Funding the Future

Debate Ammunition: Why Did We Fail to Prepare for Clima...

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THE RICHARD J MURPHY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

DEBATE AMMUNITION

Why Did We Fail to Prepare for Climate Change?

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Topic

Despite decades of accurate scientific warnings and practical plans like the Green New Deal, political systems captured by fossil fuel money and vested interests have refused to act on the climate crisis, and only by displacing those interests can meaningful change now happen.

The video that this Debate Ammunition supports [is available here.]

The Core Argument

Scientists warned us about climate change for decades, and their predictions have proved remarkably accurate. Knowledge was never the problem. The Green New Deal, which I co-authored in 2007–08, linked climate action to jobs, investment and economic renewal, creating a practical plan ready for any politician to adopt go, but politicians have chosen to ignore it.

The failure is structural. Political and economic systems reward those who defend the status quo and punish those who challenge it. Fossil fuel donations and the lobbying industry maintain structures of power that are directly harming us. As Upton Sinclair put it, 'It's difficult to get a person to understand something when their salary depends upon them not understanding it.'

We have no real choice. We either continue to cling to the old economy and protect vested interests, or we change and survive. The fires burning in France, Spain and Scotland are not exceptional events, they are the signs of a developing long-term crisis that will reach everyone's doorstep unless politics is finally remade.

The Argument Structure

Step 1 — We knew, and we had a plan:

Scientists' predictions about climate change have proved remarkably accurate. Solutions were identified and plans were ready. The Green New Deal, which I co-authored in 2007–08, linked decarbonisation to jobs, investment, community resilience and economic renewal. Barack Obama cited it during his first presidential campaign. The problem was never a lack of knowledge or imagination; it was always a lack of political will.

Step 2 — Politics chose the past over the future:

After the 2008 financial crisis, politicians who argued for returning to the pre-crisis economy won the day. The Green New Deal was shelved, and climate action was dismissed. It has been scorned by the Tories and climate change denial is worn as a badge of honour by the far right. Our political system consistently mistakes familiarity for wisdom, and as a result spends its energy repairing yesterday's economy rather than building tomorrow's.

Step 3 — Vested interests block the exit:

There are fortunes built on oil, gas and coal. There are careers built on old ideas. There are structures whose hierarchies of power rest on the fossil fuel economy. Evidence is ignored because change threatens power, and the powerful resist that. Fossil fuel donations prevent politicians from honestly assessing the science. The lobbying industry exists precisely to maintain these structures.

Step 4 — The only option is to change, and that means changing the politicians:

Climate change will force the choice regardless. We can protect vested interests or we can survive. Those are the only two options we have. A politics built on curiosity, imagination and care for real resources - people, our communities, and the planet - is available to us. But as long as the current political class remains in place, funded by those who profit from the crisis, change will not come. They have to go.

Their Argument → Your Rebuttal

They Say

Your Response

The market will eventually solve climate change — innovation and green investment are already happening without government forcing it.

Markets created the crisis. They priced carbon at zero for more than a century, externalised the costs onto the rest of us, and now the same interests that profited from that destruction are lobbying to slow the transition.

Green investment happening now is largely the result of government mandates, subsidies and regulation and not spontaneous market action. Where governments have stepped back and left it to markets, emissions have risen.

Ask which market mechanism put a price on the fires in Bordeaux, the floods in Germany or the droughts across East Africa, and the answer is none.

We can't afford a Green New Deal. The cost would be enormous and would wreck the public finances.

The Green New Deal is not a spending programme to be 'afforded' in the way a household budgets. It is an investment plan that redirects existing capacity such as labour, materials, and technology towards productive and sustainable ends.

The question is never whether the money exists; it is whether the real resources exist to do the work. Skilled engineers, construction workers and supply chains can be employed to build renewables and insulate homes just as easily as they can be left idle.

Ask what the cost of not acting is. The economic damage from unchecked climate change dwarfs any investment in prevention.

Climate policies destroy jobs: workers in fossil fuel industries will be left behind.

The old economy is already destroying communities, jobs and livelihoods through automation, offshoring and the long decline of industries that governments refuse to replace.

The Green New Deal explicitly linked climate action to job creation, investment in communities and economic renewal. The choice is not between jobs and the environment. It is between managed, planned transition with new secure employment, and unmanaged collapse that leaves workers with nothing.

Ask the fishing communities whose catches are collapsing, or the farmers facing drought, whether the old economy is protecting their livelihoods.

Climate change is ultimately a problem of individual consumer choices. People need to change their behaviour.

Individuals cannot build a renewable energy grid, retrofit the entirety of the housing stock, redesign the food system or end fossil fuel subsidies. These are system-level decisions that only government can make.

Framing climate as a matter of personal virtue was itself a strategy developed by fossil fuel interests to deflect attention from the systemic changes that were actually needed.

This crisis is political, not personal. Holding individuals responsible for the failure of governments that were bought by the industry that caused the problem is both factually wrong and morally evasive.

The One-Liners

“We didn't lack a plan for climate change: we lacked politicians willing to use it.”

“It's hard to understand a crisis when your salary depends on you not understanding it.”

“You cannot repair yesterday's economy into tomorrow's planet.”

“The choice is not between growth and the environment: it is between change and collapse.”

“The fires lapping at Bordeaux are not an anomaly. They are the preview.”

Questions to Ask

If fossil fuel companies fund political parties, how can those parties honestly assess the science telling us to stop burning fossil fuels?

Why did the 2008 financial crisis end with a return to the old economy rather than a transition to a new one, and who benefited from that choice?

Which specific lobbying organisations and corporate donors are blocking the climate legislation we need, and how much have they given?

If the Green New Deal was practical enough for Barack Obama to discuss in 2008, why is it still treated as radical or unaffordable today?

Further Reading

Post	Date	What it covers
When are we going to get as scared witless as we should be?	25 Jul 2026	Published days before recording, captures the same urgency, this asks why the evidence of climate breakdown has yet to produce the political response it demands.
My View on … The Green New Deal	14 Jul 2026	Sets out the full case for the Green New Deal as a practical programme linking decarbonisation to jobs, investment and economic renewal; the plan the video argues was ignored.
What we are up against	3 Jul 2026	Identifies the vested interests and political capture by billionaire money that are blocking the systemic change the climate crisis requires.

The Telegraph finally admits we need to take climate change seriously

30 Jun 2026

Documents the shift even in right-of-centre media, illustrating how far denial has run and how late the mainstream is to acknowledging the crisis.

Will we ever choose to address climate change?

1 May 2026

Asks whether political systems are structurally capable of choosing survival over the interests of those who profit from the status quo, which is the central question of this video.

The world's politicians have their heads in the sand as the collapse begins

21 May 2026

Documents the paralysis of political leadership in the face of mounting evidence, mirroring the video's argument that every disaster brings promises and no fundamental change.