



# THIS CHANGE EVERYTHING

**A Conversation with Naomi Klein  
About Climate Change**



By: Stuart H. Coleman,  
Hawai'i Regional Coordinator

“Surfing is the greatest thing ever!” author-activist Naomi Klein exclaimed, still excited about her surf session in Waikiki earlier that week. “If you’re obsessed with surfing—and it seems like a lot of people are—it allows you to develop a natural rhythm with the ocean,” Klein said. “That’s why Surfrider is exciting, because it’s about organizing this community that derives its joy from the ocean.”

As I spoke to the best-selling author about surfing, climate change, sea level rise and the rising grassroots activism of groups like the Surfrider Foundation, moonlit waves broke against the seawall in front of the Halekulani Hotel ocean – reminding us of the ocean’s beauty and majestic force.

Invited to be a visiting scholar at the University of Hawai‘i (UH), Klein jumped at the chance to return to the islands. She came with her son Toma and husband Avi Lewis, a filmmaker who is making a documentary based on her book. During their stay, she took surfing lessons, taught classes about climate change and gave a series of provocative talks around Honolulu about her award-winning book, *This Changes Everything: Climate vs. Capitalism*, which is also the title of their upcoming documentary.

Klein told a packed house at UH-Mānoa’s Campus Center two nights later. More than 1,000 people attended her talk to learn more



Refugio State Beach  
oil spill May 2015.  
Photo: Johua Shelly

about what many scientists believe is the epic struggle of our age. “We’re in a suicidal phase of the fossil fuel economy,” she stated. “And the most extreme forms of extraction.”

Like an apocalyptic vision, Klein described the consequence of our current energy policies: how fossil fuel companies are cutting off mountain tops for coal, contaminating our drinking water through hydraulic fracking and spilling millions of gallons of crude oil into the ocean through deep-sea drilling. She reminded the crowd that it had been just five years since the BP oil spill in the Gulf, one of the nation’s worst environmental disasters of all time.

Only in her mid-40s, the popular Canadian writer sounded like an Old Testament prophet as she railed against the corruption

and greed of the powerful oil companies that are “destroying the planet.” Yet as a young mother concerned about her son’s future, her words resonated with the diverse audience. Toward the end of her sobering talk, Klein rallied the huge crowd, saying how people have the power to stop these extraction companies and their growing control over government. “Now we need to fight and we can’t afford to lose!”

Her talk and visit couldn’t have been more timely. Just weeks before, the UH Board of Regents voted to support a plan for fossil fuel divestment; and months later, UH became the largest university to divest from fossil fuels. This past June, Hawai’i became the first state to pass a groundbreaking new law that commits to achieving 100% renewable energy by 2045.



Naomi Klein has a remarkable sense of timing. *This Changes Everything* was published last September, just weeks before the largest climate march in history. About 400,000 people took to the streets of New York to demand action on climate change, and protests took place around the world that day. Surfrider volunteers on Oahu marched with more than 200 people through Waikiki and carried signs that said, “The Seas Are Rising and So Are We!”

Klein believes that climate change activists and environmental groups like the Surfrider Foundation are part of what she calls “Blockadia.” This grassroots movement is fighting against the “fossil fuel frenzy” of the world’s largest and most profitable oil, gas and coal companies.

“The rise of Blockadia is, in many ways, simply the flipside of the carbon boom,” a popular backlash against the “new and amplified risks associated with our era of extreme energy.” These include tar sands extraction, fracking for both oil and gas, and deepwater drilling. Klein was stoked to hear about Surfrider’s “Not the Answer” campaign and our efforts to oppose any new offshore oil drilling in the South and mid-Atlantic regions.

According to Klein, the U.S. could be a leader in wind and solar power if we follow the model of many European countries. Germany gets 25% of its energy from renewables

and has created more than 400,000 clean energy jobs and more than 900 new energy co-ops. Will Americans embrace clean energy or continue our dependency on imported oil? Klein believes Hawaii’s commitment to achieving 100% renewable energy by 2045 is “a historical moment” for the state, the country and the world.

As an aspiring surfer, Naomi Klein loves Hawai‘i and hopes the state can ride

the building wave of renewable energy and become a model for the rest of the country and the world. She believes grassroots environmental groups like the Surfrider Foundation are unique and important players in the “Blockadia” movement because we are “organizing this community that derives its joy from the ocean.”

In our efforts to “protect what you love,” Surfrider activists are fighting to preserve our natural coastlines in the wake of sea level rise and rallying against extreme forms of extraction like offshore oil drilling. Without campaigns like “Not the Answer,” we will continue experiencing environmental disasters like the offshore oil spill in the Gulf five years ago and the nearshore spill in Santa Barbara this summer. We need more support, more people to join our fight. Otherwise, like Klein, we may all have to learn to surf in order to ride out the turbulent storms of climate change and the increasing waves of sea level rise.



“THE  
SEAS  
ARE  
RISING  
AND SO  
ARE WE!”