“The only war that matters is the war against the imagination. All other wars are subsumed by it.”
~ Diane di Prima, from the poem Rant

“The role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible.”
~ Toni Cade Bambara

Dear Backbone Friend,

I am deeply proud of all we have accomplished over Backbone Campaign’s nearly 16 years of artful activism. Thanks to your support, we continue to nurture a growing network of change agents, shift culture and take action on the issues of ultimate importance. You are helping make real change irresistible, a beautiful future imaginable, and creative action accessible to all.

Did you realize that Backbone has already provided spotlights and banner toolkits to Solidarity Brigades in 33 communities across the US? And that Backbone imagery and creative tools are deployed somewhere in the country nearly every day of the year? The Backbone Builders Guild is one reason our scrappy group can accomplish so much.

The incredible folks in the Builder Guild meet weekly in our Vashon Island warehouse - a “Santa’s workshop for activists.” They solder, sew and paint. They manufacture inflatable imagery, LED light panels, and giant banners, so every week we can ship their creations to the front lines of struggle. The Builders Guild is key to beautifying bold, joyful nonviolent actions. Their work propels your values and vision into the media and public imagination, helping inspire all to strive for a just and sustainable world.

Because of the many ways you pitch in, Backbone continues to build a culture of engagement to protect the places, people and species we love. In collaboration with our allies, we recently executed our 11th Human Orca Mural! We are not strangers to victory, and we may be on the verge of another: after nine months of actions to save the endangered Southern Resident Orca by restoring wild Chinook salmon, another milestone was reached: last month, the Washington State Legislature approved $750k for a Stakeholder process on breaching the four Lower Snake River dams. Breaching those dams would be the most politically difficult but single most important step toward preventing the orcas’ otherwise inevitable extinction. Together, we are making a difference on things of ultimate importance.

Today, I’m writing to ask for your help to keep our creative impact growing.
"We can be whatever we have the courage to see."
~ Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, from her Message from the Future video

You’ve probably heard us say, “Our ‘No’ is only as powerful as our ‘Yes’ is compelling.” When there are so many threats to oppose, even “protecting what we love” can feel like being stuck in a constant state of reaction and defense. This fatigues the spirit. Defense by itself isn’t enough to build a movement capable of delivering long term victories to manifest the positive future we aspire to create. Therefore, Backbone has an aggressive offense as well.

Our Solutionary Rail campaign is our compelling “Yes!” to bolster and balance the many times we must say “No!” If you haven’t yet heard, Solutionary Rail is a campaign to use existing US railroads to get our society “on track” for clean transportation and renewable energy. It is a proposal and strategy for a just transition to living wage jobs and revitalized rural communities, right of way justice for tribes and environmental justice for the most impacted communities, and a way to make real progress on decarbonizing our energy and transportation infrastructure.

Solutionary Rail may be the best chance we in the US have for significantly curbing carbon emissions and ushering in a just and sustainable future.

After many years of work, Solutionary Rail is gaining momentum with movement and policy leaders: Winona LaDuke has incorporated it into her presentations. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez declared “this should be part of the Green New Deal!” Thanks to our great team of engaged citizen activists, we had a total of 16 meetings with Congressional offices during our April delegation to Washington, DC.

Environmental justice organizers, academics, and experts from multiple fields are joining our alliance. These leaders are championing Solutionary Rail in their organizations, industries, and with lawmakers at the state and federal level. Our participation in the Moving Forward Network (MFN), a coalition of community-based organizations continues to be an inspiring and powerful collaboration. I have been personally bolstered by the growing friendships, solidarity, and lessons learned from the people on the frontlines, in the communities most negatively impacted by our diesel-powered freight system.

In May, our team brought Solutionary Rail to Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway shareholder meeting in Omaha. We’ve considered doing this for years, and this year, with the help of our Nebraska friends, we made it happen. Berkshire Hathaway owns BNSF, the largest US railroad company as well as Berkshire Hathaway Energy with its energy generation and transmission companies. We displayed a giant banner outside and leafleted as shareholders lined up in the early morning hours to get a seat at their annual meeting – revival. Our crew urged those in line to mobilize their energy and transportation assets and lead the way to a clean energy future.
Shortly before Buffett was to go on, I got a call from Mark Welsh with Nebraskans for Peace to come inside. Mark figured out the process for getting into the lottery to ask a question of the “Oracle from Omaha.” It just so happened that I was wearing the lucky socks my daughter gave me for my birthday. My lottery ticket was drawn! I was to be first in line to ask a question during the Q&A section of the meeting. Nervous but resolved, I asked Mr. Buffett if the Solutionary Rail team could meet with his people to discuss our proposal for a public-private partnership to electrify their railroads and open corridors for a clean energy future.

Mr. Buffett’s reply was evasive and rambling, but he did say that we were “free to speak with Carl Ice,” the new head of BNSF. Then, Buffett’s (yet elder) partner Charlie Munger chimed in gloriously with:

“The questioner is on the side of the angels. Electrification is bound to happen sooner or later… I think Greg will decide when.”

I could not have imagined better words of blessing! The “Greg” Mr. Munger referred to is Greg Abel, President and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Energy and a likely successor to lead Berkshire Hathaway.

Clearly, the proverbial iron is hot - and we mean to strike. We are preparing a strategic following up on Mr. Buffett’s invitation in order to open channels for a broad conversation with BNSF and Berkshire Hathaway. This is no small task. Nor is all the various work that must be undertaken. Solutionary Rail is in fact so hot that we desperately need to add staff to keep up with the opportunities. I am already spending as much time and energy as I can muster, and it still isn’t enough to keep up. It is now time for Backbone to finally add staff to the Solutionary Rail project in order to:

- Organize our growing volunteer team to expand our public education and legislative outreach;
- Grow the cohesion of our stakeholder alliance so all are “at the table” NOT “on the menu;” and
- Coordinate and compile the necessary research to craft policy and win funding to apply the Solutionary Rail approach on transportation and energy corridors across the country.

Our abundance of opportunity is the result of years of work and the investments you have made in this cutting edge project. Congratulations and thank you. People are waking up to the fact that time is running out for preventing the worst scenarios of climate catastrophe. When our very survival depends upon rapidly decarbonizing energy and transportation, Solutionary Rail provides a unique and powerful opportunity to build an unconventional alliance to deliver a paradigm-shifting victory. But to realize this potential we urgently need your support

I have never been more excited about our potential and simultaneously concerned for our team and for Backbone Campaign’s future. We have been so understaffed and consumed doing the work and responding to opportunities that we have fallen way behind in our fundraising. Just as our potential is at its zenith, our resources have dwindled.

When the People Lead, the Leaders Follow
If we don’t raise $30k in the next month, and $60k in the next 4 months, Backbone will not only fail to grow in the ways we aspire to - we will actually have to lay-off our already minimal staff. This sense of emergency is not unfamiliar. The first half of the year is always so busy that a mid-year push is necessary. But this year Amy and I want to do better than merely survive. We want to thrive.

If we double the goals above, then we will be able to start growing our team, increase our impact, and catapult Solutionary Rail into the public dialog as a stand-out, win-win solution.

At this critical moment in history, bold beautiful actions and equally bold solutions will determine whether we have a thriving planet to live on in the years to come - or not. Backbone’s artful activism and creative organizing continues to make the invisible visible, unleashes our imagination for a better world, and makes the journey toward that future irresistible. Let’s not squander the years of movement building work that have brought us to this threshold of opportunity.

Please consider making a gift at this critical moment. Some people prefer to make their tax-deductible donation in the form of stock to benefit from the tax advantages that allows. If that is of interest to you, please call the office at 206-408-8058 or email Amy and me at info@backbonecampaign.org

As you have seen, though Backbone is small and scrappy, our impact is mighty. Contributing to Backbone is always a wise, well-leveraged investment in the future. Your timely gift toward Backbone’s capacity now will deliver disproportionate positive returns for a future we can all be proud of.

Thank you again for being with us on this journey and for being an essential member of Team Backbone. Please always feel free to call or email to share your ideas, discuss strategy, or ask questions about our work.

Together, we can make a tremendous, positive, and lasting impact.

In collaboration and deepest gratitude,

Bill Moyer, Co-Founder, Backbone Campaign

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