

Delegation to Financial and Administration Committee

My name is Adeline Cohen. I'm 17, I live in Brooklin, and I'm in grade 12 at O'Neill CVI in Oshawa. I'm part of Fridays for Future Whitby, and I support the declaration of a climate emergency in Durham.

So, in one of my classes, my peers and I learnt about the American Revolution. After the Americans had won their independence from the British, the founding fathers met at the constitutional convention where they had a choice to make. Would they choose to copy the system of their predecessors and have an American monarchy, or would they have a republic in which the needs of the citizens were the top priority. Now after the convention was over, a woman asked doctor Benjamin Franklin whether they had a monarchy or a republic. Dr. Franklin responded: "A Republic, if you can keep it". To keep their democracy, lawmakers need to display decisiveness, persistence, diligence, and most of all courage. Those same traits are required in our governments today, as they need to take action.

Now, when an activists talks about taking action, they're usually aiming to change society. But in this case, it's more about preserving our society. Right now, we don't have to worry about widespread famine, but the UN has warned us that climate change will threaten global food supplies. Right now, most of us don't have to worry about our grandparents suffering too much in the heat, but seniors in Quebec already died because of heat waves, just two years ago. Right now, the refugee crisis is definitely not easy. But if we don't act then it'll only get harder. Today, 63 million people are displaced from their homes, but climate change may displace as many as 200 million people by 2050. Our world isn't problem free, but any problem we have now will be made worse if we don't treat climate change as the priority.

But the sad truth is that fighting climate change no longer means preventing it. Quite frankly, it's a bit late for that. Ecosystems are already collapsing, people are already suffering, people have already died. My family is already feeling the effects of this personally. My mum's side of the family lives in Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world, and my dad's side of the family lives in Australia, which as you know is currently on fire. Climate change is already here; we are no longer in the prevention phase. We're in the mitigation phase. If we keep going, we will be forcing future generations to enter the survival stage, in which millions of people will be displaced or killed by rising sea levels, unprecedented storms, and food shortages.

We have one decade to stop ourselves from hitting the tipping point. If we fail, even if all emissions are completely and immediately stopped, feedback loops triggered by our past emissions will continue to release greenhouse gases. At this point, climate change won't be something that we can stop, it'll be something that we can only hope to survive. This crisis is like slow-acting poison and we don't really know what a lethal dose is, but somehow people are arguing that we can afford to ingest more poison for the sake of industry, and there's still debate over how much we should invest in the antidote. We can't do that, by the time we realize that we've had too much, it will have been too late for a long time.

Dr. Franklin said, "You have a republic, if you can keep it". The science says that we have a planet if we can keep it. We need action, and courage, and initiative. Green initiatives won't get started unless we start them. Legislation won't get written and voted on if you don't write it and vote on it. Nobody is going to make the tough calls for you, or step about your post to go above and beyond for you. If the American revolutionaries had only done what was expected of them, then they wouldn't be called revolutionaries, would they. Durham is one of thousands of municipalities in the world, so I understand the arguments that our contributions won't make a huge difference. But it's not about being the leader, or the hero. It's about being part of the solution, being a part of the group that will be on the right side of history. It's about contributing to a larger goal that is worth a global effort. Saving our planet is worth your time and attention. We have a future, if we choose to keep it.

Speech 2

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I'm going to make an educated guess about the people on this council. I'm going to guess that you don't care about the economy, public utilities, or housing, just like I don't care about the environment. I don't care about a 2-degree temperature increase, or sea level rise, or the amount of carbon in the air. I really don't. I don't care about climate change for the sake of climate change; I care about it because of the impact it'll have on people. And I think you're the same. You don't care about budget just because you like numbers; you care about what it means for people. If I'm right, if people are what you really care about, then I think you can be convinced that climate change should be the number one priority. I know that most, if not all of you, have been in favour of programs designed to help the environment. But beyond isolated programs and initiatives, if we are to deal with this crisis, then climate change needs to be the priority, and larger action needs to be taken.

Now, when an activist talks about taking action, they're usually aiming to change society. But in this case, it's more about preserving our society. Right now, we don't have to worry about widespread famine, but the UN warns that climate change will threaten global food supplies. Right now, 63 million people are refugees in the world, the refugee crisis definitely isn't easy. But climate change will make it worse, as it's predicted to displace as many as 200 million people by 2050. But the sad truth is that we don't have to wait until 2050 to feel the effects. The truth is that fighting climate change no longer means preventing it. Quite frankly, it's a bit late for that. Already, ecosystems are collapsing, people are suffering, people have died. In Quebec, two years ago, dozens of seniors died because of heat waves. My family is already feeling the effects of climate change; my mum's side of the family lives in Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world, and my dad's side of the family lives in Australia, which as you know is currently on fire. I'm glad that I'm able to say that I haven't lost anyone to climate change-related disasters yet. But Jakarta won't stop sinking anytime soon, and the Australian fire season lasts for 3 more months. You can understand how this is personal, this is real to me. If it's real to you too, make it your priority.

When we're asking you to treat climate change as your number one priority, we're not asking you to drop everything else. We are asking you to consider all of your actions and your votes from the perspective of the future, to not let climate change be secondary. It can't be secondary, because if we don't succeed in the next decade, then no matter what the following generations do it won't be enough. After that, feedback loops triggered by our past actions will continue to release greenhouse gases, and climate change will no longer be something that can be stopped, it'll be something that can only be survived.

I know it won't be easy. It takes commitment. But the beauty of action is that it gives us choice. We can choose which lessons we'll be taught. Either we learn the skills of forward thinking and stewardship, or we learn how to accommodate climate refugees. You as our representatives, you learn how to treat climate change as the priority it is, or you learn how to explain to us why your concern for the community only lasts as long as your term in office, explain to me why climate change isn't important enough to you, when my family's well being depends on a 1.5 degree limit. To be blunt, we can learn how to take action, or we learn how to mourn.

To finish up, I need to tell you that nothing I've said today is news to any of my classmates. My generation is so disillusioned with politics, so few of us have the optimism to believe that our governments will actually meet emission targets. In my classrooms, irreversible climate change is often talked about as an inevitability. If you suggested to a group of my peers that we should trust the government, I would bet money that they would laugh in your face. My generation doesn't think you care about our future. Please, prove us wrong.