

# Caring about tomorrow

August 26, 2019

About 70 percent of Americans [believe](#) that the climate is changing, most acknowledge that this change reflects human activity, and more than two-thirds think it will harm future generations. Unless we dramatically alter our way of life, swaths of the planet will become [hostile or uninhabitable](#) later this century — spinning out ecological, epidemiological and social disasters like eddies from a current. And yet most Americans would support energy-conserving policies only if they cost households [less than \\$200 per year](#) — woefully short of the investment required to keep warming under catastrophic rates. This inaction is breathtakingly immoral.

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Touching the past can connect us to the future, especially when we look back fondly. In [one set of studies](#), psychologists induced people to think about the sacrifices past generations had made for them. These individuals became more willing to sacrifice short-term gains to help future generations, paying forward their forbears' kindness. Organizations like [Longpath](#) are applying these insights to foster sustainable thinking. They reason that gratitude toward the past might empower us to help those who come after — a kind of golden rule across time.