



September 12, 2019

Senator Brian Schatz
Chair, Democrats Special Committee on the Climate Crisis
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: The Fight to Save Winter: Professional Athletes for Climate Action, Testimony for the Democrats Special Committee on the Climate Crisis from Professional Climber Tommy Caldwell

Good afternoon Senator Schatz and members of the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. My name is Tommy Caldwell, and I am a professional climber from Estes Park, Colorado and an ambassador for Patagonia, Clif Bar, and La Sportiva. I grew up near Rocky Mountain National Park with a bold father who put me on the top of mountains as a kid, even in the middle of winter. I climbed the Diamond on Longs Peak at the age of twelve, and I won my first climbing competition at age sixteen.

After what feels like a lifetime of exploration around the world, the crux of my career occurred in January 2015 when I finished free climbing the Dawn Wall on El Capitan in Yosemite National Park with my partner, Kevin Jorgensen. Eight years after I had first considered this route, we succeeded in free climbing the wall's 3,000 vertical feet in nineteen days. For those of you that don't know, free climbing means using only the rock to ascend, with just ropes and harnesses as protection. Alpinist Magazine called our feat the 'hardest big wall free climb in the world.'

Ever since the New York Times covered our climb half way through, the experience went viral, and suddenly I found myself giving TED Talks and going on the Ellen DeGeneres Show and even following Kanye West on stage at a Google Event. My life post-Dawn Wall has been different; I am constantly in the spotlight. And with that, I feel a heavy weight to be a good ambassador for treating our world in a sustainable way. I understand that this platform comes with the power to do good.

It is clear the apex issue of our time is climate change. Science tells us we have eleven years to act before we see the most catastrophic impacts. As a father, it is hard to fathom how unstable the future could become. When I reflect on the inaction of my generation and how that will negatively impact my own children, I have no choice but to get involved. There's a chance that our planet will see such turmoil that things like rock climbing will seem silly. We must turn our passion into purpose. We must shift the culture of the outdoor community so that climate advocacy is a given.

In June, I had the opportunity to travel to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is ground zero for climate change, as temperatures have been rising at twice the rate of the rest of the country. It was not hard to observe the melting permafrost, causing giant crevasses to crack open the tundra, or the diminishing glaciers, receding and giving way to blue braided rivers.

Though I first traveled to the Brooks Range more than a decade ago, I was awestruck all over again. It is incredible such wildness still exists in America today. As an athlete, I am fortunate to explore the great outdoors across the globe. But this is the wildest place I have seen.

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One day, I was trying to escape the wind alongside trail runners Clare Gallagher and Luke Nelson, who are also present today. We tucked under a rock, and a curious wolf approached. We realized it was possible this animal has never seen a human. We were the outsiders. While packrafting beneath an eagle's flight and hiking alongside families of caribou, I was constantly reminded of how this place is what the world could look like without industrialization. I believe we need to keep a few places set aside to be that reminder. I believe there are places too wild for fossil fuel extraction.

Opening the Refuge to oil and gas development would not only irreversibly destroy the largest national wildlife refuge in the country— and deeply impact the outdoor enthusiasts who seek adventure and solitude there—but it would also add significantly to the climate crisis at a time in which it is imperative to curb our emissions and adopt clean energy. I believe the Refuge should not be drilled and should be permanently protected not only for the protection of wild America, but for indigenous rights and future generations.

The extent of devastating climate impacts will be dictated by policy. We need systemic policy change to move us away from fossil fuel extraction and toward a carbon neutral future. I largely attribute my success as a climber to the fact that my father taught me to embrace fear and doubt and turn it into inspiration. I ask you to do the same. Let fear and doubt fuel creativity in solving the climate crisis. Thank you.