

**Gina Fiorile**  
Wednesday March 25th, 2015  
Testimony for Senate Natural Resources Committee  
Environmental Studies Major, University of Vermont Class of 2018

My name is Gina Fiorile and I am a freshman in the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at UVM. I am an Environmental Studies major, and am from Saranac Lake, NY in the Adirondack Park region.

I was highly involved in my environmental club in high school, along with being a featured student in a documentary about climate change in the Adirondacks. I helped plan the annual Adirondack Youth Climate Summit in Tupper Lake NY, and the Vermont Youth Climate Summit, which took place for the first time this past year. Because of my work with student activism and the Youth Climate Program, I was nominated as a Champion of Change for Climate Change Education and Literacy through the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy. Last month I travelled to Washington D.C. to speak on a panel with other climate experts and be honored at the White House. My experiences have led me to have this important conversation with you today.

I have found that when students and young people realize the gravity and threat that climate change poses, they are more willing to get involved. This realization is a motivator for youth to work toward solutions in their own capacity.

Though this is a hopeful perspective, we can't do it alone. Changing a few lightbulbs isn't going to solve climate change—we need a systematic transformation. We need to change where we get our energy from, and solve the issue at its source.

That's where you come in. You have the power to create more effective change in one day than I, individually, can make in a year. We are entrusting our leaders like you with our futures, with our livelihoods, with our own health—and with the health of the seven billion people who live here too.

I am here to speak for my future, my friends, my generation, and those still to come. Climate change is threatening not only my future, but the future of billions.

Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists agree that climate change is human-induced. In fact, it's such a basic concept that a recent poll found that nine out of ten eighth graders also understand this to be true. We know what's at stake, and we can recognize the consequences of inaction.

If elected leaders like you don't act, an increase in tropical storms and droughts will destroy the crops we rely on for food, leaving many people food insecure. If elected leaders like you don't act, the EPA states that by 2070 the climate of Vermont will be similar to that of North Carolina. If elected leaders like you don't act, millions of people living on flooded shorelines will be displaced, and will become a part of a growing population of climate refugees. If elected leaders like you don't act, the WHO says five million people will lose their lives by 2050 just from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress.

When you were eighteen, did you worry about a threat this big?

Every day of my life I worry about how climate change will impact my future. Do not forget what responsibilities you've been entrusted with as an elected leader. We are looking to you for protection.

Scientists, the military, Bill McKibben, and even the Pope understand that the next few years are critical for us. The decisions we make in the upcoming months could make or break our chances of combatting climate change. You have a small window of time to act, and it's closing quickly.

The leaders in this room have the power to start making changes. I don't have the luxury of waiting until I graduate to start pressing for an energy transformation. What you decide today will determine what my future looks like.

I'm frightened when I see that the men and women in Congress who are supposed to be protecting my future against climate change are actually writing books to mislead the public and twist the words of those who are warning us. I'm frightened by the politicians in Florida who tried to ban the very words "climate change" when the rising ocean is already washing into the streets of South Beach. It should frighten you too to think that these are the same people who will decide the future and safety of your kids and grandkids if you refuse to act.

You have a moral obligation to step up and protect us. It begins here—it starts with acknowledging the problem that climate change is being caused by human activities. This resolution is just the beginning—action needs to start now in order to solve the problem.

And in the end, actions will speak louder than words. I cannot vote on the policies that will turn these words into action. You can. Please don't let us down.

Gina Fiorile

Wednesday March 25th, 2015

Testimony for Senate Natural Resources Committee

Environmental Studies Major, University of Vermont Class of 2018

The “Champions of Change for Climate Education and Literacy” award has been created, the White House says, for “inspiring students, educators, and citizens to learn about climate change and to develop and implement solutions.” Awardees include high school and middle school teachers, university professors, non-profit and national park workers. Fiorile is the only student.

As a high school student in Saranac Lake, N.Y., Fiorile was instrumental in planning the Wild Center's Adirondack Youth Climate Summit — the subject of the documentary *The Resilient Ones*, produced by Mountain Lake PBS and Bright Blue EcoMedia with Jon Erickson, UVM professor of ecological

economics. The summit educates students and their teachers about the impact of climate change and invites attendees to create climate action plans to lower the carbon footprint of their own schools.

As a University of Vermont first-year student majoring in environmental studies, Fiorile has helped Erickson bring that model to Vermont. She served as a consultant to Erickson’s ecological economics course this past fall as they planned the first annual Vermont Youth Climate Summit, which brought together 150 Vermont high school students and dozens of teachers to UVM in December. The summit was hosted in partnership with Sen. Bernie Sanders, who kicked off the event by charging Vermont high schools to take the lead in climate action planning in their communities.

Not only has the youth summit model migrated to Vermont, it’s also been chosen by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to become a national model for climate change education. This year, 10 Youth Climate Summits will be held throughout the U.S. and five in other areas of the world, engaging more than 1,000 student leaders. Selected teams will then participate in a major internet-based youth conference at the United Nations Climate Change Conference this year.

