

Meet Zero Hour's Jamie Margolin

Patti Roth

Jamie Margolin is no tree hugger.

“I’m not interested in environmental issues. That is not my passion,” says founder and co-executive director of [Zero Hour](#), a youth activist group fighting for action against climate change. Like most high school seniors, what Margolin is interested in is her future. “The climate crisis is bringing life as we know it to an end. I can ignore it or suck it up and take action.”

Teen Action

Margolin cannot remember a time when she was not afraid of climate change.

“It has always been hanging over me. I was born after 9/11, and the knowledge of climate change has been a constant, like heightened airport security.” So, when she was 14, she decided to do something about it. That was in 2016. She began volunteering for the Democratic campaign to help elect candidates who would act on climate change.

“That didn’t work out,” she says. She was devastated when a climate denier ended up in the White House.

She turned her sadness over the election results into action, and for a while focused her attention on local action. Working with local chapters of groups like [Plant for the Planet](#), the teen lobbied for climate-responsible policies in Washington state.



Founder and co-executive director of Zero Hour, Jamie Margolin urges immediate action against climate change. Image courtesy of Zero Hour

Zero Hour

“People were not listening. No one was taking any real action. I needed people to start listening to us. I decided to have a youth climate march to mobilize because this was the zero hour on climate change,” Margolin says of the origin of Zero Hour. That first march took a year to organize, using social media and other digital platforms to build coalitions and partnerships with youth activists around the country.

MEDIAVINE

On July 21, 2018, Margolin joined hundreds of young people from across the nation to march through the rain in Washington D.C.'s [Youth Climate March](#) while 25 sister marches took place in cities around the country. A Zero Hour compatriot took charge of the march in Margolin's hometown of Seattle while she headed to D.C.

The march was the final event in a three-day action that also included a a community-building Youth Climate Art Festival and a Youth Lobby Day in which the group presented specific demands for action on Capitol Hill.

Youth Movement

Determined that the climate march should be the beginning of a movement and not the culmination of one, Margolin and the other youth leaders of Zero Hour continued planning. The nonprofit has no paid positions — their primary source of income is a [“Donate”](#) button on their website — and Margolin says officers “become the leaders by doing the most work.”

MEDIAVINE

Like many contemporary youth-led organizations, Zero Hour leadership is geographically diffuse and ethnically diverse, and most organizing is done online, often through social media. It's quite different from the highly structured, bylaw and mission statement-driven organizations of traditional environmental organizations. And it looks even less like the anti-establishment youth movement of the 1960s.

“We are a youth-led organization, but we have adult mentors and donors. We are creating spaces where we can be heard, because adults are heard literally everywhere else while we get patronized and pushed to the back. But pitting generations against each other is a very colonial thing to do. We're not trying to pick a fight,” says Margolin. They're just trying to get the job done.

This summer, Zero Hour held a [youth summit in Miami](#), where the effects of climate change are already being felt. In addition to holding a die-in at Miami City Hall, the free summit included sessions on climate science, social media, lobbying, and organizational finance. The keynote speakers were Gina McCarthy, former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who called in remotely. Thunberg [sailed to New York](#) for upcoming climate strikes to minimize her travel carbon footprint.

September Climate Strike

Now Zero Hour is focusing on the upcoming [Global Climate Week of Action](#) planned to coincide with the [United Nations' climate conference](#). From September 20-27, Zero Hour and nearly every other environmental organization will be participating in strikes, marches, and other actions to spur official action against climate change.

Zero Hour is part of a coalition of youth groups planning events in Washington, D.C.; New York City; Seattle; and elsewhere. They are also developing official demands in line with the Green New Deal.

MEDIAVINE

Details on those events are still trickling out on social media, but Margolin is already thinking ahead.

“There will be a very large 50th Anniversary Earth Day mobilization next year,” she promises. And she hasn't given up on electoral politics, either. “Climate action is becoming a defining issue for the 2020 election,” she says. “We are fighting for the government to treat climate change like the emergency it is.”

Feature image courtesy of Zero Hour

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