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Biden: Time for U.S. to Re-Engage in Global Warming Negotiations

WASHINGTON, DC – Today the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee called on the Bush Administration to reverse course on global warming and return the United States to a leadership role in international climate change negotiations.

In a major restatement of the Senate's position on international climate treaties, the bipartisan resolution – co-authored by Senators Joe Biden (D-DE) and Dick Lugar (R-ID) – calls global warming a threat to international stability as well as a risk to the environment and our economy.

“The scientific evidence is clear: we need to take significant steps toward worldwide reduction of greenhouse gases to avoid permanently altering our climate,” said Biden. “As a parent, I am worried we’re leaving our children and grandchildren a global warming problem they won’t be able to stop or stabilize. I believe the Senate is ready to take a stand.”

Prior to the Kyoto meetings in 1997, the Senate adopted a resolution setting severe restrictions on U.S. participation in any international treaty addressing climate change. That resolution is often cited as the last Senate position on the issue. In contrast, the Lugar-Biden Resolution calls for the active engagement and leadership of the United States in the search for an international agreement to fight global warming.

Citing a “scientific consensus” that greenhouse gases from human activity “threaten the stability of the global climate,” the Biden-Lugar resolution declares that “the United States has the capability to lead the effort to stop global climate change.”

The Biden-Lugar resolution calls for negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – signed by the first President Bush – that will protect the economic and security interests of the United States, and commit all nations that are major emitters of greenhouse gases to achieve significant long-term reductions in those emissions. The resolution also calls for a bipartisan Senate observer group to monitor talks and ensure that our negotiators bring back agreements that all Americans can support.

“What is at stake here is more than just the environmental health of the planet. Global warming will cause droughts in some areas and floods in others. It will lift sea levels and change growing seasons,” said Biden. “It will shift other fundamental building blocks of economic, social and political arrangements around the world and cause conflict, massive migrations, the spread of disease - threats to international stability.”

The evidence of global warming cannot be ignored. Since 2001, the earth has experienced three of the hottest years on record, with 2005 and 1998 tied for the hottest and 2002 and 2003 coming in second and third. A section of Antarctic ice shelf larger than the state of Rhode Island collapsed between January and March 2002, disintegrating at a rate that astonished experts. According to NASA, the polar ice cap is now melting at the alarming rate of nine percent per decade.

As ocean temperatures have gotten warmer, the number of category 4 and 5 storms has greatly increased over the past 35 years.

“With the United States on the sidelines, and with the growing emissions of emerging economies soon to overtake our own, international action against global warming is at an impasse.

“We need to rethink the path forward to make room for the very different histories and circumstances that countries bring to these talks. That will require flexibility and openness on all sides. This resolution says it is time to take action.

“Without US leadership and participation, there is no way to stabilize global greenhouse gases before irreparable harm is done.”

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