

SPEECH BY EILEEN CLAUSSEN, PRESIDENT, PEW CENTER ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

AMERICAN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS CLIMATE COMMITMENT SUMMIT
WASHINGTON, DC

JUNE 12, 2007

Thank you. I am very happy to be here and to welcome many of you to Washington. I don't know if you saw it, but there was a recent report stating that Washington and other eastern U.S. cities will reach summer temperatures of 110 degrees over the next 50 years. In a related story, Washington is considering a new license plate slogan: Perspiration Without Representation.

And the interesting thing is we're already seeing evidence of a changing climate in this part of the country. More and more species from the deeper South are making their presence known here in Washington, like crape myrtles and camellias, and a telegenic former Republican Senator from Tennessee. Think it's a coincidence that our last two presidents are from Arkansas and Texas? They're moving north, I tell you.

It's gotten so bad that many people actually welcome a new Cold War with Russia. They think it will keep a lid on global warming. And now a congressman has been caught with money in his freezer. What better way to keep cool during a hot Washington summer than to slip an ice-cold hundred-dollar-bill into your pocket?

All joking aside, it is an honor to be here at your first Leadership Summit. I am delighted to see so many of the nation's leading colleges and universities make the commitment that your institutions are making—you have set out to be a part of the solution to climate change, not a part of the problem. And I am certain that your leadership on this issue will inspire others to do their part as well.

Today, I want to use my remarks to talk about leadership and climate change. In my view, leaders are those who help us understand, in the words of the English biologist Thomas Huxley, that "the great end of life is not knowledge but action." They help us see when the time has come to do something based on what we know about a challenge or about an opportunity that lies before us. Yes, aspiring to a fuller understanding of our world is to be admired. It helps to focus our attention, and to pinpoint our actions. But waiting for perfect knowledge is cowardice, not leadership.

Moving from knowledge to action. From what we know to what we must do. This is what I want to talk with you about today. And I want to start with a brief summary of what we know about the scope of the climate crisis and how to solve it.

Let's start with the science. Most of you are familiar with the facts by now. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projected that global temperatures will increase between 3.2 and 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. Sea levels will rise by as much as a foot to a foot-and-a-half. Many species will be lost. In addition, there is a 90-percent or greater chance that the world will see more hot extremes, heat waves and heavy precipitation events. And it is likely we will see more droughts as well.

The science, in other words, is clear: if left unabated, climate change will have tremendous negative consequences for our country and our world. The science also tells us there is no longer any doubt about what is causing this problem: greenhouse gas emissions from human sources—and, more specifically, from three key sectors: electricity; transportation, primarily automobiles; and buildings. Consider this: China is building a new coal-fired power plant every week to 10 days. And it's not just China and other developing countries. Emissions have been growing in the U.S. as well—as of 2006, they were up nearly 18 percent compared to 1990.

This is what we know about the science, and it seems we are learning more every day. And we also know something else. We know there are solutions—real technologies that can deliver real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We know, for example, that we can reduce carbon dioxide emissions from cars. We know there are clean energy sources. We know there are ways to burn coal more efficiently, and ways to potentially store coal-related carbon emissions underground. And we know we can increase efficiency in the building sector.

But still there's the same problem: we haven't yet put all this knowledge we have to good enough use. And that, I believe, is where policy comes in. We need strong policies at the national and international levels, policies that make it absolutely clear that continuing with the status quo will have both an environmental and an economic cost.

In weighing what types of policies we need, I believe it's important to look back at where we've been. Because in the same way that we know from the science that we need to take strong action to protect the climate, we know from history what policies will and won't work.

The global effort to try and address this problem kicked off in 1992, you will recall, when another President Bush was in the White House, and when the nations of the world gathered in Rio de Janeiro for what was billed as the Earth Summit. This was the event where more than 150 countries signed an agreement called the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The UNFCCC, as it is known, sets an ambitious long-term objective: to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would – and I quote – "prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." This is a goal that the United States, and virtually every other nation, has embraced.

As a first step to achieving this goal, industrialized countries agreed to a voluntary emissions target: they aimed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. But before long, it became clear that the targets would not be met and that voluntary commitments could not deliver what was needed. So the United States and other countries began to negotiate a new agreement, one with binding targets, and they agreed at the outset that these new commitments would extend only to the industrialized countries, which so far have contributed the most to the problem.

Remember: this was more than 10 years ago, and already the world, including the United States, had recognized some very important things about responding to climate change. First, we recognized that voluntary action was not sufficient. Second, we recognized that we needed a global framework with binding commitments. And third, we recognized that, consistent with the Framework Convention, the developed world would have to take the lead.

Well, how quickly some of us forget.

Five years after the Rio summit, there was another international gathering on this topic in Kyoto, Japan. This was where the United States and other countries signed the new agreement known as the Kyoto Protocol. And what the Protocol did was to *require* developed countries to reduce or limit their emissions of greenhouse gases in relation to 1990 levels, with different countries agreeing to different targets. The agreement also included a number of features advocated by the United States to ensure countries a high degree of flexibility as they worked to achieve their targets. They could make actual emission reductions at home, buy emission credits from others, and use "sinks" such as farms and forests to remove carbon from the atmosphere.

This was another important principle that would serve us well to remember today: the need to combine binding commitments with flexible ways of achieving them.

During the negotiations in Kyoto, Vice President Al Gore flew to the ancient Japanese capital to help hammer out the deal. And the American negotiators ultimately agreed to a binding 7-percent reduction in U.S. emissions below 1990 levels by 2012.

But there was a problem: It was 1997, and U.S. emissions had already risen over 1990 levels by more than 8 percent. In other words, we had pledged to reduce our emissions by nearly 15 percent and we didn't have any kind of program in place to do this, nor did we have the political will to put such a program into place.

Another problem was that the United States Senate, under the Byrd-Hagel resolution, had already voted unanimously—*unanimously*—that the United States should not sign any climate treaty that—quote—"would result in serious harm to the economy of the United States." The resolution also put the Senate on record against requiring the United States and other developed countries to reduce emissions without also mandating—quote—"specific scheduled commitments ... for Developing Country Parties within the same compliance period."

So the fact of the matter is that the Kyoto Protocol had virtually no proponents on Capitol Hill. And the Clinton administration did next to nothing to try to bring about the ratification of this treaty that its people had made such a big deal of signing. We clearly were not prepared to deliver at home what we were promising abroad. Not a sterling example of leadership, I must say.

And then, in 2000, American voters elected another President Bush, and within months of entering office, his administration made a unilateral decision to reject the Kyoto Protocol—not to modify it, not to explain the changed circumstances, not to suggest an alternative, but to reject it out of hand. And in taking this step, the White House raised the ire of other nations that had persevered through years of difficult negotiations and that had acceded to U.S. demands early on that the treaty include emissions trading and other business-friendly mechanisms.

It took the Bush administration fully six years to put forward any kind of alternative to Kyoto, as it did in the run-up to the G8 meeting last week. And, adding insult to injury, the President's proposal completely disregarded much of what we thought we had learned about how to spur effective global action on this issue—most importantly, the need for binding commitments that will truly change the world's emissions growth path.

That, my friends, is not leadership. For a glimmer of real leadership, you have to look to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, where Congress is devoting an unprecedented amount of energy to developing legislation that would (finally) put the United States on track to addressing this issue in a serious way.

Already this year, there have been more than 70 hearings on the climate issue on Capitol Hill—serious, substantive hearings convened to help members of Congress draft mandatory climate legislation. In the U.S. Senate alone, there are five bills proposing some form of cap-and-trade program for greenhouse gas emissions, and a total of 80 bills that deal in some way with the climate change issue. And the leadership of the House has made it clear that they want to pass legislation as soon as possible.

I have given entire speeches this year on what's happening on this issue on Capitol Hill, and I don't want to do that here. But suffice it to say that Congress is taking this issue very seriously, and we may, in fact, see real climate legislation by 2008, and if not by then, almost certainly by 2010.

But, for real action on this issue, real effort to reduce emissions, you need to travel outside of Washington.

You can find leadership in Bentonville, Arkansas, for example, where executives at Wal-Mart have launched a program to reduce their company's greenhouse gas emissions. And what is extraordinary about Wal-Mart's entree to the climate arena is the magnitude of the company's reach. Wal-Mart has pledged to work to reduce its emissions, both internally and externally, and the company's external reach encompasses more than 40,000 suppliers. The ability of Wal-Mart to transform the debate and reduce energy use and emissions cannot be matched by most countries.

Among the company's goals: reducing energy use in Wal-Mart stores by 30 percent, with a corporate goal of eventually being fueled 100 percent by renewable energy. Wal-Mart also is working to reduce the carbon footprint of its vehicle fleets. Wal-Mart operates 3,300 trucks. In 2005, these vehicles drove 455 million miles to make 900,000 deliveries to 6,500 stores. Wal-Mart has set a goal of doubling the fuel efficiency of its new heavy-duty trucks from 6.5 to 13 miles per gallon by 2015, thereby keeping some 26 billion pounds of carbon dioxide out of the air between now and 2020.

You can also find leadership on climate change in Fairfield, Connecticut, home to a little company called GE. As part of its Ecomagination initiative, GE has committed to doubling its investment in environmental technologies to \$1.5 billion by 2010. This is the equivalent of starting a new Fortune 250 company focused exclusively on clean technology.

And you can find leadership in Sacramento, California. Not content with establishing an ambitious set of greenhouse gas emission targets—such as reaching 1990 levels by 2020—California lawmakers have gone the next step and passed legislation, with real enforcement, to give the targets the force of law.

Of course, California is not the only state to be exercising a leadership role on this issue. For example, 24 states, including large emitters like Texas, have required that electric utilities generate a specified amount of electricity from renewable sources. Twenty-eight states have climate action plans. And many states are working across their borders to reduce emissions in a cooperative way.

California and five other western states, for example, have agreed on a regional target for greenhouse gas emissions. By August 2008, the states will establish a market-based system to enable companies and industries to meet the target as cost-effectively as possible. A similar effort including 10 Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states is aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions from power plants in the region.

And then there are 522 mayors representing 65 million Americans who are aiming to reach the U.S. Kyoto target of a 7 percent reduction below 1990 levels by 2012.

That is leadership. And we can also find leadership on the campuses of the colleges and universities that all of you represent. There are wonderful stories on the Presidents Climate Commitment website about colleges and universities reducing their emissions in real, tangible ways.

However, despite all the great things you are doing on your campuses, and despite the leadership of the states, cities and businesses I have mentioned, U.S. emissions still are trending up not down. Voluntary action is great, but it is not enough.

We need mandatory policies that will light a fire under what's happening now to address this issue, policies that will take us to another level of action and commitment. In the view of the Pew Center, what we need more than anything else is an economy-wide cap-and-trade system. This is when you place a cap on emissions and allow companies to achieve their targets either by reducing emissions outright or by purchasing emission credits from others who may be able to do it more cheaply.

Cap-and-trade, in fact, is the focal point of an effort involving the Pew Center and other NGOs, along with a number of leading companies. The group, which now numbers 27, is known as the U.S. Climate Action Partnership (USCAP for short), and we have issued a cap-and-trade proposal with specific targets and timetables—a real plan of action to slow, stop and reverse U.S. emissions. In addition to cap and trade, the USCAP group embraced an array of other policies aimed at building a low-carbon energy economy.

Another example of leadership. Another example of people and organizations making the shift from knowledge to action on this issue.

But whether we are talking about USCAP, or about what is happening in the states—or, indeed, about the things you are doing on your college and university campuses—the leadership ranks on this issue remain far too thin. And this is where you come into the picture in your role as educators.

Responding to global climate change will be a decades-long challenge. We know a great deal about how to get started solving this problem right now, as I have said. But we still need to learn more. We need to learn more about how to develop and deploy new, low-carbon technologies around the world. We need to learn more about what types of policies will drive technology development. And yes, we need to learn more about the science of climate change so we can refine our understanding of exactly what's happening, and what it will take to avert and adapt to this crisis.

Your institutions will be the places where much of this learning takes place. America's colleges and universities are the incubators for the next generation to lead the climate fight. It is crucial that you lead by example through efforts to limit your own emissions. And it is crucial that you educate your students about what you are doing—if only to show them that progress is possible. But even more crucial is that you make sure this next generation is able to gain the knowledge it needs to act on an issue that will have a profound impact on their lives and on the world they inherit from us.

Climate change is an issue that touches on science, policy, technology, ethics, international relations and other fields of study. That means encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to the study of climate change. It means enabling students and professors to work across the disciplines so they can see how all the pieces fit together. It means creating new majors, new academic programs that enable students and professors alike to give this topic the attention it deserves. It means following the words of the Presidents Climate Commitment that all of you have signed by—I quote—"integrating sustainability into the curriculum."

And it also means looking at what you can do outside the classroom to educate your students and others—by facilitating and encouraging dialogues on this issue on your campuses.

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire," said the poet William Butler Yeats. We need to light a fire in this next generation so they can see the urgency of this issue, explore solutions, speak out for action, and act.

Today, I am pleased that the climate debate has moved from focusing on what we know to what we must do. Now, the challenge is to build a common understanding among the young and not-so-young alike a common knowledge of what it is going to take to address this enormous problem ... and a shared sense of responsibility on the part of today's—and tomorrow's—leaders.

Meeting this challenge will take perseverance, and yes, a certain amount of perspiration as well. But I believe we are up to the task. Thank you very much.