Dear 1L:

You've gotten to law school at a crucial time for the future of the planet.

The good news is that you're arriving at a pivotal point when your work as a lawyer can make a big difference. The bad news is that we have a dwindling amount of time to get the situation under control. You'll need to plunge right into the issues as a lawyer if you're going to contribute.

At the end of environmental law courses, I used to tell students about the role they could play over the course of their careers in fixing environmental problems. I'm going to have to change my spiel a little bit. It's now too late to prevent a serious amount of climate change. Avoiding a climate disaster isn't something today's students can plan on tackling "over the course of their careers." The most critical time will be the next fifteen years, which means you'll need to get to work pretty quickly.

Why fifteen years? By then, major economies need to clean up their electric power systems and electrify their transportation systems. There will certainly be continuing challenges, but if we don't get where we need to be in 2035, we'll be desperately playing catch-up after that. So the next fifteen years are crucial.

Fortunately, we've begun to lay the foundation for the 2035 goal:

- The Inflation Reduction Act that passed this month is a big step forward. It will funnel billions of dollars into clean energy.
- Most states have renewable energy standards, and the use of renewables is growing almost everywhere.
- The costs of wind, solar, and battery storage have plunged faster than anyone expected.
- A dozen state governments have have deadlines to reach net zero emissions, and some have now set in place detailed plans.
- Major corporations have been setting carbon targets and demanding to be connected to renewable power generation.
- The finance sector is starting to take climate risk seriously.

We've made real progress but we're *way* behind the curve. In the next 15 years, we need to build frantically on this foundation to turn incremental progress into transformative change.

The most obvious way you can contribute is as an environmental or energy lawyer. But there's a lot that needs to be done beyond those areas:

- *Land use law:* There will have to be changes in land use laws to limit sprawl and support public transit. There will have to be changes in building codes to require electrification and energy efficiency.
- *Business Law.* There will have to be corporate planning to cut emissions, and climate-related disclosure requirements. Small businesses are going to be in special need of help to work their way through regulatory requirements.
- *International Law.* Obviously, there will also be a lot to do in the international sphere.
- *Social Justice Law*: Someone is going to have to represent disadvantaged communities to make sure they aren't left behind or overburdened.

This isn't going to be easy. The Supreme Court is the most conservative it has been for almost a century. Political polarization is continuing to rise, while the upcoming elections are not looking good. It's going to take iron determination and creativity to find ways to make progress. The determination has to come from you, but we're here to equip you to search out and implement innovative solutions. Later generations aren't going to accept as an excuse that we got discouraged because problems seemed too hard to solve.

Those of us who have been around longer aren't going to be able to just pass the baton to you. There isn't enough time for you to take on the problem alone. We're all going to have to work ever harder to make change happen.

What we do together between now and 2035 will determine what your lives look like in 2050 and 2080, and what your children and grandchildren will see in the next century. So grab your books, get yourselves ready, and be prepared to head for the trenches when you graduate. No time to waste!

Note: This is a new and improved version of an open-letter to beginning law students that I first posted in September 2021.