Thousands rally on Boston Common to demand action on climate change

A participant and a sign at Boston Common on Saturday.

By Nicole Fleming | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 29, 2017

Thousands rallied at Boston Common on Saturday afternoon to demand action on climate change, one of many such events across the country and world marking the 100th day of Donald Trump’s presidency.

“We are here today because there is no Planet B,” the Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, minister for ecological justice at the Bethel AME Church in Jamaica
A critical goal is to unite people across fractured segments of society in a realization that climate change affects us all, she said in an interview before the rally.

“Liberals or conservatives, blacks or whites — we will all go down together,” said White-Hammond.

The Boston rally, which began at noon, included workshops in the form of action tables and teach-ins. The workshops looked at how climate intersects across various aspects of our society, from education to mass incarceration to immigration, said White-Hammond.

“Massachusetts has been out in front on so many things,” she said. “We need to lead aggressively.”
Studies have cited Boston as one of the American cities most vulnerable to climate change. A report last year by the University of Massachusetts and other local universities indicated that in a worst-case scenario, sea levels could rise more than 10 feet by the end of the century — plunging about 30 percent of the city under water.

White-Hammond said she lives in an area of Dorchester that scientists expect will have monthly floodings by 2070.

“What kind of future is that to leave to my godchildren?” she said. “We are definitely speaking to the [Trump] administration and Congress [today], but also to our local leaders.”

The flagship march took place in Washington, D.C. Like the others, it was sponsored by the Peoples Climate Movement, which links dozens of organizations to fight climate change. Similar rallies were also held internationally, including in London, Bangkok, and the Philippines.

Signs at the rally included “I’m with her,” with an arrow pointing to a picture of the earth; “There are no jobs on a dead planet”; and “At the start of every disaster movie, there’s a scientist being ignored.”

Many attendees spoke of their personal journey to awareness of climate change issues.

Cody Smith, 24, of Roxbury, said he grew up on a cattle ranch in California but is now an animal rights activist and has been a vegan for three years. He noted that experts have said giving up beef will reduce the carbon footprint more than stopping the use of cars.

Colleen Pearce, 60, of Harvard, who held a sign reading, “Our earth is neither Republican nor Democrat,” recalled a family trip years ago to Asia, including Shanghai and Bangkok. The air pollution stands out in her memory.
“In Bangkok, the police wore gas masks to direct traffic,” said Pearce. “Here’s this gorgeous countryside [nearby] and amazing people, and their lifespans are so short.”

She fears American cities are headed for the same avoidable fate, she said.

Her 33-year-old son, Ethan Payne, and his girlfriend, 30-year-old Rose Lassos, said they are passionate travelers and scuba divers, have seen how the beautiful coral reef is being bleached.

They saw orangutans in an Indonesian forest, said Lassos, while listening to the buzzing of saws as deforestation was underway nearby. “Once you make eye contact with an orangutan in the forest,” you can’t help but want to protect them, Lassos said.

The family wants to see Massachusetts implement a [carbon fee and dividend program advocated by the Citizens’ Climate Lobby](https://www.citizensclimate.org), a “revenue-neutral carbon tax with 100 percent of the net revenue returned directly to households,” according to the organization’s website.

Timothy Gay, a Boston Latin School environmental science teacher, said he was prompted to start [ClimateCurriculum.com](https://climatecurriculum.org) after reading a [New York Times article](https://www.nytimes.com) about many science teachers lacking the knowledge and lesson plans to adequately teach the next generation about climate change.

The Boston Student Advisory Council helped develop the curriculum with support from the Boston public schools and Youth On Board, which helps organize youth voices.

Climate change is “constantly at the forefront of our [class] discussions,” said Gay. “Almost every topic I touch upon in environmental science deals with climate change issues.”
The website offers climate change lessons for elementary, middle, and high school-aged students, which Boston Student Advisory Council members demonstrated later that afternoon during a teach-in at the Church On The Hill nearby on Bowdoin Street.

One of the Boston Student Advisory Council members — Kathleen Alvarez, a 15-year-old freshman at Snowden International School — spoke from the gazebo at the rally, energizing an audience that included many people around her age.

Twelve-year-old Isabelle Harvey, who attended the rally with her mother, Ann Warner-Harvey, is already thinking generations ahead.

“We’re going to be ancestors some day,” said Harvey.

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