COEJL
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Protecting Creation, Generation to Generation

GLOBAL WARMING AND ENERGY POLICY

Ask your Senators to support The America's Climate Security Act* (S 2191). *Urge your Representatives to support comparable legislation. Emphasize that the U.S. must provide global leadership to curb global climate change.

Background: The Torah teaches us that we have a responsibility for future generations (Deuteronomy 30:19) and that we must tend to the earth (Genesis 2:15). This obligation compels us to protect the integrity of ecological systems so that all creatures can thrive – now and in years to come. It is therefore no surprise that the Jewish community has been a leading voice on energy policy and has long urged energy policy reform to reflect American values such as environmental conservation, national security and economic development. It is time that the United States likewise takes a leadership role in this area. After all, the U.S. comprises only 5% of the world's population, yet produces 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

On February 2, 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ("IPCC") released its Fourth Assessment Report, which concluded that climate change is "unequivocal." This report reflects the collaboration of more than 2,500 scientists from 130 countries and relies on research published in peer-reviewed journals.

Carbon dioxide concentrations are higher than they have been in more than half-a-million years. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, carbon dioxide levels have risen 30 percent. During that same period, global temperature has increased by nearly 1-degree Fahrenheit. If we do nothing to reduce carbon emissions, the earth will warm an additional 2-10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the 21st century. Such a drastic increase in temperature would have severe impacts on our environment, our security, and the global economy. Some of the likely adverse effects include:

> Rising sea levels due to ocean heating and the melting of polar ice;
> Hunger and malnutrition due to impaired food production in many developing countries;
> An increase in floods, droughts, and forest fires due to climatic shifts (for example, the IPCC has reported that since 1970, there has been a trend of more intense hurricanes such as the ones that ravaged the Gulf Coast in 2005);
> Illness due to heat stress and air pollution;
> Species extinction due to the disruption and migration of ecosystems.

Climate change also threatens our national security. Environmental changes associated with climate change will spark unprecedented human migrations, increased border tensions, conflicts over essential resources, and greater international demands for rescue and evacuation efforts. Rising sea levels threaten to displace tens of millions of people. The IPCC predicts that declining rainfall may reduce agricultural yields in parts of Africa by 50% by 2020. These national security threats have prompted the Center for Naval Analysis to declare that climate change is a "threat multiplier." Our continued dependence on foreign oil compounds these national security concerns. Indeed, the more the United States depends on carbon-emitting fossil fuels, the more our foreign policy is subject to the will of nations who do not share our values.

Materials provided by the Coalition on the Environment in Jewish Life (COEJL). For more information, contact Jennifer Kefer (Jennifer@coejl.org).

Reducing carbon emissions is good for the economy. In March 2008 the Environmental Protection Agency released an economic analysis of The America's Climate Security Act and concluded that the bill was consistent with a growing economy. This analysis found that U.S. GDP would continue to grow by 80% -- even with an economy-wide cap on greenhouse gas emissions. Taking steps to clean up our environment creates opportunities for entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists. Today, America's environmental technology sector hosts 1.6 million jobs in more than 50,000 firms and generates $220 billion annually for the US economy. Capping carbon emissions will provide incentives to industry to develop alternative fuels and conservation technologies, fostering economic development and promoting energy security.

The Jewish community supports The America's Climate Security Act (S 2191):

This bipartisan bill establishes a mandatory, but flexible policy that caps emissions from major carbon-releasing sources such as factories, vehicles, commercial and residential buildings. By regulating the most polluting sources, it covers 80% of the economy – but only regulates 20% of emitters.

The bill includes short and long-term emissions reductions. It is projected to lower greenhouse gas emissions by about 20 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and approximately 60 percent by mid-century via a cap-and-trade system. While stronger emission reductions are needed (80% by mid-century), the Lieberman-Warner bill provides an important first step.

The bill creates a market for each allowable ton of global warming pollution. By placing a price on carbon emissions, it creates incentives for regulated entities to invest in environmentally friendly technology.

The bill includes important protections for vulnerable populations. First, the best way to protect the poor from climate change is to prevent it from happening by establishing a firm cap on carbon emissions. Second, the bill helps the poor adapt to climate change legislation by setting aside 18 percent of auction revenue to help low-income individuals through heating assistance and weatherization. Utilities and states are given additional allocations to offset the impact of climate change legislation on poor and low-income consumers. Finally, the bill establishes a fund to help the poor in other nations adapt to climate change (by, for example, developing drought and flood-resistant crops).

The bill creates incentives for states to pursue more aggressive climate change policies by allocating free pollution allowances to states that adopt reduction requirements that are more protective than the federal policy.

The bill protects U.S. national security interests, both by reducing the destabilizing effects of climate change and by creating incentives to invest in clean, renewable technologies that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

The bill includes important provisions to account for human error. For instance, it provides for periodic reviews by the National Academy of Sciences to make sure the program is working and monitoring programs to ensure that promised reductions are carried out.

There is no time for delay. Delaying adoption of a U.S. emissions cap by only two years will double necessary reductions until 2020.

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