

# Green New Deal: It's the Dr. Oz of Environmental Policy



By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 7, 2019



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

Imagine if Dr. Oz, who peddles all sorts of pseudoscientific, nonsensical miracle cures on his daytime television show, proposed an environmental policy. That's the Green New Deal.

If any among you thought that environmental activists might have a few good ideas about the future of our planet, let this resolution remove all doubt. The document ([PDF](#) [2]), introduced by freshman Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey, reads as if it was written by somebody without a shred of common sense, let alone a working grasp of physics, public health, or economics.

Let's consider some of the more fantastic claims and ambitions in the resolution.

## **Green New Deal: It's the Dr. Oz of Environmental Policy**

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez says that life expectancy is declining, and she appears to blame a lack of "clean air, clean water, healthy food," and a laundry list of other things. Each of those claims is categorically false.

First, while life expectancy has ticked down in recent years, [we know the reason](#) [3]: An increase in suicides and opioid (largely fentanyl) overdoses. It's not due to a dirty environment. We have some of the [cleanest air in the world](#) [4], clean and safe water (despite the [exaggeration of the Flint water crisis](#) [5]), and a very healthy and safe food supply (even if people choose to eat junk food instead of vegetables). From a basic necessity standpoint, it's never been a better time to be alive.

To achieve its vision of environmental and economic justice, the Green New Deal wants 100% of our nation's energy to be based on clean or renewable resources. That's utopian daydreaming.

Germany is attempting to implement an energy policy (called Energiewende) along these very lines. How's it going? Well, Germany is [nowhere close to meeting its 2020 emissions target](#) [6], and *Foreign Policy* [describes](#) [7] Germany as a "coal-burning, gas-guzzling climate change hypocrite." Strong letter to follow.

The bottom line is that [no serious energy plan can exclude nuclear power](#) [8]. However, if we were to focus exclusively on building up nuclear power, we could probably transition to that entirely [within 25 years](#) [9]. People who are serious about addressing climate change (or any form of air pollution) ought to consider it.

The Green New Deal's plan for farming is every bit as wrongheaded. To make agriculture more environmentally friendly, the resolution wants to encourage more family farming. That's exactly backward. New research concludes that [small \(usually organic\) farms are worse for the environment than large "corporate" farms](#) [10]. How so? Because they produce fewer crops while simultaneously generating a disproportionate amount of pollution and consuming a disproportionate amount of resources like water. If we want to be responsible stewards of the environment, we should *avoid* building family farms because they aren't efficient.

### **Green New Deal Goes Off the Rails**

Perhaps the most laughable aspect of the Green New Deal is its proposal for more "high-speed rail." If that was the extent of the proposal, we might support that. Regional high-speed rail (e.g., connecting Seattle and Portland) is a very good idea. But that's not what the Green New Deal has in mind.

An accompanying document ([PDF](#) [11]) that explains the thinking behind the resolution says that the ultimate goal is to **"build out high-speed rail at a scale where air travel stops becoming necessary."** [Emphasis added.]

Uh-huh.

Have any of this resolution's 60-odd sponsors ever looked at a globe? There are a couple of obstacles, known as oceans, that will always make air travel necessary. We will not be building multiple high-speed lines across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Besides, the idea of taking a high-speed train from Seattle to, say, New York City is neither appealing nor practical. In an airplane, that trip is about 4.5 hours from Seattle to NYC but about 6 hours in the reverse direction (due to the jet stream). Assuming the [fastest trains](#) [12] (~270 mph) and no stops, a high-speed train might make the same trip in 10 hours. Add in stops, and it's probably more like 15 or 20 hours. Why would anyone do that if a plane is faster?

### **Green New Deal Is a Testament to Scientific Illiteracy**

The only way a team of sitting Congressmen and Congresswomen could come up with a "plan" so detached from reality is because scientific illiteracy is rampant in our country. Until we have smarter, more informed people in charge of science and technology policy, expect more of the same.

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[3] <https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/news/20181129/cdc-opioids-suicides-drive-life-expectancy-drop#1>

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[6] <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/german-emissions-dip-bit-ngos-want-detailed-coal-exit-path/germanys-greenhouse-gas-emissions-drop-slightly-2017-estimate>

[7] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/13/germany-is-a-coal-burning-gas-guzzling-climate-change-hypocrite/>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/02/09/solution-us-energy-policy-really-really-simple-10847>

[9]

[https://www.realclearscience.com/journal\\_club/2015/05/15/we\\_could\\_get\\_rid\\_of\\_fossil\\_fuel\\_electricity\\_in\\_just\\_25\\_years](https://www.realclearscience.com/journal_club/2015/05/15/we_could_get_rid_of_fossil_fuel_electricity_in_just_25_years)

[10] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/09/22/corporate-farms-are-better-environment-organic-farms-13438>

[11] <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5729035/Green-New-Deal-FAQ.pdf>

[12] <https://www.cntraveler.com/stories/2016-05-18/the-10-fastest-trains-in-the-world>