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Hi everyone, thank you so much for being here today, and thank you to the Charlotte Women's Movement and the Women's United March for inviting us to speak about the climate crisis. All three of us have attended every Women's March held here in Charlotte. These marches have impacted us in more ways than we can count. We are infinitely grateful for this opportunity.

Before we begin, we would like to recognize that the land we are standing on does not belong to us. It is colonized indigenous land that was protected by proud Cherokee, Catawba, Saponi, and Congaree peoples. In acknowledging the grave injustices inflicted upon these people, we would be remiss not to mention the many enslaved and indentured servants whose labor we still profit from today. It is our responsibility to honor, respect, and fight for the people to whom the land rightfully belongs and for the voices of indigenous people and people of color that are so often ignored.

The climate crisis is the most pressing and all-encompassing issue humanity has ever faced. It isn't easy to speak to the full scope and severity of this issue in a five-minute speech. Here's the basic science. Carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases, of which the largest source is burning fossil fuels, thicken the shell of the atmosphere, trapping heat. This heat compounds on itself, causing global disaster. Evidence of this cycle is everywhere. Fires burn faster, hotter, and longer. Storms worsen, causing paramount flooding at alarming rates. Currently, extreme weather events are the most visible manifestations of this crisis, but they are by no means the only or the worst. Famine, war, and extinction are also inextricably linked to the systemic processes causing global warming. These outcomes are crises in themselves. That alone speaks to the gravity of the situation. There are many estimates of the time we have left to reverse our impacts on the earth. 30 years, 10 years, 11 months. But even if we had a century, the fact of the matter is we are speeding at full force toward tipping points that we cannot go back from. There should be outrage so intense that life as we know it halts. There should be cries so loud that every single person stops to hear. This goes beyond the headlines, beyond our family, our city, our bubble. The time to wake up is now.

The climate crisis is unique in that it is a crisis of every sector of society. When we speak of the warming planet, we often speak of melting ice caps and rising seas, when in reality the climate crisis is so much more. It is a refugee crisis. The UN reports that there could be 1 billion climate migrants by 2050. It is an economic crisis. The World Economic Forum's annual risks report found that, for the first time, environmental issues filled the top five places for most imminent threats. It is a justice crisis. The 24 wealthiest countries with just 14% of the population release over 40% of all carbon emissions. Vulnerable, disadvantaged countries, which are often home to people of color and indigenous people, are hit the hardest.

It is a health crisis. The 2018 Lancet Countdown Report stated that "climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century." It is an ecological crisis. Land-based animal and plant species are now moving poleward at a rate of 15 feet per day, and around 200 species are going extinct every day. It is an education crisis. A food and water crisis. A political crisis. It is a crisis of morality. It is a crisis of the present. It is a crisis of the truth.

Our generation has a choice. Either we can blindly follow the generations before us into a world where morality takes a back seat to money, or we can chart a new course where we rise up, fueled by love and rage. In the midst of the climate crisis many people, including ourselves, have felt discouraged. There are moments when the news we see is too much to process. It is easy to turn to despair, hopelessness, and fear. But when we let these feelings overtake us, that is when we give up our power. Being an activist is more than posting on social media, or wishing others well who are suffering. It is taking those feelings and transforming them into motivation, strength, and drive. It is looking at the devastating destruction we have created as the human race and saying NO MORE! It means doing the research even though it hurts. We will no longer stand quiet as we watch acres of land that were supposed to be passed down be obliterated by corporations. We will no longer watch thousands die from super storms each year, and we will no longer forget. Being an activist means sacrificing conveniences, privileges, and everyday life in order to create a more sustainable future. It may sound extreme, but really the only radical thing would be to do nothing.

The choice is this: we can be affected by the world or, affect the world ourselves. We chose the latter. And why? Because we know that we must. We are fighting so that our children will never have to sit outside of a government building every Friday for months, waiting for those in power to listen. We are fighting for a future, because a fight without hope of something better is fruitless. This is why we must choose to see hope over all else. Hope doesn't always look like optimism. Hope is messy, painful, and sorrowful. But it is also bright, healing, and joyful. Hope in its truest form is uncertain and inconsistent, tearstained and raw but so real. Hope is having expectations and making them come true. Hope is an action. Hope is love, anger, sadness, fear, disappointment, and more made into a promise. A promise to always continue, to do what is necessary, and to look up and ahead while doing it. It is something you must create for yourself from the notion that action is the only option. Recognizing that we can make tangible change is the first step.

Across the world millions of people have taken the initiative to be a part of their future. We have seen strikes with thousands of people and in Charlotte we have done the same. Every week at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center, we strike along with dozens of other youth and adults from 3-6pm. If you're unavailable to make it to a weekly strike, try changing some of your daily habits like meatless Monday or carpooling to work or school. But in the end, it is laws not lightbulbs; it will take global systemic change to save us. However, individual action is crucial, and the community that stems from it even more so. This is where women will win.

This cycle was created by rich, white, cis, straight men with power. It is communities, women and girls who will save us. It will be women of color, youth, mothers, LGBTQ+ people, and those from low income areas who will save the world. In a recent analysis of the 100 most effective solutions to the climate crisis, educating women and girls ranked at number six. 59.6 gigatons of carbon dioxide would be saved every year just by putting more girls in school. The improvement of our social, political, and economic knowledge guarantees a better future for everyone. It is women who will make those improvements, seek and spread the knowledge, and mobilize.

All right, enough of us talking, we have a system to overthrow. Thank you.



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