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**GCA’s 38th Annual National Affairs & Legislation Conference (NAL) 2021**

Focus: Climate Change Solutions

**History**

Each February, the GCA hosts the nonpartisan NAL in Washington, D.C. to advocate for a beautiful, healthy planet and enhance the GCA mission to 'restore, improve, and protect the quality of the environment through educational programs and action in the fields of conservation and civic improvement.' The NAL follows in detail legislation that ultimately affects the above purposes, and the Conservation Committee provides education on the environmental issues themselves. ​The Green Fingers Garden Club of Greenwich fulfills these purposes through its Conservation Committee, and each year sends a delegate to NAL to learn about environmental issues and meet with their CT Congressional Representatives and Senators to lobby on behalf of GCA positions.

Due to the uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the February 23-25, 2021, conference was held virtually and for the first time included **ALL** GCA club members (more than 1700 attended, including many of our fellow Green Fingers members!). Throughout the three-day event, participants explored the solutions on oceans, natural systems, innovation, and energy efficiency as well as transportation and infrastructure. Over the first two days, we heard from experts on the front lines of the fight against climate change, scholars, and members of Congress from both sides of the aisle. On the third day, club members met with their representatives in Congress to discuss the GCA’s legislative priorities, chosen because they are pragmatic, stand a reasonably good chance of bipartisan passage and, in line with this year’s Climate Solutions initiative, hold great potential for reducing the carbon emissions causing rapid changes to our climate. The 2020 position papers can be found [**here.**](https://www.gcamerica.org/publications/details/id/27)

*From the time of its founding, the GCA has been an active force in the promotion of environmental awareness and the preservation of natural resources. In 1921, one of the four founding GCA members testified before Congress on behalf of the parks of Washington, DC. The Conservation Committee was one of the earliest GCA committees established, and many GCA members were active in the 1930s in the battle to save the redwoods.*

*In the 1960s, as the environmental movement grew in response to growing alarm about pollution and species loss in our country, the GCA's legislative involvement grew along with it. In June 1969, the NAL was established as a separate entity from the Conservation Committee. In the words of Mrs. Thomas M. Waller, a primary founder and former GCA president, the purpose of NAL is to "bring to the attention of the membership important legislative proposals in Washington which fall within the fields of our endeavor." To learn more please visit*[*GCA National Affairs & Legislation*](https://www.gcamerica.org/what-we-do-NAL-Conservation)*.*

**2021 Focus on Climate Change**

The GCA recognizes the threat of climate change and the need for action at all levels of the government as well as individual behavior change. The observed changes in climate are negatively impacting plants and human health. Rapid loss of biodiversity, species extinction, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, extreme weather events, and the health of public lands are at risk if this trend is not addressed. The 2021 conference focused on climate change solutions — specifically, the potential of oceans, natural systems, transportation, and innovation/energy efficiency to mitigate and abate the impacts of climate change. The event highlighted innovation, concrete constructive programs, and policies that, if enacted, can effectuate the changes necessary to have a measurable impact in our communities in both the near and long term. Sessions throughout the three-day conference featured compelling, factual, nonpartisan presentations from an impressive line-up of elected representatives, administration officials, and leading experts from industry and the non-profit sector, as well as some of the best scientific minds and practitioners from the front lines of climate change.

[NAL Committee Recommended Reading Materials](https://www.gcamerica.org/members/nal-conference#reading-materials)

[NAL Educational Videos and Podcasts](https://www.gcamerica.org/members/nal-conference#educational-videos)

[NAL Committee Resources: What We Are Watching Chart / Legislative Updates](https://www.gcamerica.org/members/nal-conference#nal-committee-resources)

**2021 Conference Sessions and Speaker Links**

If you missed the conference, the speaker videos, meeting materials and video links are all in the members’ section of the GCA website [here](https://www.gcamerica.org/members/nal-conference).

**Tuesday Morning: Natural Climate Solutions**

* [VIDEO: The Administration’s Climate Action Plan](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6019)
* [VIDEO: Solution I - Working with Nature](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6020)
* [VIDEO: Barriers & Opportunities for Adopting Regenerative Agriculture in the US](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6021)
* [VIDEO: The Growing Climate Solutions Act](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6022)
* [VIDEO: The Trillion Trees Natural Carbon Capture Act & The Upcoming Farm Bill](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6023)
* [Invocation from Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwOvBv8RLmo)
* [The Administration’s Climate Action Plan](https://climate21.org/documents/C21_Summary.pdf)
* [Christy Goldfuss, Center for American Progress](https://www.americanprogress.org/person/goldfuss-christy/)
* [Tim Profeta, Nicholas School for the Environment, Duke University](https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/people/tim-profeta)
* [Kathleen Biggins, C-Change Solutions Website](https://www.c-changeconversations.org/)
* [Katherine Wilkinson Reference Materials](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5919)
* [Barriers to Adopting Regenerative Agriculture in the US (Patagonia Study)](https://forainitiative.org/barriers-for-farmers-ranchers/)
* [Jennifer O’Connor, Guidelight Strategies](http://www.guidelightstrategies.com/)
* [Sarah Greenberger, Sr. V.P. Audubon](https://www.audubon.org/content/sarah-greenberger-0)
* [The GCA's House Committee Climate Crisis Page](https://climatecrisis.house.gov/one-pagers)

**Tuesday Afternoon: Climate Equity/Innovation and Energy Efficiency**

* [VIDEO: Members of The House Select Committee on Climate Solutions](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6024)
* [VIDEO: Solution II – Innovation and Energy Efficiency: Inventing the Future at Home and Abroad](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6025)
* [VIDEO: What is a Carbon Credit, Carbon Tax and What Will the Cost of Carbon Be?](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6026)
* [VIDEO: The Path Ahead: How Can a Climate Agenda Be Achieved](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6027)
* [VIDEO: Climate Equity: Why Caring About Climate Change Matters](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6028)
* [VIDEO: A Layman’s Guide to the Language of Clean Energy](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6029)
* [VIDEO: Related Legislation – Portman/Shaheen Energy Efficiency Act](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6030)
* [Katharine Hayhoe Reference Materials](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5925)
* [Innovation and Energy Efficiency, Nat Keohane, Senior Vice President for Climate at Environmental Defense Fund](https://www.edf.org/people/nathaniel-keohane)
* [The Path Ahead: How Can a Climate Agenda Be Achieved? Lynn Scarlett, Chief External Officer, The Nature Conservancy](https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/who-we-are/our-people/lynn-scarlett/)

**Wednesday Morning: Oceans**

* [VIDEO: 30 by 30](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5954)
* [VIDEO: Solution III – Oceans and Coasts; 2020-2030 A Critical Decade for Ocean and Climate Action](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5955)
* [VIDEO: H.R. 8632, the Oceans Climate Solutions Act](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5956)
* [VIDEO: The Sustainable Seafood Economy](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5958)
* [VIDEO: PSA - Your Food Choices Matter in the Fight Against Climate Change](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5957)
* [Oceans and Coasts: 2020-2030: A Critical Decade for Ocean and Climate Action, Dan Myers, Director of Public Affairs for National Geographic Pristine Seas](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/pristine-seas/meet-team/)
* [High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy Report](https://www.oceanpanel.org/ocean-action/people-nature-economy-report.html)
* [The Sustainable Seafood Economy, Julie Packard, CEO, The Monterey Bay Aquarium](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pv6VRtbJ4-Q)

**Wednesday Afternoon: Transportation and Infrastructure/ Advocating in a Virtual World**

* [VIDEO: Solution IV– Reducing Carbon Emissions through Infrastructure and Transportation](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5932)
* [VIDEO: Net Zero America – Five Pathways to Achieve Net Zero Emissions in the US by 2050](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5959)
* [VIDEO: What Can I Do to Help My Community Take Action on Climate Change](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5960)
* [VIDEO: Related Legislation – ATIA, S.2302 – Transportation Committee](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5961)
* [VIDEO: How a Bill Becomes a Law](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6039)
* [VIDEO: GCA Legislation Priorities](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6040)
* [VIDEO: Next Steps: Ideas for Advocating in a Virtual World](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/6041)
* [Reducing Carbon Emissions through Transportation and Infrastructure, John Podesta, Founder of the Center for American Progress and former White House Chief of Staff](https://www.americanprogress.org/person/podesta-john/)
* [Oceana website](https://oceana.org/)
* [Net Zero America – Five Pathways to Achieve Net Zero Emissions in the U.S. by 2050, Jesse Jenkins, Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton, University](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5933)
* [GCA Legislative Priorities, Karen Gilhuly, VC Legislation and Policy, Carol Hunter, Asst. Legislation and Policy](https://www.gcamerica.org/members:pages/async_getresourceHtml/id/5934)

**Thursday: Garden Clubs meet with their individual representatives in Congress**

Garden Club speakers and Issues:

Juliet - Soil/Trees/Plants

Ginger - Oceans

Elizabeth - Infrastructure

Sharon - Closing

Sen. Blumenthal Meeting

Juliet opened with thanks for participation/support of the Great American Outdoor Act, congratulations on stopping the sale of Plum Island and co-signing the letter regarding excess packaging that was sent to Amazon, Walmart and other e-commerce companies. She congratulated him on his CLCV scorecard ranking and gave an overview of GCA-focused bills to ensure he was aware of GCA position.

Blumenthal stated his support and favor for all of the measures the GCA supports

— believes some have and some have not been introduced; iterated that details are important but in general the measures will be supported and reminded us that 60 people from both sides will need to support.

— stated that Biden will propose infrastructure bill that will be climate focused; Blumenthal is hopeful it will emphasize electric, mass transport, and will be robust.

— Sen. Blumenthal is on the armed services committee and is pressing to convert its fleet of cars to electric; he is hopeful on this.

— Juliet raised question around carbon markets and regenerative agriculture, Blumenthal is supportive of regenerative agriculture initiatives but will need to balance with trends in the American Public. He is open to considering solutions.

— Oceans Act is very important to Blumenthal; with chairs Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and Lisa Murkowski he is part of the Ocean Caucus, a bi-partisan organization working to increase awareness and find common ground in responding to issues facing the oceans and coasts. Agrees we are currently failing. Blumenthal went on to state Biden’s focus on Oceans and Water.

— Oceans-based climate solutions Act — Blumenthal is working on bipartisan support; has not been introduced to the Senate. Some questions around bill re: wind energy and commercial fishing.

- Question from our group was raised from this topic re: gaining bipartisan support through a jobs angle (ex: CCC but renewed); Blumenthal feels that the ideas could have renewed vitality and ability to engage young people and encourage public service (ex: college debt absorbed in exchange for public service).

— Juliet raised questions re: Blumenthal's letter to e-commerce companies asking them to reduce plastics in their packaging; he has not had satisfactory responses to those inquiries yet and believes they are hoping he will go away!

— Infrastructure — Infrastructure bills are critical for our economy but we need sustainable improvement using the best provisions of House and Senate bills. Biden is working on a collaborative bill that is going to address many infrastructure and climate issues combined. Blumenthal has been in discussion with Secretary of Transport; he f eels rail is important to our state and will remain important to Biden (he noted Biden frequently takes rail to Delaware from DC and vice versa).

— Blumenthal further discussed issues with the gateway project (tunnels leaking and rail infrastructure), feels this is urgent and pressing! It is an important issue for him. In addition, broadband and connectivity is something he hopes will be involved in future legislation to help enhance our transport capabilities, as well as better use of mass transport.

— Green New Deal - he will be pressing for that package as he is an original co-sponsor.

— American Rescue Plan hoping to be completed by Mid-march and then focus will shift. He believes infrastructure/climate will be at front.

— Sharon asked how we can be helpful to him? He suggested continued stewardship, promoting values and debunking myths. Emphasized that activism and stewardship are good for the economy and we should “separate programs from personalities”, referring to the Green New Deal; in addition preservation of Open Spaces is important as we see land values rise in our state (due to current shift in desire to live in our state), this may threaten our open spaces. Also emphasized that local is important!

— Blumenthal is open to more frequent contact! Even gave us his “cell phone” number to keep open line of communications and hopes we can all gather again in person (masked and distanced) by summer!

Sarah Shapiro, Aide to Senator Murphy, Meeting

— Juliet opened the call and asked Sarah to pass on our thanks to Sen Murphy for his past support of environmental legislation and congratulated him on his CLCV scorecard

— Opened the dialogue re: nature based climate solutions and the trillion trees/natural carbon act, climate solutions act, native plant specifics pilot program and the monarch pollinator highway act.

— Oceans was brought to the table by way of Ginger. Asked for support of the ocean-based climate solutions act; Sarah stated that oceans based climate solutions act is a broad bill and they are supportive. They are hopeful for a partner bill and are supportive and joining on a letter re:30/30. Also mentioned living shorelines act and NOAA nature based (state fund) as potential to scale up.

— Infrastructure was introduced by Elizabeth — specifically mentioning the ATIA (carbon pollution, green natural infrastructure, erosion control, highway wildlife crossing, burying lines along scenic highways); Sarah stated that the surface transport act (past act) is up for reauthorization - they are working on reauthorization.

— Sharon asked how we can be more helpful, Sarah stated that once Covid relief bill is passed there is more opportunity to shift focus. Indicated that Murphy has a huge focus on oceans and the LI sounds and ocean based climate bills.

Sean Higgins, Aide to Congressman Himes, Meeting

— Juliet opened the call and asked Sean to pass on our thanks to Congressman Himes for all his work in support of environmental legislation and congratulated the Congressman on his CLCV scorecard

— Opened the dialogue re GCA focus: nature-based climate solutions and the trillion trees/natural carbon act, climate solutions act, native plant species pilot program and the monarch pollinator highway act.

— Sean stated that the Congressman was happy to co-sponsor the monarch and pollinator act, noting Himes’ beehives. He is going to look into trillion trees, native plant pilot program and the climate solutions act.

— Oceans based climate solutions act; Sean feels it is a long bill may which may need tweaks.

— 30x30 resolution is creating a framework but congress needs to codify it. Sean thinks it will likely be folded into the oceans-based climate solutions bill. Himes also supports carbon dividend bill

— Himes Supports: ATIA, moving forward act, saving America's pollinators.

— National Green Bank Act — thinks there is opportunity to capitalize on that bill (Green Bank has been a success in CT) and stated Dingell has a similar bill and hopes it can be folded into the infrastructure bill.

— Prioritizing the Long Island Sound, carbon tax is important to Himes and he would like to see them in a climate package. Gateway projects - Sean thinks that they will try to get funding in this administration and that progress is happening re: walking bridge in Norwalk.

— Encouraged us to keep in contact and inform of new bills as there are so many to track!