Solutions and Lessons Learned about Climate Legislation on the State Level

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Panelists: Moderated panel discussion with Nevada State Senator Pat Spearman; Rhode Island State Senator Dawn Euer; and Florida State Rep. Anna Eskamani. Samantha Blake, WiLL Program Manager, moderated the discussion.

To implement effective, sustainable clean energy legislation, it helps to understand some of the political pitfalls that could get in the way of progress and prevent successful passage. WiLL members and women state legislators from across the country shared what they’re doing to ensure their communities are doing their part to prepare for climate change and create resilient green infrastructure for the 21st century.

Based on the conversation, our panelists had the following policy recommendations:

- **Know the political landscape around energy policy in your state.** Research government agencies that oversee climate and energy policy and who they manage. Is it politically viable to hold corporate actors accountable for the part they play in the damage of the climate?
- **Use existing legislative vehicles to include stricter energy standards.** Use state budgets to increase funding in waste management and renewable energy. Rework any international agreements pertaining to energy transfer and negotiate cleaner extraction standards for renewable energy.
- **Build relationships with academia and energy researchers.** Utilize energy research labs throughout the country that teach legislators about energy policy. Make friends with people in schools/universities that research this issue and can help you get information quickly.
- **Build relationships with the elected and appointed leaders in the state who implement energy policy.** Network with municipal colleagues (mayors, city council etc.) as they actually implement energy policy in the cities/town. Take a look at the respective legislative committees that have jurisdiction over these issues; speak to seasoned legislators that can give you the lay of the land before you begin to move policy.
- **Think outside of the box.** Climate impact has consequences that go beyond sea level rise. Make the issue relatable by explaining the benefits of clean energy transition in the terms of profit margins for businesses and day-to-day effects for citizens. Some people don’t want to engage in the conversation around climate change just because it is the right thing to do, they need examples and stories that they understand. Environmental issues consequently become business, transportation, and food security problems as well.

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- **Emphasize job creation.** Talk to the Chamber of Commerce about what climate change adaptation looks like in terms of job creation, especially after the importance of essential workers spiked during the pandemic.

- **Identify non-traditional allies to help mobilize policy.** Word of mouth is just as important as strong technical language in the bills. Advocacy groups are great at translating how the issues affect the people. Build relationships with key advocates that have historical ties to forming energy policy. Look at ethnic/cultural organizations that promote civil rights in their communities because they can mobilize groups in the environmental justice space.