Op-ed: The young must lead on climate change

By Julian Carr Aug 22 2015 [The original has a large photo of the author here]

As a native Utahn and professional skier, I am blessed with a life in the snow. Snow has provided me with a job and the opportunity to visit the most incredible mountains around the planet — from Japan to Alaska, Argentina, Chile, British Columbia, Switzerland, Iceland, Austria and across the USA. Life is good.

I am a big mountain freeskier. We don't race slalom gates or wear speedsuits like Bode Miller or Lindsey Vonn. We send cliffs and charge big and wild mountain lines. Freeskiing is about breaking free from the old rules. It's about thinking differently and going big.

We need to apply that mindset to our energy future. Yeah, this is about climate change. If you don't believe it's real, do your homework. Tune out the skeptics who are paid to confuse you. Correct your friends and family members who say the science is unclear. It's not.

I'm talking to you. We can't wait for others to solve this thing. We, the younger generation, need to push our elected leaders. We need to step up, think differently and go big. Throughout American history, it is young people who have stood up to injustice and catalyzed change. Civil rights, women's rights, marriage equality — these are all movements where the young stood up to the old-money, old way of thinking and changed the nation. The hippies helped end the Vietnam War. Surely with all our information technology and social connectedness, we will.

How? By joining and firing up the grassroots social movement that is activating young people, athletes, skiers and snowboarders and progressive thinkers from around the world. If you're a skier or snowboarder, join or at least look into Protect Our Winters, the climate activist group founded by big mountain snowboarder Jeremy Jones. If you're not a skier, check out [350.org](http://350.org) and The Climate Reality Project. All of these groups, plus the smartest thinkers on climate, are pushing the social movement approach because past strategies have failed.

Educating your community about climate change is good, riding your bike and eating less red meat are good, but they are not solutions. Climate change will not be solved by individual actions or by businesses getting greener. History shows that the government needs to step up. All of the biggest environmental changes in American history have only come when Congress and the White House enacted big laws that we take for granted today: the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Endangered Species Act. Without these laws, our skies would be black like Beijing's. Our rivers would be toxic. Our bald eagles would be extinct.

The Obama administration recently announced the details of its much-anticipated Clean Power Plan. These rules are aimed at reducing carbon emissions from coal power plants, our dirtiest power sources. Sadly, Gov. Gary Herbert has indicated he may fight implementation of the Clean Power Plan.

Please write, call or email his office and ask him to reconsider his position and its impact on Utah's winter tourism industry that supports 18,419 jobs and $1.29 billion to our economy annually, according to BEBR and RRC Associates data.

Snow is vital to the Utah economy and our way of life. The critics will say the plan will increase our energy bills. Not true. Energy efficiency and conservation are a major part of the plan and will actually decrease your energy bills.

The fossil fuel lobbyists will say the Clean Power Plan will kill jobs. BS. It will create jobs. Not in the coal industry, but in our communities as we hammer up solar panels and wind turbines. In 2014, there were approximately 2,000 people employed in the wind and solar industries in Utah. We can't stop there. The clean energy revolution will be more powerful than the Internet revolution.

Snow is the magical product of the airborne collision of water vapor, cold temperatures and the catalyst of a nucleus around which snow crystals form and precipitate from the sky. But without cold there is no snow. The last decade was the hottest on record. Each of the last three decades has been hotter than the one before. Climate scientists predict that more of our mountain precipitation will fall as rain instead of snow. Born and raised in Salt Lake City, I can already see this happening.

It is immoral to allow our children, and our children's children, to inherit a planet that we screwed up. Join me in the movement. Join me on the front lines so that, when we are old, we may still join together on the snow.

Julian Carr is a world-record-holding skier based in Salt Lake City and founder and CEO of Discrete Headwear.