



Tishman Environment  
and Design Center



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# Tishman Center Talks Future of US Environmental Policy, Climate Change and Climate Adaptation

[Michelle DePass](#), Director the  
Tishman Center, Dean of the [Milano](#)  
[School](#), and former Assistant

Administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and [Robert Verchick](#), Gauthier-St. Martin Chair in Environmental Law at Loyola University New Orleans and former Deputy Associate Administrator for Policy at the EPA, brought New School students, faculty, staff and visitors from outside The New School together last week to discuss the future of US Environmental Policy. Other issues they discussed were: international climate negotiations, [CAFE standards](#), the [Clean Power Plan](#), the energy grid, climate research, and climate justice. Both Dean DePass and Professor Verchick served at the EPA under President Obama. [Dr. Cecilia Martinez](#), Visiting Assistant Professor of Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management, joined the conversation as a faculty discussant on other specific issues such as energy and justice, renewable sources, and energy dependency.

### **Major takeaways included:**

The energy grid is essential to a functioning society. The methods we use to generate energy, whether with renewable sources like wind and solar or fossil fuels like coal and natural gas, have impacts on the cleanliness of our air and water and thus our health. As climate change progresses, energy becomes even more important because we need

energy in order to power our homes, including heating and cooling. Access to reliable energy is a justice issue - social vulnerability often coincides with decreased access, leading to higher incidence of health impacts and higher death rates among minorities, women, and the elderly in events like blackouts or heat waves. Dr. Martinez discussed the concept of demand - in this case, how much energy we need. As a society, for the sake of reducing emissions AND for providing enough affordable energy for everyone, maybe we need to rethink what is "essential." For instance: is the energy it takes to air condition the casinos and hotels in the Las Vegas desert considered "essential"? Is it essential in comparison to the tribes who still live on land without steady and consistent access to electrical service?

### **On the future of US environmental policy:**

A discussion between discussants and the audience followed that took on subjects such as achieving energy standards, subsidies and future regulations, and what our civil servants can do in the new administration. Professor Verchick shared that the biggest thing that needs to change economically are not subsidies, but global investments. Global banks are now

incorporating the carbon footprint in their investments. The future will be decarbonized by getting that huge amount of global investment in going in the right direction. The reason it isn't happening in regulated banking markets because banks are unsure how serious the world is about decarbonizing. Until the world has regulation or international agreements that signal fossil fuels are on their way out, that signal has to reach the global investment markets. Dean DePass discussed how civil servants working in agencies like the EPA and the Department of Energy work there because they believe in the foundational mission of their agency. These civil servants will work hard to keep the good work going. Going forward, as citizens, it is crucial for us to be aware and vigilant of both climate policy and how our own actions and demand can dictate how our energy is consumed and what policies can result from our own demands.



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