In 2016, millennials (those of us born between 1981 and 1996) surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest share of the US population. Yet you’d never know it by our relative shares of Congressional representation. Even after the great Millennial Wave of the 2018 midterm elections, millennials still only make up 6% of the House of Representatives. Boomers? 53.9%. If Congress actually reflected the US population, there would be 97 millennials in the House today. Instead, there are about a quarter that many.

Graphical representation of the generational share of U.S. House of Representatives seats if reflective of the general population (as of 2016 according to Bloomberg)

Why do I begin a post about the Green New Deal by talking about millennial under-representation in Congress? Because I don’t think you can talk about one without the other. As a millennial, my voice has **never** been represented in the halls of Congress–let alone my voice as a millennial who also happens to be a queer woman, though I am also white so I’m not as under-represented as women of color, who remain the most underrepresented group versus their population share in Congress.

(For the straight white male Boomers reading this post, I’d like you to sit with that for a moment. Imagine a world in which your voice, your perspective, has **never** been represented by the people writing our laws. Now imagine someone telling you to smile more.)

AOC during the Feb. 5th State of the Union address
(Jonathan Ernst / Reuters)

For millennials, and in particular millennial women, seeing someone like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez rise to national prominence feels revelatory. She knows what it’s like to be promised the American Dream, knows what it’s like to see that dream evaporate only to be told it’s our fault for buying too much avocado toast instead of receiving acknowledgement of the growing mountain of student debt. She knows what it’s like to be told she’s too young, too “other”, to be told to sit down and wait her turn. She knows what it’s like to feel the existential burnout of a generation who’s been shredded by the systemic structural barriers of a racist, sexist, capitalistic society designed by and for only those at the top who burned the social safety net behind them once they’d safely crossed into prosperity. And, she

understands the damage climate change will bring within our lifetimes, in stark contrast with today’s Congress, which over-represents the generations that are least likely to support any form of action on climate (maybe because they are least likely to live long enough to experience its worst effects):

Polling on the Green New Deal shows stark differences across generations (DataForProgress)

Climate change is an existential threat to our way of life. So is the growing wealth inequality in our country, which is currently worse than it has ever been. Is solving these problems going to be easy? Of course not. But we can’t solve one at the expense of the other, and we certainly can’t allow the voices of people who benefit the most from income inequality, and who will not see the worst impacts of climate change in their lifetime, dictate the terms of policy debates about our future.

This is where the Green New Deal resolution comes in, and why it’s so exciting. It represents a conscious effort to address both problems: an ambitious federal jobs program designed to reduce our climate impacts with a strong taste of redistributive justice. The initial proposal is politically savvy and intentionally vague. It gives us a broad outline that sets the terms of the coming debates without declaring a winning side on important questions like the inclusion of nuclear power, reliance on carbon capture and storage, and taxes. We’ve got two years until a hypothetical future with Democrats in the White House and Senate to push a bill through. Let’s not waste those years denigrating the best advocate for climate action we’ve ever had. Instead, let’s have productive conversations about how we can return the US to its former status as a country that invests in its future.

The announcement of the Green New Deal this week by AOC and Senator Markey, co-sponsored by 70 (and counting) fellow Representatives and Senators–including all the major 2020 Presidential candidates–is the first time I have felt genuine hope for our future since that November night over 10 years ago when President Barack Obama was elected.

The Green New Deal train just pulled into the station. And in the words of Sean McElwee, co-founder of progressive think tank Data for Progress and unofficial Mover of the Overton Window on a whole host of leftist issues, it’s time to “get on the GND train or choo choo motherf*cker, we’re going to go right past you.”

So which side of history do you want to be on? Choo choo, indeed.