicated our lives to it,

and I hope you will do the same, because climate change -- we want to make a difference on this. We are the heroes we've been waiting for.

So, thank you all for coming today. Please join me in thanking the Vice President.

DR. WILKINSON: And have the last word.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And let's thank -- let's thank this Bay Area.

DR. STOKES: Yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Let's thank California. (Applause.)

DR. STOKES: Yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Our Lieutenant Governor was here -- Eleni Kounalakis. Let's thank her. There is so much good work that's happening right here. So please, Bay Area, keep it up. Keep it up. (Applause.)

DR. STOKES: Yes, thank you.

DR. WILKINSON: Thank you so much.

END 3:55 P.M. PDT

DR. WILKINSON: Frankly, I'm still kind of pinching myself that we got to talk to the Vice President of the United States only about climate.

DR. STOKES: I know I'm like re-geeking out all over again. I'm like riding high on electric school buses right now.

DR. WILKINSON: You were a legitimate heat pump hype woman that day, Leah. I mean, you are that every day. But in all seriousness, how awesome that she set up an EJ office way back in 2005.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, I mean Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth, the documentary, it didn't come out until 2006. Kamala Harris has been leading on environmental justice and climate action before most people even knew this was a problem.

DR. STOKES: And then she went on to play a critical role in the breakthrough of federal climate policy that, you know, how many times did we talk about, like is this ever going to happen?

DR. STOKES: You know the other thing that doesn't necessarily come through in the audio that I remember from talking with Vice President Harris is that she really lit up when she was talking about climate solutions. You know, when you meet politicians, sometimes it can feel like they're just hitting talking points, but she was genuinely as excited as I am, you know, it's obvious that this is a very personal issue for her.

DR. WILKINSON: I'm so glad we're back here and you're saying genuinely again because it makes me light up the way that Kamala Harris lit up in the interview. And I loved at the end hearing how

enamored she is with space, right? When you are someone who really sees and feels the majesty of our universe, the extraordinarily unique place of the earth within it, as Kate Marvel says, the only good planet. Well, I think all of that is a critical part of climate leadership also.

DR. STOKES: Yeah, and in this moment that we find ourselves in, I don't feel like I can emphasize this enough, but it's really essential right now to stay politically engaged on climate.

DR. WILKINSON: That means engaging with the people who are in positions of power, who are making critical decisions at every level of government, and they're making them for the future of our country and for the future of the world.

DR. STOKES: And of course, the vice president talked about something that I feel really strongly about too, which is voting. It is so important to vote.

DR. WILKINSON: If you have the right to vote, you've got to use it. And of course, that is not the only thing you can do politically. There is so much to do beyond showing up at the ballot box, but also you need to show up at the ballot box.

DR. STOKES: It's so important for people to show up.

DR. WILKINSON: Well, on that note, Leah, I just want to say I'm really glad to be back in Podlandia with you and as we say in the South, with all y'all.

DR. STOKES: It's really exciting to be with you, Katherine, and to all those listeners out there. We missed you and we're so excited to spend more time with you again.

DR. WILKINSON: We did miss y'all, and we have got much more to come in episodes this fall. So stay tuned for stories, obviously, about bold climate solutions, efforts to stop misdeeds and corruption, and more awesome leaders in the climate movement.

DR. STOKES: Our next episode is going to look at Project 2025, maybe you've heard about it, it's the Heritage Foundation's conservative manifesto, and we're going to specifically be looking at its plans for the climate.

DR. WILKINSON: Spoiler alert, they're really, really bad.

DR. STOKES: Dun dun dun!

DR. WILKINSON: So stay tuned.

DR. STOKES: A Matter of Degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes.

DR. WILKINSON: And me, Dr. Katherine Wilkinson.

DR. STOKES: We are a production made in partnership with Frequency Media, the 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara, and the All We Can Save Project.

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is working to hold Big Oil accountable for the damage they're doing to our climate and our communities. Find out more at [MakePollutersPay.net](https://www.makepolluterspay.net).

DR. STOKES: And if you're digging the show, please hop on Apple podcasts or Spotify and give us a five star rating or leave us a review.

DR. WILKINSON: Michelle Corey is our executive producer, Lizzie Stewart is our producer, and Claire Bidigare-Curtis is our editor and sound designer.

DR. STOKES: This episode originally aired in October 2022 with Jordan Rizzieri as producer, Katherine Divine and Emily Crumberger as associate producers and Enna Garkusha as supervising producer.

DR. WILKINSON: William Cagle and Ellie Katz wrote the original script, and Isabel Moncloa Daly and Becca Godwin were script editors. Matthew Ernest Filler was our lead audio engineer, mixer, and sound designer with dialogue editing and additional mixing by Claire Bidigare-Curtis.

DR. STOKES: Rose Wong designed our show art. Sean Marquand composed our theme song and additional music came from Blue Dot Sessions.

DR. WILKINSON: Research, fact checking, communication and production support for the original episode were by Daniela Schulman, Amarachi Metu and Madeleine Jubilee Saito.

DR. STOKES: And now, script writing, fact checking, communication, and production support are by Lucas Boyd, Alex Dileo, Quinn Lewis, Christin Palmstrom, and Anusha Singh.

DR. WILKINSON: Find us online at degreespod.com and at degreespod on the artist formerly known as Twitter and YouTube.

DR. STOKES: And stay tuned for more stories for the climate curious.

DR. WILKINSON: And, you know, if you fell out of a coconut tree, you'd probably figure out how to make some juice. So I'm not worried. I'm not worried