

Last week's [Global Climate Action Summit](#) in San Francisco was at once exciting, inspiring, thought-provoking, and controversial. While I was reinvigorated to push my career in climate change and environmental law and policy, it also forced me to critically think about the nuances in climate change policymaking. As promised, here is an overview of my experience there.

Attending the Summit itself was by invite only, and potential attendees, or “delegates”, were nominated months in advance. While the Summit organizers were selective with delegates, a lot of folks attended by signing up as a volunteer to help with logistics and assisting delegates. Many volunteers were able to sit in for sessions, however, and even came in close contact with the Summit's multiple celebrity speakers. Additionally, those speakers also attended affiliate events, which started weeks before the Summit itself, and were often equally informative about key topics in climate change. [UCLA School of Law's Emmett Institute](#) organized a particularly informative [event discussing Los Angeles' sustainability practices](#), which was free and open to the public. Literally [hundreds of other affiliate events](#) were available in San Francisco this September. I found these events as equally wonderful learning and networking opportunities as the events at the actual Summit.

My experience consisted of being a “youth delegate,” specifically garnered for young climate change professionals and students under 30. While most of these youth delegates were in their twenties, I was happy to meet a few teenagers as well, including 16-year-old [Jamie Margolin](#) and others in the [This Is Zero Hour campaign](#). The inclusion of hundreds of youth delegates into this relatively exclusive Summit deserves applause, especially given the opportunity for us to network with many of the most accomplished climate change professionals in the world.

Indeed, the networking opportunity was fantastic. Over [4,000 delegates attended](#), and I learned something new about climate change from nearly every person I met. Summit organizers did an impressive job of inviting delegates with an array of expertise as diverse as the impacts of climate change itself. I met various experts in agriculture, food, water, policy governance, and many other fields. Delegates originated from nearly every continent, and the demographic diversity gave the Summit a truly global atmosphere. Most notably, the Summit featured multiple indigenous communities from around the world, highlighting the unique concerns and opportunities they bring.

If given the time, I probably could have met more experts in other related fields, but one downside of the wealth of information available was that there was little time available for networking or attending exciting affiliate events without missing part of the Summit itself. Delegates were invited to a networking reception on the first night of the Summit, and likely

were expected to network while eating lunch. I personally would have enjoyed more structured networking time without sacrificing opportunities to attend sessions, but given that the schedule ran late by almost an hour each day, that probably would be infeasible.

Sessions provided general overviews of prominent topics in climate change. The Summit focused on [five key challenges](#), including health energy systems, inclusive economic growth, sustainable communities, land and ocean stewardship, transformative climate investments, and cross cutting challenges. The generality of each session provided opportunities for delegates to expand their knowledge beyond their personal area of expertise. [Similarly to the Climate Reality Leadership Training](#), the plenary sessions successfully provided an overview of climate science and reinvigorated passions for climate activism.

It was hard to miss many of the sessions, even for lunch. The [Summit speaker list](#) was incredible, and included Michael Bloomberg, Al Gore, Alec Baldwin, Jane Goodall, and Governor Jerry Brown. President Obama and Governor Schwarzenegger provided video messages specifically for the Summit. Prominent organizations like Google, Salesforce, Mahindra Group, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund, and many others showcased their climate change achievements and announced ambitious new climate goals, including [Governor Brown, who cavalierly announced that California will “launch a damn satellite to figure out where the pollution is and how we’re going to end it”](#). Many of the plenary and high-level sessions were exciting and inspiring, so it was hard to find time to network.

The “rah-rah” nature of the Summit was slightly undercut, however, by the [protests surrounding it](#). In addition to the protesters who risked arrest outside of the Summit, some got into the plenary sessions themselves. Delegates protested three plenary speakers’ presentations: Michael Bloomberg, Dave Matthews, and Governor Jerry Brown. They were premeditated and unique to each speaker. The first set of protesters somehow snuck in a giant banner through security, which they promptly displayed when Michael Bloomberg walked up to the podium and started chanting “our air is not for sale”. The protesters during Dave Matthews’ performance sang a song protesting Governor Brown, with which Matthews tried his best to jovially harmonize on guitar while security pushed them out of the hall. The group of young indigenous women who protested right after Governor Brown’s speech had to literally be carried out by security while they shouted about his legacy putting vulnerable communities at risk.

I was not surprised to see protesters at a climate change event. However, perhaps because I hail from Texas, the land of oil rigs, I *was* surprised that the protesters were environmentalists. Californian environmentalists, please note how good you have it here.

Even Michael Bloomberg noted how incredible it was to “have environmentalists protest environmentalists.” This is a good problem to have, and helps to constantly push the envelope on designing equitable and effective climate policy.

In hindsight, I could see why an event in which large corporations and political leadership celebrate their climate change achievements would be met with protest. Governor Brown’s legacy does not reflect a focus on climate equity. Bloomberg’s own book Climate of Hope barely included a paragraph of climate equity policies, despite containing entire chapters devoted to market-based solutions. I respect the pragmatic approach of market-based climate solutions, but governance has been lacking in offsetting the impacts that the market consistently imposes on vulnerable communities. Those communities deserved to speak their mind about being left behind.

The protesters were not alone - multiple speakers and panelists mentioned the importance of non-market-based solutions that helped vulnerable communities. Many of these speakers were representatives from developing countries, indigenous communities, and small-island states. While representatives from the protesters’ organization itself were notably absent from the speaker list, I was glad to see the Summit encompass a diverse set of climate solutions, even those that were at loggerheads with those of the Summit’s organizers.

The organization of the Summit itself was relatively impressive and climate-conscious. Each delegate was issued a public transit pass that already included \$5.00, a reusable water bottle displaying the Summit logo, and a non-plastic compostable name badge. Uniquely, the lanyards attached to each name badge had a small device you could click to exchange business information with someone you met at the conference. Professional contact information is sent directly to each person’s [Klik app](#), which was the app that displayed the schedule and details on each session at the event. No business cards would have to be exchanged, and no plastic water bottles needed to be bought. It was great to have an organization that was mindful of cutting down its contribution to paper and plastic waste.

One surprising oversight in climate-conscious organization was the type of food sponsored by the Summit. I was impressed at how the Climate Reality Leadership Training provided locally-sourced vegetarian and vegan food to cut down on the event’s carbon emissions. Sadly, the Summit did not take a page out of Al Gore’s book. Both the lunches and the delegate reception served meat and an egregious variety of cheeses in a supply for all 4,000+ delegates to enjoy. While I personally love the air of sophistication brought by an expansive cheese and meat charcuterie available at the reception, it was perhaps in bad taste (pun intended) after simultaneously providing a session on sustainable food and agriculture practices.

Despite the meals and protests, the Summit was an incredible experience for a young climate change professional like myself. Similarly to the Climate Reality Leadership Training, it was a great opportunity to be reinvigorated with climate action. I learned more about everything at stake with climate change, and the opportunities available to fix it. This Summit brought even bigger names and a more intense networking opportunities, as well as a healthy discussion on the real equity issues facing Governor Brown's climate change legacy. That being said, this Summit was a nice cap to his expansive gubernatorial role. Here's to hoping that California's next Governor will continue and outdo this one.