



Silver State Voices
on
Climate Change



Lillian Chang Spinello

Lillian is a longtime Nevadan and has seen the environment changing around her in worrisome ways. From longer, hotter summers that have brought an extended infestation of grasshoppers to wildfires that have ripped through California and brought

clouds of smoke to Nevada, she's worried about how long our planet can sustain these changes.

"Growing up, I played soccer outside every single day," she says. "I don't even know how kids today can play soccer with how hot the weather is. The concerns with heat exhaustion, heat strokes, even heat deaths -- it's impossible. Soon it's going to be impossible for anyone to be outside for long."

Lillian and her partner have talked about it with their own child. They worry that spending too much time outside, in the heat and in the smog, will harm their daughter's health. Her family recycles, tries not to use single-use plastics, and recently bought an electric vehicle. But she knows that individual action is not enough, and that we need action at the highest levels.

For the last year, Lillian has volunteered with the Climate Action Team, contacting her neighbors to talk about climate change. She's also written letters to the editor, called legislators, and written letters to the governor to ring the alarm on climate. Until lawmakers take the climate crisis seriously, Lillian won't stop trying to protect the state she calls home.

"Nothing else matters if you don't have a planet or a home to live on."



Abigail Herrera

Abigail is a senior in high school in southeastern Las Vegas and will vote for the first time in 2020. She has volunteered with Chispa Nevada since the summer of 2018, after she participated in the Latino Youth Leadership Conference, a program to build the leadership skills of young Latinos. Abigail's family immigrated from Mexico decades ago, and she will be the first person in her family to attend college.

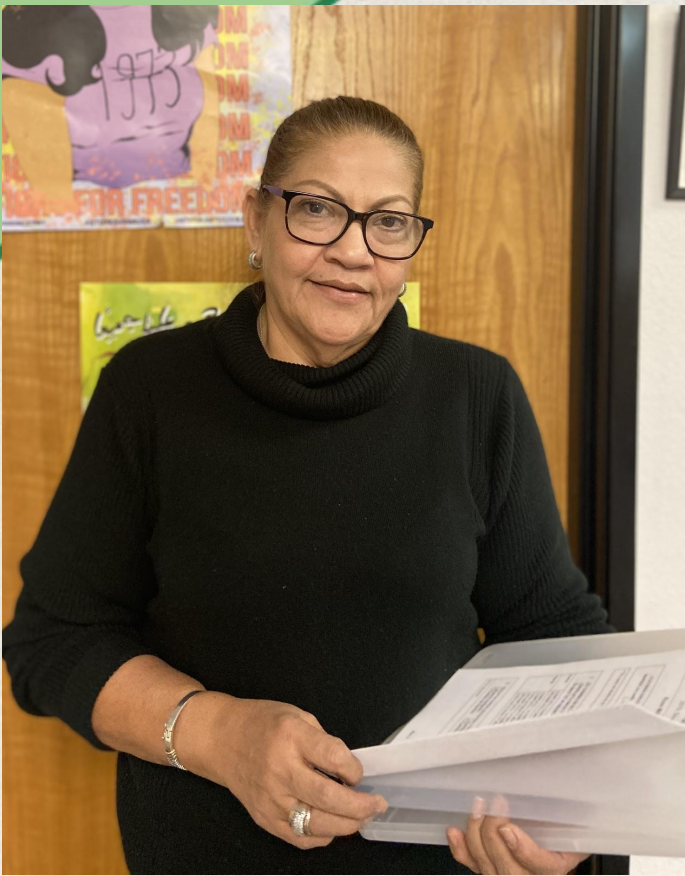
Since joining Chispa Nevada, Abigail has been focused on fighting for clean air and clean water by advocating for elected leaders to take climate action, transition school

buses to electric power, and promote more renewable energy use in Nevada. She's joined the Youth Climate Strikes, tabled at community events, and even posed questions to candidates at presidential forums. Getting involved as a climate justice volunteer has made Abigail excited about 2020. "I'm ready to vote for someone who's going to reduce our carbon footprint and get this done."

Abigail is most concerned with the rippling effects of climate change on public health. As a young Latina, she is especially worried that communities of color will bear the brunt of the problem. That's why Abigail wants to study nursing, so that she can help families like hers take care of themselves as the climate changes. Knowing that her parents are getting older but don't have health insurance, Abigail worries about the increasing medical costs they could be faced with as pollution and heat waves get worse. Already one of her capstone projects this year has focused on reducing waste in hospitals, so that fewer materials end up in landfills, contributing to pollution.

She also sees young generations like her as the future of our country. "We want change. I want to live somewhere where the air is clean, where the water is clean. And we'll be harsher with candidates when it comes time for them to do what they say they're going to do. It's important for them to live up to the promises they're making right now."

"We don't have a lot of time left to save our air," she says. "We need to take action now. For those candidates who are listening, *se tienen que poner las pilas.*"



Isabel Klein

Isabel is a *promotora* with Chispa Nevada. Isabel comes from Mazatlan, Mexico, where she saw firsthand the effects of climate change on the sea that bordered her town. “Now there’s no fish, no shrimp, and everything seems to be going extinct,” she says. The magnitude of what’s being lost -- from ocean life to coral reefs to clean air and water -- is what scares her the most.

For Isabel, the best way to fight climate change is to transition to a 100% clean energy economy. She’s interested in investing in solar panels to reduce her monthly bills -- especially the \$250 electricity bill

she gets during the summer months -- but couldn’t afford to buy them outright or even to lease them.

With Chispa Nevada, she’s pushing for lawmakers to make solar energy more affordable and accessible to families like hers. She’s testified before the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada in support of community solar gardens and small-scale solar development projects that can be located in neighborhoods like hers.

“Lots of us want to go solar, but we can’t afford to do it,” she says. “That’s why every candidate should see where we live, our environment, and what we’re going through. If they see how people live, the water we drink and the air we breathe, they’d understand why we need to take action.”

As a *promotora*, Isabel is committed to working with her friends and neighbors to bring more Latinos into the Conservation Voters Movement. “We have to get other people involved, we have to stay engaged, or we’ll get sidelined,” she says. Although her two sons are adults now, Isabel still feels a commitment to protecting their futures. “This planet is what we leave for our grandchildren.”



Bertha Robledo

Bertha is a staple in Chispa Nevada's *Clean Buses for Healthy Niños* campaign. She has been fighting for electric school buses since 2016, and she got involved because of her family: her son was one of Chispa Nevada's first *promotores*, and after attending his graduation, she decided she needed to join the fight for her school-age grandchildren.

Since then, Bertha has been an active volunteer with Chispa, meeting with lawmakers from Carson City to Washington, D.C., from Governor Sisolak to Senator Cortez Masto to local council members to utility commissioners. Her plea has remained the same: children shouldn't breathe dirty air on their way to school, and electric school buses are the best way to protect our children's health.

"I'm on my way out," Bertha says, "but I'm doing this for the next generation. If lawmakers won't listen to us, we'll keep organizing, we'll keep working, we'll go directly to them. My grandchildren deserve to breathe clean air."



Alexa Aispuro

“If we’re not voting for ourselves, who’s going to vote for us?” Alexa says. “Growing up, I was very oblivious to what was going on around me. But now I understand the stakes. Latinos are underrepresented in resources and in policy. We have to make ourselves heard. We’re bringing our own chairs to the table.”

From tabling at Lollapalooza to community fairs, Alexa is on a mission to engage young Latino voters and help them understand they deserve to have a voice in how their environment is managed. Alexa is a youth organizer with Chispa Nevada, working with local high schools to train students about how to get involved in grassroots

organizing and issue advocacy. She joined the Conservation Voters Movement in 2016, when she voted for the first time and signed up to help register others to vote.

Since then, Alexa has helped organize and speak at nearly a dozen rallies, strikes, and events supporting clean energy and climate action. She has led walkouts and lobbied in Carson City and Washington, D.C., calling for a transition to electric school buses, the establishment of community solar gardens, and the regulation of PFAS. She sees 2020 as an opportunity to turn the ship around on climate change.

“This is a 911-level crisis,” she stresses. “I don’t want to minimize other issues, but what’s the point of working on anything else if we don’t have a planet? Our planet is our home. We need to act on this now.”

Alexa has lived between Mexico and Las Vegas most of her life and has seen how pollution can hurt Latino communities. In middle school, she lived next to a freeway and rode a diesel bus to school each day. Her best friend Robert was eventually diagnosed with asthma, and soon he was missing school regularly for doctors’ visits and emergency room trips. Realizing how asthma can disproportionately affect communities of color, she wants to make sure their needs are prioritized by the next president. “It’s up to us to demand better,” she says.

“I think things can get better. But we still have a long way to go. In 2020, it’s all going to have to change. Our next president will need to listen to young voters, to communities of color, and be ready to act immediately. The clock is ticking.”



Louise Helton

Louise Helton is the founder of 1 Sun Solar, a rooftop solar and electrical contracting company based in Las Vegas. Inspired by President Bill Clinton's speech at the National Clean Energy Summit in 2005, when he said Nevada should be the "Saudi Arabia of solar energy," she and her partner founded the company in 2008. Since then, they've survived a recession and major regulatory setbacks to become a multi-state enterprise.

When the rooftop solar industry first started in Nevada, it created more than 8,000 jobs and put thousands of solar panels on roofs across Nevada.

"We were bustling," Louise says. "My company and those of my colleagues had hired hundreds of employees and installed solar panels on homes, businesses and off-grid projects throughout southern Nevada. These are good-paying jobs, jobs that could support a family."

But Louise also knows what can happen when promising industries are undermined. When net-metering rules were changed in 2015, her business fell by 95% nearly overnight. Thousands of employees were laid off. Bigger solar companies pulled out of the state, focusing their operations elsewhere. But for a small business owner like Louise, that wasn't an option. Instead, Louise became one of the leading voices in the fight to bring back the credits that had helped grow the rooftop solar industry. Through hearings and trips to the state capitol, she and her coalition succeeded.

Now, Louise is worried about what will happen if the federal government continues to support the oil and coal industries, at the expense of renewable energy resources. She's been advocating for the federal tax credit for rooftop solar consumers to be extended, and for elected leaders and candidates to understand the important role the solar industry plays in Nevada's economy.

"Candidates should know that Nevada has built a strong clean energy economy and that we intend to grow it even more," Louise says. "But we need action at the federal level to protect and grow these jobs."



Simon Anderson

When the rooftop solar industry all but shut down in Nevada in 2015, Simon was devastated. Although the company he worked for kept him on to help maintain their existing rooftop solar systems, nearly every other member of his team was let go. Policy makers had just slashed credits for rooftop solar customers, leading most solar companies in Nevada to cease their operations. Thousands of solar energy workers were laid off, and Nevada's clean energy reputation took a dive.

Nevada's rooftop solar industry began its boom in 2013, and it was growing at a rapid pace when Simon started at Sunrun in 2014 as a solar panel installer. Over the course of just a couple years, Simon and his colleagues had helped Sunrun install rooftop solar panels on more than 5,000 homes. "We went nonstop," Simon says. "It seemed like we were doing installations 24 hours a day, all over town. Then they pulled the plug on us."

"It was heartbreaking," he says. "Professionally and personally. Working those kind of hours with so many people, those people become your family. And suddenly they don't have work anymore."

Nearly losing his job and watching many of his friends lose theirs made Simon realize how important it was for workers that the right clean energy policies were in place. He started attending regulatory hearings and rallies, calling on policy makers to revisit their previous decisions to bring back the rooftop solar industry and the well-paying jobs it had provided to thousands. During Nevada's 2017 Legislative Session, legislators did just that, restoring the net-metering credits that drove so many homeowners to invest in rooftop solar panels.

Now, the industry is roaring. Nevada has reclaimed its clean energy leadership, moving on from the 2015 debacle to raise its Renewable Portfolio Standard to 50% by 2030. Clean energy today employs nearly 30,000 Nevadans. Simon is part of a team of 100 construction workers at Sunrun, doing installations and managing warehouses.

Although Simon began his career as an electrician, he quickly fell in love with the solar industry.

"When I moved to Nevada, I was looking for something I could be a part of and believe in. I found it working for the solar energy. This job, it's exciting, it's fun, and it feels good at the end of the day. We go to someone's home and soon, they're making their own power."

Simon feels like he's found his true passion with his solar career. He says he'd like to see solar panels on every roof of the Las Vegas valley, and has continued his advocacy, calling for Congress to extend solar tax credits for homeowners and to support battery storage incentives. He's worried about climate change, but thinks that little by little, solar energy can help save the planet.



Rudy & Emily Zamora

In his short life, five-year-old William has been hospitalized for asthma four times -- twice in the past year alone. The last time, William was in the hospital for a week.

“It started out with a cough and it led to him going into pulmonary failure and cardiac arrest,” says his mom, Emily. “Those were the longest four minutes of my life.”

William was diagnosed with asthma when he was just three years old. His parents, Emily and Rudy Zamora, have watched him struggle to breathe through multiple and severe asthma attacks, feeling helpless as their son fights for his life.

“Watching your child suffer is the worst thing in the entire world,” says Rudy.

Now that William is attending pre-kindergarten, Rudy and Emily are worried about how he'll do in school. If he's hospitalized again and misses out on a week of education, what will that mean for his learning?

It's not just the physical toll it takes on William, or the emotional toll Emily and Rudy endure. Too often, living in a dirtier climate also comes at a financial cost. Even with good employer-provided health insurance, Emily and Rudy have watched their medical spending increase significantly. William takes two different daily medications for his asthma, on top of the doctors' visits and emergency room bills. If they didn't have decent medical coverage, Emily and Rudy don't know how they would afford to pay for it all.

“No parent should have to justify, ‘Should I or should I not take my child to the hospital?’ as their son is having an asthma attack,” Emily says. “We need to do better. People shouldn't have to be making so much money just to be able to breathe.”

But these costs will only increase as climate change exacerbates the conditions that affect air quality. There's no doubt in their minds that the air pollution William is exposed to has also worsened his symptoms.

With his asthma and his lungs still developing, William is now at a higher risk of developing heart and lung problems for the rest of his life. Latinos and other communities of color are already more likely to live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution. Compared to non-Hispanic white children, Latino children are twice as likely to die from asthma. For African American children, it's even deadlier. They're 10 times more likely to die from asthma.

Watching the Trump administration roll back clean car standards, deny climate change, and protect polluters has made the Zamora family even more determined to fight for equitable solutions. That's why Rudy and Emily support an urgent transition to electric vehicles, especially school buses -- so that when William is old enough to ride in a bus to school, he won't be breathing in toxic diesel fumes. And they want to see steps taken to address climate change now.