

Backbone Campaign Response

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Statement to our Community

In June, some former associates of the Backbone Campaign launched an attack on the organization. The 79 page document they crafted takes conflicts out of context and paints a picture of an organizational climate that does not reflect the experience of the many, many people who work with the Backbone Campaign.

There are always going to be challenges within our organizations. Ultimately, we need to find ways to work together as a movement in this critical time, dealing with our disagreements with one another and growing together in the ways we strive to live our values. We're all in this together, and this moment requires us to build and maintain unity and solidarity, so that we can confront the crises before our world.

Backbone Campaign has robust organizational systems, checks and balances on board and director power, and a sophisticated board of veteran movement leaders. [Read the statement](#) the Board issued in response to this attack. The mention of Secretaries of State and Attorneys General in the attack gives it an air of legalistic legitimacy, although **the above agencies rejected it outright or they reviewed and refused to take up their complaint. (See here.)**

Please trust your gut and your own direct experience working with Backbone Campaign thus far. If you ever have any issue with our words or deeds, we welcome constructive feedback and honest communication, as we are all forever students in this life and work. We are more than happy to address any concerns you or others may have.

Forward Together,
Mary Lou Finley (Board Chair), Bill Moyer and Amy Morrison

For more information about the increase of attacks on organizations, read Seattle nonprofit leader Vu Le's "[The Wheel of Disillusionment](#): What it is, and how it destroys relationships and creates toxic cultures" which mirrors Backbone's experience of this attack.

[Letter from Attorney](#)

CENTER FOR NONPROFIT LAW, PC

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April 17, 2019

RE: Investigations of Complaints against Backbone Campaign

TO: People and Organizations interested in the Backbone Campaign

As the Registered Agent for Backbone Campaign, and as its legal counsel, I can report to you that Backbone Campaign is not being investigated, and was not being investigated, by any state or federal agency.

A document complaining about Backbone Campaign was sent by a few aggrieved individuals to the following agencies: the Oregon Department of Justice, the Oregon Secretary of State, the Washington Attorney General, and the Washington Secretary of State. I am happy to report to you that after receiving and reviewing the complaint, all four agencies concluded that there was no basis or need for an investigation of Backbone Campaign.

We were never contacted by the Washington Attorney General's office. Their office reported to Backbone Campaign's staff that none of the issues raised in the complaint involved matters that the Washington Attorney General would investigate. Accordingly, the Washington Attorney General's office has decided not to even begin an investigation in response to the complaint.

The Oregon Department of Justice contacted me after they read the complaint and asked some questions, asked for a few documents, and requested some information from the Board of Directors of Backbone Campaign, to determine if there were any problems of concern that would warrant an investigation. They subsequently determined that a formal investigation of Backbone was not warranted or necessary.

We were never contacted by the Oregon Secretary of State, or the Washington Secretary of State, in response to the complaint. To the best of our knowledge, they did not even begin any investigation in response to the complaint.

In summary, all four of the agencies the complaint was sent to, have concluded that the complaint did not contain any allegations which they felt warranted any further investigation by their agencies.

If you, or any other interested party, has any questions or concerns regarding the contents of this letter, please contact our office and we would be happy to discuss the matter with you.

Sincerely,



David E. Atkin, Attorney at Law

Internal policies and trainings

Backbone Campaign's most important priority is the safety and wellbeing of everyone within our event/work/volunteer spaces. Backbone Campaign Staff and Board took the incident at our 2017 Action Camp seriously and for the last year we have undergone trainings and woven our learnings into new processes and policies for safety, accountability and well being. These have included:

- A [Safe Spaces Policy](#)
- [Beyond Inclusion Beyond Empowerment](#) - staff participated in a two day anti-oppression training with Dr. Leticia Nieto, January 2018. A training in Radical Consent and a second Beyond Inclusion Beyond Empowerment Training for our team and community was held, September 2018.
- Consent and Overcoming Sexism in the Workplace - staff, board and volunteers participated in a one day training with Dr. Betsey Archambault, Vashon DoVE Project, March 2018
- The Backbone Campaign Board adopted a [Sexual Harassment Policy](#)
- Additional trainings in preventing harassment and creating accountability processes have been taken by staff. An Employee Manual has been created with the help of pro bono legal help, and staff have attended HR trainings.

2017-2018 Changes to the Board of Directors

Backbone Campaign is governed by a set of bylaws, which were crafted in 2007 specifically for an activist organization by David Atkin, nationally renown nonprofit attorney. The bylaws state that all board members are elected for a one year (renewable) term by the Council of Electors, a body made up of many founders of the Backbone Campaign, as well as past key staff and a past board president. This entity provides checks and balances to the power of the Board, similar to the judicial branch of the federal government. Their job is to elect the Boardmembers each year and to step in when the Board is experiencing excessive conflict that overcomes the organization.

In fall of 2017, conflict on the board escalated and the Board was unable to function, due to the growing division and mistrust. For three months, the Council of Electors investigated the conflict and in January 2018 they independently decided it was in the best interests of the organization to replace three Board members.

A statement the Council issued is [here](#).

A statement by Attorney David Atkin about the Council of Elector's process is [here](#).

A statement from the Board, in response to the June 7th attack on Backbone, can be read [here](#).

The roster of current Backbone Campaign Board members is [here](#).

Incident at Action Camp 2017

Backbone Campaign prioritizes the safety and wellbeing of participants at its events, workplace, and actions. Questionable behavior at our 2017 Action Camp occurred by a person who was a board member at the time. The Director, staff and board took the allegations of inappropriate behavior at our Action Camp seriously, did a thorough investigation, and took appropriate, timely and proportionate action, including an apology to the person who had reported that their boundaries had been crossed.

Backbone Campaign's good work continues - Testimonials

It would be difficult to find any organization that has been more generous or out on the front edge with the level of impact and skill-sharing that Backbone has provided. We continue to carry on with our good work, as it is vital that we keep our movements strong in this challenging time. To see some of the work we have done in the past year, check out the [Recent Actions blog](#).

The following individuals support Backbone Campaign and its Executive Director, Bill Moyer, and they have written testimonials of support. **Letters from individuals whose names are bolded are included here. To read others, contact inquiry@backbonecampaign.org**

Yvette Arellano, t.e.j.a.s.

Norma Baum, artist

Medea Benjamin, Code Pink

Juan Jose Bocanegra, El Comité

Debbie Cantrell

Barbara Cummings

Karen Dolan, Institute for Policy Studies

Martha Enson, UMO

Cathy Fulton

David Godsey, Open Space for Arts and Community

Kay Hubbard

Jacob Maurice Johns, Community Supported Organizer

Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers, Popular Resistance

Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright

David Swanson, World Beyond War

Maia Tabet

Jo Walter

Daphne Wysham, Center for Sustainable Economy

Lesley Zenz, artist

Yvette Arellano, October 16, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Yvette Arellano, a grassroots advocate from Houston, Texas and work with Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services in protecting our communities from the harms of oil and gas infrastructure and toxic exposure. I've had the pleasure of meeting Bill Moyer through our joint participation in the Moving Forward Network, a coalition of communities across the nation fighting the negative impacts of a global trade system.

Not only has Bill been an active member of the Moving Forward Network but an active ally in assisting environmental justice organizations to create high yield/low capacity actions. The MFN includes organizations like t.e.j.a.s who for years have shared our struggle with not much support or assistance. For over a decade we have challenged the oil/gas and chemical industry for the atrocities they continue to cause communities like Manchester, a community like many others who live at the fenceline, hugging up against tank farms, chemical plants, refineries and other infrastructure, in the home of the largest petrochemical complex in the entire nation and second largest in the world.

Our work receives little to no support in the belly of the beast, yet we continue to advocate for and support our communities because we have no other option. We continue to struggle with capacity because we have no other option. We will continue to find creative solutions because we have no other option. We have been used and abused by organizations and our stories extracted, our efforts co-opted and reclaimed, our people used as testing grounds by organizations and other so called partners alike. I share my passion and commitment for the work because these are also things I know I share with Bill: passion and commitment.

When I first met Bill, to this day he has yet to belittle, harass, shut down or ignore me or my community's voice. In fact the opposite is true: in rooms where I have shared concerns that go unheard, Bill has paused the conversation for my concerns to be heard or echoed them for a second earshot. This is something I have not only seen for myself but others. Bill Moyer has even increased our actions and helped us gain partners in other local outfits doing work in immigrant rights work and labor rights with the light brigade. He brought, demonstrated, trained and donated a light to us which has dramatically aided us in more action driven work.

In working with other creative collectives that have been challenging, I have tapped Bill for support. During the last of the Hurricane Harvey rains I remember Bill calling myself directly, checking in, one of the few who did. Bill has even made himself available during late hours when we have had questions about direct actions and he helped us come up with creative solutions to our direct actions. Bill is, for me and my team, an example that actions that speak louder than words.

It is with a full heart and grounded in truth that I share with whomever is reading this letter about my colleague, partner and someone I consider a movement brother, Bill Moyer. This morning I woke up at 4am to take the time to write this letter of support that I hope finds the reader well. I took this

time away from organizing, advocating, making flyers, taking calls or sleeping, because I believe and support my movement brother Bill.

In a movement that requires us to build trust, trustworthy people are hard to find. I have read the grievances against Bill. Some individuals who wrote them have shared spaces with me and have had countless opportunities to approach me directly and they never have. I don't find solace in defending my fellow movement family against other organizers when so much work is at hand. I find no solace in complicit organizations who stand aiding false allegations but who fail to be living examples of mutual aid to environmental organizations as Bill has.

If you'd like to reach out to me please do at 281-919-5762.

In Solidarity,

Yvette Arellano
Policy Research and Grassroots Advocate
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services

Juan Jose Bocanegra, September 15, 2018



Dear Friends,

I recently found out that Mr. Bill Moyer was being accused of insensitivity, now if it had been from government officials, police, right wing groups or other reactionary forces I would have said yes he is intolerant of backward politics and the dangers that such groups pose to regular workers! But no this accusations were being made from people in the left or so called left. The accusations were being levied by some people of color and allies that sympathized with their accusations.

Bill is a hard worker, intolerant of injustices, and above all sensitive. We at El Comité and the May 1st Action Coalition have always depended and received support from the Backbone Campaign via Bill in the form of visual arts training and materials. Bill has never denied us the logistics that are needed in many campaigns by providing us bright and visually attractive signs that describe the problem we are confronting. Bill has never denied us his creativity, enthusiasm and revolutionary fervor to our efforts. So when I heard these accusations it was difficult for me to ascertain that they were talking about the same person that I know! In fact I can and will challenge those accusers of showing me where they have provided comparable solidarity with other people's struggles in the same fashion or even a hint of support as has Bill done for our organizations.

I do not believe that the mere fact that a person is white that they are inherently insensitive to the plight of poor people, workers and people of color including being insensitive and disrespectful to women. Bill has time and time shown to me that he is not white he is "clear", clear about the struggle and clear about who the enemy is! In this time of reactionary politics with unprecedented anti-people and anti-revolutionary elements that we should be attacking each other only leads to weaken our position against the right! The Backbone campaign has been an effective organization not only locally but nationally. The government and the right wing in this country know that and maybe by creating chaos and uncertainty about who your allies are, that their ulterior intent is to weaken our struggle. However let me be very clear we have a long history of working against operations like Cointelpro, police infiltrators, right wing agitators and just plain old opportunists that they better have their shit together to try and divide friendships and solidarity built in the struggle over years.

I stand with my brother Bill and The Backbone Campaign as they weather and struggle against this onslaught of perverted devious and ill willed rumor mongering and vile accusations. I hope this letter is clear about my position if there is any other way that I can assist Bill or the Backbone Campaign please do not hesitate to call me.... Thanks Bill for all your help over the years! Your sign "ICE out of Washington State!" Has been our cry and has been picked up nationally!!!!

Sincerely,

Juan Jose Bocanegra
Co-Chair May 1st Action Coalition
Coordinator El Comité

Debbie Cantrell, August 22, 2018

I am writing in support of the Backbone Campaign. I am not a writer and I have no time to make this letter elegant. However, my heart is breaking to witness an organization that gives so much to the community blacklisted. Here are my thoughts and hopes:

I have been working with Backbone Campaign since I was introduced to their work in 2012. I was a member of the Washington Fair Trade Coalition, and Bill Moyer came to Bellingham to teach a weekend workshop on activism, specifically related to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Free Trade deal. I was so impressed with the amount of work the small group accomplished, the level of expertise of the speakers, hands on experience that participants were given and the collaborative attitude of the staff. In addition, they made sure that there was food, handicapped access, and no one was turned away for lack of funds. During the weekend, an opportunity came up for a direct action, but it would require a change in the agenda for one of the days. A quick meeting was held to get input from the organizers, participants and speakers to see if it was possible to shift gears. The entire thing was handled so smoothly, and with consent from all. I tell this story, because the qualities and values I witnessed here in Bellingham have been repeated during all of my many interactions with Bill and the Backbone staff.

I have volunteered in many capacities and have had Bill and a staff member stay at my home. I have always been treated with respect, listened to and encouraged to push myself beyond my comfort zone to become a better organizer/activist.

Bill Moyer is a visionary activist that our movement towards a more just and healthier world so desperately needs. He has big bold ideas and a positive attitude. He doesn't let small details get in his way. He is always juggling more balls and working on so many different things at the same time than I can even comprehend. He may think faster than his feet can carry him, but that is the price you pay for bold thinkers. He delegates tons of work, and I imagine in that delegation, hurt feelings happen. I have been in a leadership role a little bit and find that no matter how hard you try to please everyone, you never can. I am sure he has interrupted people, made decisions that everyone doesn't agree with, or come across as uncaring. Who in a leadership position has not?

There are so many social and environmental justice fights that are of the utmost importance right now, and things seem to be getting worse in this political climate. We can not afford to be divisive. We must learn to work together and be flexible with others weak points. Backbone Campaign gets results on so many fronts, I think they deserve all the support possible. Happy to answer any questions you have by phone or email.

Sincerely,
Debbie Cantrell
Bellingham, WA

Popular Resistance, September 5, 2018

We have worked closely with Bill Moyer and the Backbone Campaign for over ten years and have collaborated with them on many projects. Bill and the team at Backbone Campaign have been critical to multiple successful campaigns. We have referred the Backbone Campaign to other organizations, and we will continue to do so.

Bill is an excellent movement strategist, a creative artist and a person who believes in using processes that are inclusive and responsible. He has a wide range of talents and builds a team of activists appropriate for each campaign to support and amplify efforts on a broad range of issues. The work that Bill and the Backbone Campaign have done has had a far-reaching impact. You can find people across the United States and around the world using tools that Backbone has developed.

We write to let you know that Popular Resistance is in solidarity with Bill Moyer and the Backbone Campaign and to urge you to take time to speak with Bill and the Backbone Campaign team about recent allegations against them if you have concerns. If you do so, you will find that the allegations are unfounded and that Bill and the Backbone Campaign acted responsibly and in a timely manner to concerns raised about behavior by a board member, now a former board member, at the 2017 Localize This Action Camp. The persons who are making the allegations are engaging in toxic and unproductive behavior and have failed to show interest in resolution, other than to destroy Bill and the Backbone Campaign.

Bill and Backbone have provided tactical and creative support for our work for National Improved Medicare for All for more than ten years. That was manifested most recently in April when Backbone teamed up with us to hold the first direct action camp for single payer health care. For four days, we held workshops and designed and executed a variety of actions. Bill's input was critical to the success of the actions. He was also excellent at listening to all participants and reading the mood in the camp. He helped us to adjust the agenda to maintain energy and engagement so participants' needs were met by the actions.

Bill and Backbone were an integral part of the organizing of the Occupation in Washington, DC in 2011. Bill was a member of the organizing committee, including being on the executive committee, which was responsible for developing strategy and tactics before and during the occupation. He provided large visuals used throughout the occupation and led workshops and actions.

Bill participated in our three-day strategy retreat in early 2013, which is where Popular Resistance originated. This was done after the Occupy Movement had faded and we were working to determine the next steps to build on the progress made by Occupy and to continue to build the movement for economic, racial and environmental justice as well as peace.

Bill and Backbone were an integral part in the five-year campaign to stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). They helped to develop the campaign from the start and participated in the planning and execution of four successful direct-action camps during that period. Bill developed the visibility strategy and materials that we used in the beginning of the campaign to raise awareness of the secret TPP corporate trade deal. He participated in developing direct actions and provided critical support to make them a success. He organized actions in addition to the four camps both

locally and at TPP negotiations in multiple parts of the United States and Canada. Bill and Backbone played major roles in stopping the TPP and helping to build the movement-of-movements and solidarity that was essential to stopping this destructive corporate power grab.

Bill and Backbone also assisted with our campaign to try to stop a fracked gas refinery and export terminal in Maryland. They participated in our Spring Action Camp in 2016, creating strong visuals and training participants in kayak activist techniques. In fact, we brought a group of climate activists to the Localize This Action Camp on Vashon Island in August 2015.

We have turned to Bill and Backbone for support throughout the past ten years and will continue to do so. They have always been there to collaborate with us and to support what we are doing. We have worked together under stressful conditions and have found Bill to be a strong and reliable partner. When an employment opportunity became available at Backbone Campaign, we referred one of our staff for the position. She currently works $\frac{3}{4}$ time for Backbone Campaign and $\frac{1}{4}$ time for Popular Resistance. She moved to Vashon Island for the position in March of this year. And when Bill asked Margaret to become a board member, she accepted it without hesitation.

We have found Bill to be a person who is always striving for improvement, whether it's perfecting an activist technique or improving processes for Backbone as an organization. Backbone is also an organization that strives for solidarity in the movement, understanding how unity is one of the keys to success of political movement. The allegations made against Bill and the Backbone Campaign are the opposite of our experience with the people involved with Backbone. It is unfortunate that for almost a year, Bill and Backbone have had to spend so much time and energy addressing the allegations, despite their proven falsity, and attacks by a small group of disgruntled people. It is also unfortunate that individuals and organizations have spread misinformation published by the attackers without first reaching out to Bill and the Backbone Campaign for more information. When abusive statements are made by an ally, we believe it is best practice to talk to those accused first before sharing the information or adding any credibility to the claims.

It is our hope that the call out culture, which is happening in response to real situations and real anger and hurt, will mature so that we as activists develop care in how we react to it. There are real situations where sexual harassment and violence need to be exposed and addressed, but we also have to take care in how we go about doing that or we will enable attackers to use emotional buttons and scare tactics to disrupt the work of people who are valuable to the movement. As we gain power, we can expect more infiltration and disruption. We must take care not to empower our opponents in dividing and weakening us.

Kevin Zeese
Margaret Flowers
Co-directors, Popular Resistance

Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright, October 19, 2018

Greetings Friends and Interested Parties:

My name is Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright, a racial/climate justice practitioner, organizer and policy analyst originally from New York City, but now residing in Seattle, WA. I have spent the last decade of my life fighting for the frontlines and working to increase climate action for, and inclusion of low-wealth Black and Brown communities hit first and worst by the climate crisis we currently find ourselves in. I moved to Seattle roughly three years ago, following the birth of my son Zahir Cielo and quickly found a home in the community. Bill Moyer was a big reason for that – he embraced me as a friend and brother from the moment we first met each other and immediately began discussing our work and what it would take to realize true climate justice.

Bill is one of the reasons why I consistently evoke to colleagues of mine across the country, and the world, that Seattle is the first place I have ever lived where I feel like white folk legitimately and genuinely have my back. In one of our first discussions I was pleasantly surprised at the how open and supportive he was of my analysis and experiences of white supremacy and racism within the climate community. It's been my experience, very often, that when I share these truths with white folk, they are evasive, skeptical and too often generally problematic. Bill embraced my truth without hesitation and continually kept in touch with me to ask how he could assist my work and what he could do to address systemic racism and white supremacy in climate and nonprofit circles. It's been refreshing to have the friendship and comradery of a true white ally who is not afraid to ask questions and open himself up to correction when necessary.

Backbone has pulled off amazing feats under Bill's leadership – the annual Action Camp on Vashon Island is just one example of the myriad accomplishments that Bill should take credit for – which he does with maximum humility, always desiring to know what he could have done better. That's why I was shocked when allegations of misconduct surfaced and even more disappointed at the lack of community-rooted due process that was offered to Bill. I took part in conducting what I believe to be an objective and fair investigation of the situation associated with the Action Camp that took place in the Summer of 2017.

What my investigation revealed was that while Bill, like ALL men, have work to do in understanding their internal and external contributions to the patriarchy, he took part in no actions that could be associated with promoting or ignoring sexual misconduct or harassment. It's very disappointing that he was not given the chance to explain his side of the accounts that took place and was quickly labeled by accusations, half-truths and flat out fabrications. I know Bill Moyer, I know his heart, and while there are attributes of his personality that warrant

improvement, which is something we can and should relate to, he is an exceptional earth citizen and I stand with him –proudly, publicly and profoundly.

As I stated earlier, all men have work to do, just like all white folk have work to do to understand how they consciously and unconsciously contribute to, and exercise white supremacy. If every white person was treated the way Bill has been when exercising unconscious/unintentional white supremacy, our movement spaces would be bereft of good, genuine people who are contributing to uplifting all of us from the collective fight of our lives, climate disruption. This is a time to come together, to work with each other, improve with each other and otherwise do all that is necessary to win. Bill is someone who is willing to do that. If there is a silver lining to all of this, it's that Bill has been putting in the work, and I can already see marked improvement and consciousness on his part.

I would be happy to have a discussion with any and all who have questions about my solidarity with Bill Moyer. Please feel free to reach out via email at anthonyrogerswright@gmail.com or via mobile at 631 402 7855. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Blessings and Light,

Anthony K. Rogers-Wright

I write this letter of support for Bill Moyer and Backbone after many years of knowing and admiring Bill's work. I have worked alongside Bill Moyer and the Backbone campaign when we successfully forced Shell's icebreaker, The Fennica, to turn around at the St. John's Bridge in Portland as part of the #ShellNo campaign, a victory that contributed to Shell withdrawing their plans to drill in the Arctic. And I worked with Backbone as a participant in the Action Camp of 2017, and as an organizer of a youth component of that action camp, bringing youth—including Native youth, youth of color and LBGTQ youth—to the Action Camp on Vashon Island alongside adults.

As witness to much of what was alleged to have happened at Action Camp, I feel Bill has been the target of a vicious smear campaign. But Bill is not the only one wronged. The people wronged in addition to Bill include all of us who were at Action Camp, but especially the youth who were in my care who witnessed the explosive rage of one particular woman, (whom I will call "Vicky" to protect her identity) a rage so abusive, so toxic, so loud, and filled with expletives that we were helpless to protect the ears and minds of the children in our care from the language and behavior that was on display, try as we might to move far away.

Although I was not witness to the alleged sexual harassment of a camper, my understanding is that, when Bill was asked to respond to concerns expressed by several women at camp, that Bill asked "Jim" (not his name) to leave-- an appropriate and timely response to people feeling unsafe with "Jim." It should have ended there. Instead, "Vicky" chose a very public forum—at the end of camp, and in front of over 100 adults and youth-- in which to air her grievances, inflicting a public humiliation on Bill and other men who did not share her perspective. But it didn't end there. It continued with demands that Bill resign, with going after his organization's non-profit status with the state, with some groups calling on others not to work with Bill again, and with demanding his funders not fund him again.

This is toxic activism, and it will destroy our movements if we don't call it out.

Something that others allege was sexual harassment-- that was not the fault of Bill but that Bill handled in a swift and completely appropriate way-- has now been conflated with every personal failing that Bill may have made throughout his career. Rather than

trying to correct the problem, there is now a pack mentality of “us” against “them,” with activists being forced to take sides. Such behavior is incredibly destructive—of Bill, of the organization he directs, of civil society, and of our ability as activists to work together with trust and respect.

It takes courage to defy Shell and other corporations, as Bill has done, to put yourself out there regularly and bring people together to challenge the status quo. It takes commitment to do this for decades with little compensation for your efforts. It takes a strong desire for equity and fairness to do all Bill did to raise funds for the “community-supported activists” and other activists of color. This is hard work. And Bill has done it for many years.

I urge you to support Bill and the Backbone Campaign at this time of unprecedented attack, look to his record of incredible civic engagement, his accomplishments, speak to his board members and allies who have worked with him over the years who know and love him, and understand that we all have work to do, but that Bill Moyer and Backbone deserve our continued support and gratitude for all they have given us over many years.

Sincerely,

Daphne Wysham
Director, Climate Justice Program
Center for Sustainable Economy
503-310-7042