

Season 7, Episode 3: Climate Action and Solutions

Host: ESF President Joanie Mahoney

Guest: Laura Schifter, Senior Fellow, This is Planet Ed at Aspen Institute

[MUSIC]

Laura

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These assumptions about concepts of climate change are really rooted in the fact that many adults never actually had the time to learn about climate change in school themselves, and so it's enabled these kind of misconceptions to permeate conversations.

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Joanie

Welcome to seasons seven of Campus Conversations, the podcast. I'm Joanie Mahoney, and I have the honor of serving as SUNY ESF president. This season, we're working to explore the engagement of our ESF community beyond our campus. Today, I'm excited to welcome someone that I have been working with over the last year and whose work is an incredible blend of action, education and policy.

Doctor Laura Schefter welcome, Laura.

Laura

Thanks so much for having me, Joanie.

Joanie

Oh, I'm excited to talk about this because we've worked on an actual work product that we've put out together with a group of people this year. And the more we can do to talk about it, the better. So, I was glad that you were free to jump on this with us. But before I get too far into it, I want to tell people a little bit about you.

A senior fellow with the Aspen Institute's Energy and Environment program leading this is Planet Ed, and if people aren't familiar with that, they should go check it out because it's very cool.

Laura is also a lecturer on education with the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a fellow with the Century Foundation. Previously, you worked as a policy and research consultant with clients including Education 2020, the Massachusetts Department of Education and the US Department of Justice. You've served as a senior education and disability advisor for Representative George Miller from California on the Committee of Education and Labor, and an Education fellow to Senator Chris Todd from Connecticut, on the Senate Health, education, Labor and Pensions Committee. And after graduating from college to elementary school in San Francisco.

You are the coauthor author of *How Did You Get Here? Students with disabilities and Their Journeys to Harvard*. You earned your Ed.D. in Education Policy, leadership, and Instructional Practice, and in EDM in mind, brain, and education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

And what's amazing is people can't see you. But I don't know how someone with your youth has packed that much into your career. And I know you also have a family, and you're just one of those people that is super organized and accomplishes a lot. It really was fun to work with you. So, let's tell people what it was we were working on.

Laura

First, Joanie, I just want to say it has been so fun and fantastic to work with you. You know, as you said, I have a lot of background and experience working in education and education policy. And actually, just even as recently as about five years ago, climate change was not a top issue for me. It was something I cared about, but it was, you know, there are a lot of problems going on in education, and that's where my main focus was.

And then one day, I was sitting in my basement with my three children, and the UN had released a report on 1.5 degrees warming. And I got news alert after news alert after news alert, we had a decade left to address climate change to avoid those most devastating impacts. And I sat there looking at my three children, and I realized in that moment the misconceptions that I had about climate change and the fact that this was not some far off problem, but this was an issue that we were facing today.

It was an issue that was going to impact my children and all children throughout their life. And the work I had been doing in education felt somewhat meaningless. I knew I had to work to commit myself to working on climate issues related to climate change, but I spent some time, looking for other jobs. I looked at the Sierra Club, I looked at the Environmental Defense Fund, and nothing really felt right with the experiences that I had.

And then it was a couple of months later, Jay Inslee, governor of Washington, announced he was running for president. And he said on day one of his administration, he would ask every department to submit its plan to address climate change. And it was in that moment I realized I didn't have to go to some separate field to do work related to climate.

I worked in education policy, and I worked with folks across a variety of issues in education, and we didn't talk about climate change, and we didn't talk about what the education sector needed to do to take action on climate change. And maybe that was something I could work on. I could bring people together that I had previously worked with to start grappling with what the education sector needed to do.

I spent the next year talking to anyone and everyone that would talk to me about how we might be able to bring education leaders together. And through the course of that work, I ended up meeting with somebody at the Aspen Institute. And the Aspen Institute agreed to take me on to launch K-12 Climate Action.

Within my first month of launching K-12 climate Action, I had the privilege of talking to former education secretary, now, chancellor of the SUNY system, John King.

And, Chancellor King understood the need and urgency for the education sector to take action on climate. And he agreed to co-chair the initiative with former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman. And we brought together 20 additional leaders, from a variety of perspectives in education to first go on a listening tour and hear from people all across the country about what our K-12 schools needed to do to take action on climate change.

And then after a year of listening and learning, they released the K-12 Climate Action Plan, which is a framework and maps what our K-12 education sector could do. And after that report came out, one of the things that we did is we heard from students across the country, educators across the country, that we're using that action plan to help inform what their schools could do.

But we also heard from people within the early childhood sector saying they wanted to do something similar. And we heard from folks within the higher education sector also saying they wanted to engage in a similar process.

So actually, about a year and a half ago, we launched Higher Ed Climate Action that includes a task force, which we've been so honored that you have served on, and it's co-chaired by Cal State Chancellor Millie Garcia and commissioner for Higher education for Louisiana Kim Hunter Reed.

And similar to what we did with K-12, you know, you all went and heard from students, faculty members, higher ed leaders, climate experts through the course of a listening session, to learn more about what the higher education sector can do to take action. And we just released the Higher Ed Climate Action Plan this past August, which really maps, the comprehensive way our higher education sector can take action on climate change.

Joanie

And I thought that the task force was one of the most meaty, which is a funny word for me to use as a vegetarian. Right? But, I mean, we had very well organized meetings with a lot of people from different perspectives that we got to listen to.

So we had a series of listening sessions where you lined up speakers for us that prompted thinking, and then we on the task force talked about what we heard, what are the most important things that came from that. And you and your team at Aspen corralled all of that information. And then we all met in person for a couple days to work together to put this plan together.

So one of the things that I thought was really interest thing that came from it, and it was a conversation. You'll have to tell people some of the names of the people that I'm talking about as we go through it.

But the Chancellor, of Mayland, he and I really connected and sort of a light bulb moment about how it can't be that climate is an other topic. It can't be something that I get busy with my whole day, and I take care of all of these things, and then I will go and draw my attention to climate and see what I can do over there.

It has to permeate everything we do. And I think that that was the theme from a lot of the young people that you lined up for us to hear from, and that we're part of the task force. So that is what I think is reflected in this report, is the ways that higher ed can infuse work in the climate space into everything that we're already doing.

Is that a fair characterization?

Laura

Yeah. So, I think what's really important for us to recognize is the fact that we are all existing within a changing climate, right now. So, in order for higher education to prepare students for success, they need to prepare them for success in a changing climate. So that doesn't just mean that those students who take science classes are the ones that need the education around what it means to exist within a changing climate.

It means students across a variety of professional or disciplinary tracks need to know what it means to exist within a changing climate, within their context. You know, whether they're a business leader, they need to understand what the sustainable business practices are, whether they're a chef, they need to understand what it means to source food locally and have more sustainable practices, and how climate change may impact food production ahead.

You mentioned some of the students that we had the opportunity to hear from, and I think two that really stood out to me, in thinking about how where existing within a changing climate right now, one was a student who is currently at Brown Medical School, and she has been working to advocate with medical school students across the country to push their medical schools to actually change the curriculum and ensure that our future doctors have the opportunity to learn about what it means to be a doctor in a changing climate.

Climate change will have a direct impact on people's health, whether that's making things like asthma and allergies worse, whether it's increasing risk to heat related illnesses. And doctors need to understand what those risks are and what they can do to help keep people safe in a

changing climate. And so she was one person who is really making this charge to say that means our medical students, need to have the opportunity to learn about this information in school.

So that was one student that really stood out to me. And thinking about, you know, what we need to do within higher ed curriculum to exist within the context of a changing climate. But there was another student that really stood out to me that had me thinking about how higher education as a system really needs to grapple with what it means to effectively serve students within a changing climate.

We had a student, whose name was Anya, who is from the University of Texas, and one of the things that she really spoke to us about was how she thought about her decision around where to go to school, thinking about, will it be too hot in the middle of the day for me to attend classes? Will I be able to afford housing with sufficient air conditioning so that I will stay cool and be able to learn effectively?

So climate change also has this impact on students basic needs, and higher education needs to think more robustly about continuing to serve and support students well in a changing climate.

Joanie

I thought that was so compelling that student who had such a basic concern about the temperature and whether they would be able to survive, and I don't mean literally, although that is literal in a lot of cases. But just as you described, it's going to be incredibly hot. Am I going to be able to do what I need to do in this setting?

And it's interjected a sense of urgency, but I'm curious now. I mean, you've spent a lot of time on Capitol Hill. You're an expert in these issues. I was watching the news the other night because here we are at the very end of the 2024 election cycle for president, and there was a graphic on the television about the most important issues to people in a recent poll.

What happened? That climate is not forefront for people in this election. I mean, we're interrupting the election with, can people vote in North Carolina because Asheville's been, you know, completely devastated. How do we have these split screen stories that the reality is that climate change is here and it's affecting this campaign. And two, nobody is putting a value on it when they're selecting in a poll who they support for president, what do you make of that.

Laura

Yeah. So you know Joanie, I think one of the things that's been really challenging with climate and figuring out where it falls in terms of people's priorities, is that we haven't really figured out an effective way to talk about climate change. You know, thinking about some of the past narratives around climate change and how they've been elevated in our conversations.

It's been an issue related to polar bears, where polar bears are going to be something that probably, most people will not see within their lifetime. Or we've talked about it in a way where we

say the impacts will happen in 2100, and 2100 feels very far away. Or there are conceptions about climate change that in order to care, you know, I need to be somebody that gives up everything I've ever done in my life and go live without anything that I've learned to enjoy.

And these assumptions about concepts of climate change are really rooted in the fact that many adults never actually had the time to learn about climate change in school themselves, and so it's enabled these kind of misconceptions to permeate conversations, or just even the notion that climate change is something for scientists to understand. And it's too complicated for just our average person to understand.

These are all things that we have a responsibility to break down and figure out a more productive way to talk about it, in a way that enables people to to care and take action themselves. You know, another big thing is once you start to understand what is actually going on, is that it can be really scary and it can be really overwhelming.

The reality are the impacts are scary. And, you know, the thinking about how we're actually going to take action where we are today and where we need to go is overwhelming. But the truth is, staying silent about it is not going to help either. So we really need to open up additional dialog about climate change, how it is impacting our daily lives and the lives around us.

I mean, thinking about Anya and how she was talking about how climate change was impacting, whether or not she'd be able to go to class in the middle of the day. Having conversations like that and being brave and talking about both our worries and our concerns about climate change. But then also what we want to do to make a difference.

And, you know, the places that we can start making a difference are by talking about it, finding community on our campuses, finding community in our homes and our, you know, local governments and really pushing for change that way. But it really we need to spend some time and really figure out a way that that we can talk about climate change in a way that connects with people's daily lives and their own experiences.

Because, like you said in Asheville right now, there are a lot of people that are directly experiencing the effects of climate change and that is impacting their lives, their well-being and their ability to thrive.

Joanie

It does. And you've said a few things. You know, the power of communication, right? Because one of the first things that I remember in terms of advertising or marketing about the changing climate was that polar bear. And I remember seeing a magazine picture with a polar bear on a tiny piece of ice, because all the ice around them had melted.

And I remember feeling sad for the polar bear, but that was kind of it. Like there's no interaction with me and polar bears. There never has been. I don't think I've ever even actually seen a polar

bear. And some of the students that we heard from as we went through this process, they were they were a lot more clear about what a wasted opportunity that was.

And when that's your first foray into explaining why you should care about the climate. You know, we kind of missed the mark. I mean, you tugged on heartstrings for the polar bears, but there was no connection to our daily lives.

So then fast forward. Now we have these 24 hour news cycles. You know, for the 4 or 5 days before a hurricane comes, it's 24 hours of this is the worst thing that's ever going to happen on our planet.

And then it comes and then you see this devastation. But nowhere along the way is there those tangible things that you can be doing. I'm lucky that I work at ESF for a lot of reasons, but chief among them is we attract students here that really do get it, and they want to be part of the solution. And young people are going to drive these solutions. And I don't think they always like hearing that. You know, it's like you all made the mess, and now you're just telling us that young people are going to be the people that fix this. So I've challenged people at ESF to really bring it down to a layperson's level. And I think our task force report did that to a large extent.

I think most people want to help. Very few people are completely unconcerned about what they see. I think the larger issue is they don't feel power because they haven't been educated in this climate space I'm talking about. And even if you have been educated and you know what 1.5 degrees increase meant to you in your basement, and you know what 2100 is going to look like because you've seen the models, that still doesn't translate into what can I do today?

And by the way, children being born today are very likely to be here in 2100. I have challenged people here at ESF to explain to people in layman's terms what can you do?

So I would ask you, Laura, if you could wave a wand and get everybody to do something that they have the ability to do in their lives, where would you want them to start?

Laura

If I could wave a magic wand, I would have people do two things. The first would be to learn more about climate change. I think, you know, as you alluded to, there are a lot of misunderstandings about climate change. People haven't had the opportunity to learn about it. It's easy to say, oh, well, I can't understand it. I'm not a climate scientist.

But the truth is, we can all understand the basics of climate change. I know that my first step on my own journey was that I needed to learn about it, and I had some help from my daughters, some help from other people across different avenues. And at a very basic level, this is what I learned largely for the first time.

You know, Earth is our home. We live on the Goldilocks planet, and it's created that just right conditions for life. Our atmosphere is a blanket that surrounds our earth and the atmosphere acts

as a heat trapping blanket to trap just the right amount of heat. It's not too hot, it's not too cold, and for a long time that has enabled humans, animals, plants to really thrive on this planet.

But right now it's getting hotter. Because of us. We are changing the material of our blanket, those greenhouse gases that are a part of the atmosphere trap just the right amount of heat. But right now, we're adding more greenhouse gases to that blanket. So, think about, you know, changing from a sheet to a heavy comforter. You are hotter under a heavy comforter.

We right now are making our planet hotter by trapping more heat with our greenhouse gas emissions. And that's largely coming from when we burn fossil fuels to make electricity, our burning fossil fuels related to transportation, our manufacturing practices, our agriculture practices, our buildings and fossil fuels that we use within our own buildings. And then, also thinking about the ways that we take care of nature.

So, understanding that Earth is our home, it's getting hotter because of us. It's changing now and it's impacting us. This is not some far off problem, but we are seeing these changes now, and there are changes that we can make today to build a better future. So, I think at a very basic level, if people take the opportunity to learn those few things, that is really critical.

And then the second thing that I'd like to ask people to do is start talking about it, because once you learn about it, then start talking about it with other people, because ultimately it's going to be, you know, hearing from your sister about why this matters to them and what they are doing or hearing from a friend in your class or hearing from your aunt or uncle.

I think what we're seeing right now, again and emphasizing this is we really need to see communities come together and take action. And so one of the key things that we can do is once we've learned about what is going on in our world is we need to actually start talking about it and helping motivate other people to take action.

I think one of the things that I think, has been a really interesting thing to see research on is one of the biggest predictors as to whether people have solar panels on their roof is whether their neighbor has had a solar panel on their roof as well. So, you know, under the notion of talking about it, talking about it, showing that you're taking action can help inspire other people to act too.

So, we just need to get the ball rolling in that way and moving people forward on this really critical and important issue.

Joanie

I think that's fantastic. I've never heard you use that analogy before with the sheet and the blanket, but if you imagine that your greenhouse gas emissions are just adding to the weight of that blanket, right? It's being trapped under the blanket and making the blanket thicker and thicker. I think that's a really easy way for people to understand why we're saying we need to reduce what we're putting out there, because the blanket is getting too warm for us. I will, I think now forever think about that. We're making that blanket thicker.

You know, you talk about learning about climate change and I want to have a frank conversation about this, because in this political polarization that we're in, part of the divide has been around the topic of education in and of itself. And we're saying there's the people that are, you know, going to college and earning degrees are over on this side. And the folks that are just as importantly, learning a trade and going to work over on this side are in different political camps. And that has nothing to do with the policies that we're all being asked to pick a leader around. And when it comes to climate change, it doesn't matter. Everybody is affected by climate change, and we kind of can't let the world characterize it as something that educated people, care about, you know?

I mean, the people that are suffering the most already are people that are living in areas that aren't resilient. You know, it's not here in the northeast that we're feeling it most dramatically. So allowing this to be characterized as just something that people who study climate are concerned about is really doing a disservice to everybody who lives here.

And then you know, you talked about some of the things and I think you started with electricity. And I just want to clarify that it's the source of the electricity. Right. That's the problem because there are people who get confused by that. They see electricity as a big contributor. And then they say, why is everybody driving electric cars?

So, it's the source of the electricity. And are you making electricity from renewable source? And here in New York we make a lot of our electricity with hydropower because we're blessed to have Niagara Falls, among others, you know, here in our state. And on a personal level, I drive an electric car. But I've also taken advantage of some of the programs that are in place and put solar panels on my roof.

So the sun is the source of the electricity with which I'm powering my car. And so, I just want to be careful when we talk about electricity. But transportation, buildings, taking care of the land. People need to understand that nature. As you said, we have this Goldilocks of not too hot, not too cold. We also have this Goldilocks of soil health, and we can't take up more physical space and undo the natural protections that are in place to help mitigate the climate change.

You know, the soils are a powerful tool in that. The trees are a powerful tool in that. The ability to let water drain naturally so that it's clean, you know. All of that is affected if we just sprawl further and further and further out. So people need to connect those land use policies with what's happening in the climate.

But I want to say when it comes to learn and talk about it, we were together for Climate Week in New York, and you brought a group of people together, and it included public television. And we talked about how the successful campaigns in the past around smoking, for instance, they started with kids being afraid and driving the behavior of the adults in their lives. Right. And, you know, I don't want to scare the wits out of kids, but I think it's really important for us to start at an early age.

So the work you're doing is on that whole continuum. You're focused on what children in kindergarten are being told. And now you've put this report out that talks about what we can do in higher ed.

So tell me, how did you gather this group of people, and what was the thinking that went into putting the stakeholders in the room to get the message out that you did?

Laura

You know, I think what's really important in understanding is the success of our planet and the success of our country in the next several decades is going to depend upon us taking this issue serious and having people who can advance the solutions that we need, and that will require education. So it's going to require this massively robust effort to help ensure that people understand what's going on in the world and that they're equipped in terms of knowing what to do.

And that means we need to work across our systems, whether that be developing this understanding that we are dependent upon nature at a very early age. It's not just that, you know, we are savors and we get to be the caretakers of nature. No, actually, we depend on nature and our climate to live and do the things that we want to do.

And that's something that you can help young children understand. And that's why we need young children at the table to providing the opportunities for people to learn about this in informal settings, in museums or after school programs, in their K-12 learning, in higher education. Where we are right now, not enough people understand this issue, and that is a disservice to our ability to advance solutions.

So we need to lock arms with people who work on helping inform our communities and ensuring that they are able to talk about this in a way that we can sort of break through the noise of media right now and really empower people with this understanding. And that's going to be necessary. You know, like I said, for the continued prosperity of our country and our world.

And that's something I know you mentioned the politics at the beginning. That's something that we all care about. We all want America to do well into the future. We want young people today to be competitive. We want to ensure our national security. And all of that is going to require people that understand their world. And our world is in a changing climate right now.

So that I think that there's something that we can bring people together around. You know, this is not about the polar bear debate, but this is about preparing people for success and securing our shared future. And so that's something that requires us all to work together across the spectrum in formal, formal learning and work in an aligned way to help us empower all people with the understanding they need.

Joanie

You know, one of the biggest parts of the problem is the disinformation, right? And people hearing, oh, climate change is a hoax. Some of it, I think, is just not being educated on the topic, but some of it is just the money that's coming from people that are benefiting from us continuing to use fossil fuels. And they have a lot of money, and they use it to fund campaigns, and they use it to get behind people who have promised not to bother looking for solutions in the climate.

And so, it's very important that we educate people so that they're not susceptible to that disinformation. You know, you hear people all the time. Oh, it's cyclical. You know, the planet has gone through cycles like this before. But if you just put a chart in front of people and show them what's happened since the industrial age, it's irrefutable.

But nobody even gets to that level of research. Right. So, I will take up that challenge. You know, I feel like I can always learn more. I have learned a lot about it, but just talk about it more often and, and ask people here to just talk about it more in your lives.

So, how does This is Planet Ed intersect with this work? So this is Planet Ed, did the task forces right. But what is This is Planet Ed.

Laura

So can I just say one thing real quick before I answer your question to. Sure. I think one thing that's really important and thinking about talking about it too, is I think it's really important to lean into talking about why this issue matters to you. You know, it's very easy for us to keep climate in a box where we're talking about things that are external to people, but people and their individual motivations are really what's going to help drive and take us out of it.

And it's been one of the things, you know, as, as I have talked to people about this more and more, asking people, just what is it that's motivating you to care about this issue? And you will hear deeply personal reflections about why they care, and it's about the people and the places they love and the things that they love.

And so I think always, you know, just taking a minute to connect to people on that human level about why you care is just really important to open up a dialog in a way that can be productive.

Joanie

And, you know, I would even take it one step further, Laura, like, ask people what they care about, right? Not why do you care about the climate, but they're what motivates you in this work, which we had an exercise where we did that and I thought it was really touching to hear what brought all the people around the table to this.

But you can tie the climate to everything people care about. So, I would say to people, you know, what matters to you in your life. And I know you, Laura. You could instantly tie climate to what matters to these people in their lives, no matter how seemingly unrelated their concerns are to the

climate. I mean, even as you said, national security there are people for whom that's the most important thing.

And tell them, like, what would you tell somebody who says national security is the thing that keeps me up at night? Why should they care about the climate?

Laura

I mean, I would say to them, look, what we are seeing is more extreme weather is pushing our political systems to the brink. I mean, we are seeing climate migration occurring across the world right now. And even when you think about things like immigration at the southern border, a lot of that is driven from a place that is called the dry corridor, because there is a significant amount of drought there.

And when there is a significant amount of drought, it puts pressure on the population that is living there to continue to rely on the things that they rely on for their well-being and for their livelihoods. You know, agriculture, for instance, you're not going to have successful agriculture when you're being impacted by drought. And as soon as people are not able to live their lives the way they do, you're allowing for destabilization to take place. And that puts pressure on our kind of global system to maintain its security, and it allows for us to be more susceptible to crime, to threats to our, national security. The Department of Defense has actually also talked about how climate change has put a lot of even our military bases at risk because they are in, you know, low lying areas or they are in areas that are going to be impacted by climate related events.

So there's the actual destabilization of our systems when we're having this pressure put on our natural resources and the ability for people to continue to live well where they are. And there's this actual infrastructure issue that's going on with our national security and our military bases across the world.

Joanie

Yeah, by definition, our naval bases are going to be near the water right. And the water's coming in. But look at that. Like I just put you completely on the spot. And that's what I mean. If I showed you the graphic that I saw on the news the other night about the top issues in the recent polls, about what people are voting on, I would guarantee that you could put a narrative that draws back to the climate on every one of those issues, and I think that's the extension of what we need to be talking about.

So we put like minded people around a table, and we have this profound experience of listening to people talk about how they came to this. But I think there's another step where people who don't think they care about the climate, you can, in a couple sentences, tie what they care about. I mean, the whole issue of pocketbook and the national economy.

I mean, it is shocking to me that people can't connect the expense of climate change and these multibillion dollar disasters that our federal government is having to deal with and not see the

connection to our economy and our national debt, which people will tell you their concerned about our national debt. So I would say whatever issue drives somebody, we can put a narrative around that issue to tell them why that person needs to care about the environment.

And that's the work that I'm going to start to try to do in my own life, rather than just preach about the climate, listen to people tell me what matters to you in your life.

Laura

I do think one of the things that you're kind of hitting on, too, is like people will say, well, it costs too much to do this work, but we never compare it to the cost of inaction, which is also what you're talking about. So, there is going to be costs associated with the infrastructure that we need to do to make this transition happen.

And there are costs associated with us not acting like you were talking about the billion dollar disasters that are just increasingly occurring across our country. There's also a significant amount of cost that's been associated with high heat, which is not considered \$1 billion disaster. But high heat means that people can't work as much. They can't contribute to the economy. We can't get as much done. You know, students are learning less in times where there's high heat. And the EPA has projected that high heat alone is going to decrease future earnings at about \$6 billion per graduating class.

Joanie

While that is a metric I had not heard. But how compelling is that? And so if you care about the economy, you know, if you care about national security, if you care about your children's futures. So, whatever motivates you, educate yourself on how the climate is affecting that issue. That's a challenge that I would give to people.

And then, you know, I'm curious because you have such a broad range of experience as an elementary school teacher, as someone who has taught in college, you know, someone who has been a fellow in an agency like Aspen, but also been on Capitol Hill and working in committees, where do you think the power is in moving the needle?

Laura

You're probably not going to like my answer, but the power in moving the needle is going to require all of us. And I think one of the things that I have seen increasingly when I've done this work and I mean, you know, this work in climate, but the work in policy more is that there's not one place that holds the keys that can unlock it.

It's this kind of groundswell of efforts that are going on simultaneously that eventually you reach a tipping point and then action starts happening at scale. And so I wouldn't say that, you know, federal policy is needed over local policy, local policy needs to happen to get federal policymakers

to care. You know, action by business needs to happen to show federal policymakers it's okay to move.

All of this stuff needs to sort of happen together. So whatever system or level you are working at, you are contributing to this greater groundswell of a desire to advance solutions. So, I think it's not one thing that's going to sort of seal the deal and make this work happen, but it's ultimately going to be everything sort of playing off of each other to reach a tipping point that everyone then is advancing solutions effectively.

Joanie

Yeah, no, your answer is excellent. What I thought you were going to say is the elementary school teacher having these young people in front of you. Before I let you go, I want to talk about the task force report and my goal in having this conversation is to let people know that the report exists, and to talk about it as much as we can and get it out into the hands of people that can use the information that's in the report.

What are the next steps for you?

Laura

Yeah, so the next steps for us are really kind of disseminating this report, helping institutions within higher education know that this report is out there helping policymakers see the potential of higher education and its role and contributing to solutions, and really just making this a part of the work that higher education does. So we are going to continue to support those within higher education, as they are thinking about what they can do to contribute to solutions.

And then with our work at this is Planet Ed, what we are thinking about more robustly engaging in is that effort that I talked about a little while ago around how do we link arms across all of these institutions that support people in learning and help equip them with the information that they need to help empower people and communities all across this country to understand climate change and what they can do.

So we are working to continue to convene those, who are working in early childhood, K through 12 higher education museums, libraries, afterschool programs, institutions of higher education, media, traditional media, children's media, even things like Roblox and Minecraft gaming to come together and say, you know, how can we help empower people in understanding the world that they're living in right now?

So that is another big thing that is next for us, is really bringing people together to equip them with the understanding, knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a changing climate.

Joanie

You know, that is excellent. And I would just put out there to you that we have 2200 students here at ESF who are passionate and knowledgeable and willing to talk about it. And so however we can help in that broader effort. Please don't hesitate to call on us. The state has put these Empire state Service Corps program in place, where our students can be paid for volunteering on the issue of climate.

So that's true all across SUNY. So, make sure that you are aware of that army of people that you can tap into. The state has put resources behind them to be advocates and be doing the work in this climate space, among other places. You know, mental health and early childhood education are in there as well. And then if people want to take a look at this report and read the highlights, at least, how do they find it?

Laura

So go to www.ThisIsPlanetEd.org and the report will be there. We'll have their report on early childhood K through 12. And some of this information about Kids Media up on that website as well. And Joanie, just one thing I want to add, I have had the honor and privilege of hearing both from you and from Chancellor King about the amazing work going on at ESF and the enthusiasm and excitement that I hear from both of you when you're sharing about what students are doing across the campus, is just truly compelling and, really appreciate the opportunity to continue to partner with you all and to see and learn from the great work that students are doing all across the campus.

Joanie

Oh, it's amazing. And I tell them, you're literally changing the world and it must feel so good. But at the same time, I tell them, we're not leaving it all to you. There are faculty here that have dedicated their professional lives to finding solutions. And, you know, they've been ringing the alarm bells for decades. They're not the people that have left this for the next generation to solve.

So I think our students really like coming here and working alongside faculty that get it and have been in the trenches and the tools that we can provide them with things like this task force report where you brought incredible minds together, put all that information together, and we can continue to strive to make the changes necessary to mitigate this warming planet.

I do have optimism. I do think, and maybe it's because I'm surrounded by all these wonderful people at ESF, but the people that I interact with are tuned in to the climate, and they want to help. And so for you to be putting solutions out there for people to just pick up and read, ThisIsPlanetEd.org, they can find it and then call on us if we can be doing anything to help.

But I really enjoyed the experience. And I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Laura

Thanks so much Joanie.

Joanie

See you soon.

Laura

See you soon.

[MUSIC]