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We spoke to [@BillGates](#) about his new book, “How to Avoid a Climate Disaster,” the limits of his optimism, and how his thinking on climate change has evolved. This is a thread about that conversation.

Question: In the past, it seemed you would distance yourself from the policy side of climate change. Was there a shift in your thinking, or was it a deliberate choice to lay out the policy side in your book?

“[T]he reason I smile when you say it is because in our global health work, there’s a whole decade where I’m recognizing that to have the impact we want, we’re going to have to work with both the donor governments in a very deep way and the recipient governments that actually create these primary health-care systems ... But, you know, we need a lot of countries, not just a few, to engage in this.”

Bill Gates

Q: How do you feel about our chances of making real political progress, particularly in the US, in the moment we find ourselves in?

“I am optimistic. Biden being elected is a good thing. Even more encouraging is that if you poll young voters, millennials, both who identify as Republican and Democrats, the interest in this issue is very high. And they’re the ones who will be alive when the world either is massively suffering from these problems or is not, depending on what gets done. So there is political will. But there’s a lot of interplay [between politics and innovation].”

Bill Gates

Q: You’ve said a couple of times you’re optimistic, and that’s sort of famously your position on these things. But of course, optimism is a relative term. Do you think we can realistically hold warming to or below a 2 °C increase at this point?

“That would require us to get the policy right, to get many, many countries involved, and to be lucky on quite a few of the technological advances. That’s pretty much a best case. Anything better than that is not at all realistic, and there are days when even that doesn’t seem realistic.”

Bill Gates

Q: In the book you cover a broad array of hard-to-solve sectors. The one I still have the hardest time with, in terms of fully addressing it, is food. How hopeful are you about agriculture and climate emissions?

“[T]his is the one area where my optimism five years ago would have made this, steel, and cement the three hardest ... Now I’ve said I can actually see a path. But you’re right that saying to people, ‘You can’t have cows anymore’ — talk about a politically unpopular approach to things.”

Bill Gates

Q: Do you think plant-based and lab-grown meats could be the solution to the protein problem globally, even in poor nations? Or will it be some fraction because of the cultural love of a hamburger and the way livestock is so central to economies around the world?

“I don’t think the poorest 80 countries will be eating synthetic meat. I do think all rich countries should move to 100% synthetic beef. You can get used to the taste difference, and the claim is they’re going to make it taste even better over time.”

Bill Gates

Q: What’s your reaction to things like the Trillion Trees Initiative and the large number of corporations announcing plans to achieve negative emissions at least in part through reforestation and offsets? <https://t.co/Wt4ilhtfPf>

“For the carbon emissions I’ve done—and I’ve gotten rid of more than what I emit—it comes out to \$400 a ton. Any of these schemes that claim to remove carbon for \$5, \$15, \$30 a ton? Just look at it.”

Bill Gates

Q: What's your reaction to things like the Trillion Trees Initiative and the large number of corporations announcing plans to achieve negative emissions at least in part through reforestation and offsets? <https://t.co/jAFIwkaBqk>

“The idea that there are all these places where there’s plenty of good soil and plenty of good water and just accidentally, the trees didn’t grow there—and if you plant a tree there, it’s going to be there for thousands of years— [is wrong].”

Bill Gates

Microsoft is in the process of trying to eliminate its entire historic emissions. The company apparently wants to do it at \$20 a ton? Do you think we can achieve reliable permanent carbon removal for \$20 a ton eventually? <https://t.co/B4cLagSN0E>

“Very unlikely ... With all these things, you have capital costs and you have energy costs. So getting to \$20 a ton is very unlikely.”

Bill Gates

These quotes are excerpts from [@jtemple's](#) interview with [@BillGates](#) in December. Read the full Q&A here: <https://t.co/A72BMVpSCr>

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