

U.S. Climate Policy: Toward a Sensible Center

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Excerpt: Joseph I. Lieberman, U.S. Senate

MR. : Ladies and gentlemen, if I could ask you to take your seats, our next speaker, Senator Lieberman, has arrived, and he's on a tight schedule, so I would like to ask you to take your seats so that we can begin without delay.

Once again, if I could ask you to take your seats so that we can begin. Senator Lieberman has arrived and is on a tight schedule, as you can imagine.

[Pause.]

MR. : Ladies and gentlemen, if you could finish taking your seats, or what few seats there are left. There are a couple more seats up in the front, and then we will get started, because we have a very busy day. I guess there is an overflow room across the hall for those of you who would like to sit more comfortably for Senator Lieberman's remarks.

Let me first extend my welcome, along with Strobe and Eileen, to Brookings and with the Pew Center. It is a tremendous opportunity to have such a distinguished group of both panelists and participants in the audience here on such an important issue, and as part of a very core part of what we are doing here at Brookings, the set of issues that you are talking are really as important as any broad public policy that the country and the international community has to address, and so it is especially opportune and fortunate for us to have Senator Joe Lieberman here to talk about these issues.

I have the privilege of being the designated Senator Joe Lieberman introducer here at Brookings, and so it is my pleasure to welcome him back. He has been a very familiar voice here, and it really is a testament to the range of his leadership across so many issues in our public life that we have him here today.

It is a record that I think is known well to all of you. His distinguished three terms in the United States Senate, previously the Attorney General of the State of Connecticut, Democratic candidate for vice president in 2000, and for the presidency in 2004, and really I think one of the most thoughtful and forward-looking voices on the issues of how the United States has to be in the world today, and recognizing that our role and our interests expand across a broad range of issues, from traditional national security issues to the issues that we are talking about today, which is climate and energy policy.

As you all know, Senator Lieberman has been one of the most creative and innovative voices in the U.S. Congress trying to find a path, a new way forward, to try to avoid the extremes and the gridlock that we faced over climate policy over the last decade. And it seems to me, and I think to so many of you here, that we face a really opportune moment where this kind of innovative thinking can help galvanize the political forces in this country and abroad to really make some progress on an issue which is so urgent for all of us.

So without further ado, let me introduce Senator Joe Lieberman. He is going to talk, and then we will have an opportunity for a Q&A after his remarks.

Senator Lieberman.

[Applause.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Thank you. Thank you.

Thanks, Jim. Thank you all for that warm welcome. Thanks more broadly to the Brookings Institution. This is the second time in about six weeks you have introduced me here. It's nice to be back.

Thanks to Eileen and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change for bringing us all together this morning to talk about this challenge that is so critical to our environment and to our health and to our economy.

I do want to give a special thank you to Eileen and her team at the Pew Center for the extended help that they gave to John McCain and me in constructing what we think is a very balanced and creative approach to this problem.

The title of this conference, "Toward a Sensible Center," is in fact an apt and accurate description of the Climate Stewardship Act that resulted from the labors Brother McCain and I were involved in, and we intend to continue to fight for until we get the votes to make it the law of the United States of America.

[Applause.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Now as you probably know, thanks to Pew and others, the Environmental Defense Fund, gave us great help on this. Our proposal is based on free market principles that have worked in past environmental legislation. It sets reasonable goals, and it gives business and industry ample time to meet those goals.

We get a great kick out of our critics who would have you believe that John McCain and I are wild-eyed enviros. Maybe wild, occasionally, but wild-eyed enviros who would destroy jobs and lower our standard of living to chase after and unproven scientific theory. Ridiculous. These critics ignore the facts and cultivate people's fears, telling them that the best policy is to do nothing, and you know in the end it's going to be okay, don't worry about it. Trust me. And looking around this room, I don't have to convince you very much, it won't get better unless we do something together. It will get a lot worse.

In fact, this debate over global warming reminds me of a short, wonderful radio play called "The Fall of the City," by Archibald MacLeish. In the play, written in a very different circumstance, a giant conqueror is moving relentlessly toward a place MacLeish simply calls The City. The people have been warned it is coming, and they are ready to confront it. But their leaders are not. Their leaders tell them we can't win. The giant has already overcome everything in its path. The people must yield to the conqueror, the leaders say. If they fight, the city will be changed so much that it will ultimately be destroyed.

So the people decide not to fight. The conqueror appears at the entrance to the city. The people kneel before him in surrender. The conqueror looks down on the people. Slowly his visor is raised to reveal that inside the conqueror, there is nothing. The helmet was hollow; the armor was empty. The conqueror in fact could have been defeated. But now it was too late. The people had surrendered to their leaders' fear which became their fear.

That really reminds me of the debate on global warming in our country. The fact is not just anecdotally, but in public opinion after public opinion poll, Americans of every political and ideological persuasion say that they understand that global warming is real, and they want to take steps to reduce and reverse it. They see the effects all around them. The droughts are getting worse, flooding has increased in the Midwest and Europe, and the glaciers are melting.

But too many of their leaders, our leaders, are telling them exactly the opposite. We are not really yet sure the planet is warming, they say. Or if it is, there's nothing we can really do effectively or economically to stop it. Or they say trying to reduce greenhouse gases will ruin the economy. Energy costs will be sky high. Jobs will vanish. And if you still have a job, you're going to be forced to drive to work in a tiny, tinny, unsafe car. What could be worse than that?

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: We're better off not doing anything, they say. If there is a problem, let's leave it to the next generation, which will know better whether there is a problem to take care of it.

Just as in the fall of the city, these leaders ignore facts and cultivate fears. They lack courage and they fail to lead.

Global warming is not a conqueror to kneel before. It is a challenge to rise to, and a challenge that we the people must rise to. Presidential leadership would clearly take us a long way toward confronting global warming. But, sadly, there is not much evidence that we are going to see that kind of leadership from this administration.

So it really is up to Congress and ultimately the people. Senator McCain and I are working to convince our colleagues to provide that leadership when our Climate Stewardship Act returns to the Senate for consideration.

We got a surprising 43 votes last October, and with your help, we are going to get more this time.

[Applause.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Now given the difficulty in predicting the Senate's schedule, which is far more difficult than predicting the onset of global warming --

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: -- it's hard to say exactly when we will have the opportunity to bring this up. But I want to tell you that when we do, I am optimistic that we are going to make some progress.

I know that some say that election year politics may crowd out our climate stewardship cause, but I say let's put our cause at the center of our national politics this year. I believe that our elected leaders will always respond when the public, moved by facts, not fear, demands action. And that's why today I want to issue a call for leadership to everyone in this room and to everyone watching on the Internet.

I know that many of you are already leaders in this cause, but you need to redouble your outreach and bring others to our side. We need leadership from the business community, businesses that are large and those that are small. We need leadership from the best minds in our academic, engineering, and scientific communities. We need leaders on assembly lines and factory floors. We need moms and dads and their kids to become leaders for change.

I have found in a career in public service that now I must say in all honesty spans more than three decades that when people are asked to rally to a cause larger than themselves, particularly a cause which involves protecting the health and prosperity of our country and our children, that the people will demand action from their elected leaders, and that will ultimately move our government.

Passing the Climate Stewardship Act is step one. Step two involves making it work. And here I am confident. I know that will require a different kind of leadership at all levels across our nation. Often when we talk about these kinds of big, historic, national efforts to meet big problems, we use military analogies, wartime analogies. This morning I want to use a peacetime model our nation built within the living memory of most of us here today, and that is the flight to the moon.

President Kennedy called the nation to action with these words, which should resonate to us as we think about global warming. He said:

"We choose to do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because the goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills,

because the challenge is one we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

In 1969, less than a decade later, President Kennedy's challenge to the nation was fulfilled when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. We all remember the image of Armstrong stepping from the ladder of the fragile lunar lander, but many forget that it was the broad shoulders of a united nation that lifted him there. The lunar program is an apt model for the broad mobilization we need today to address global warming.

The lunar program also reminds us of the ways in which dealing with a big challenge like global warming will help, not hurt, our economy. Think of it this way. When Kennedy issued his call to go to the moon, we did not need to invent the rockets. Robert Goddard, a great American scientist, launched the first liquid-fueled rocket in 1926. We did not need to invent computer. Electronic computers have roots dating back to the mid '30s. We didn't need to create new industrial practices to manufacture many of the components that were needed for the lunar program.

One of my favorite stories is that spacesuits were manufactured in a bra factory. I'm not going to go into any detail there.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Existing companies took on the challenge and created processes that, while innovative, were not new. The point I'm making about the factory is that the processes date back to the production lines of Henry Ford in the second decade of the last century.

So the lunar program just took existing technologies and made them better. Made them more powerful and less expensive to achieve an historic breakthrough, in that case putting a man on the moon.

Many of these improvements, innovations, intellectually, and inventions practically, then worked their way into the economy, spurring growth, creating jobs, and cementing our global American scientific and technological leadership. And that's precisely where we stand now and what we can do, and what Jim Steinberg (phonetic) has correctly called a moment of opportunity in the battle against global warming.

We know how to make fuel cells and other solar panels, for instance. We know how to make coal-burning energy plants less polluting. We know how to make cars and trucks that are not only safe and comfortable, but they're less polluting, and less fuel thirsty.

What is required of us now is to create a program, an atmosphere, an environment that will drive and nurture the development of these technologies toward a goal. That is exactly what John and I hope the Climate Stewardship Act will do.

By creating a market that makes greenhouse gas reduction valuable, just like the lunar program, bringing these inventions to the market will spur the economy, create jobs, and again cement our global leadership in science and technology.

But let me tell you something that a lot of you already know: If we do not do this, if we do not innovate, if we do not keep driving technologies forward, I guarantee you that we will be forced to buy these products from other countries that do.

This problem is not going to be wished away. The world recognizes it and people all over the world are moving to deal with it. This is not fiction. It's really happening today.

For example, Ford, as you probably know, recently released its first hybrid car with engine technology licensed from Toyota. German companies have moved now far ahead of ours on photovoltaics. The Dutch have taken the lead from America in the production of wind energy. We are going to pay dearly if we continue to falter and fall behind other

nations in this way. High-paying, high-tech jobs are going to be created, but overseas. And our trade deficit, already large, is going to get larger.

Of course, as with anything else, there are good and bad ways to tackle an immense challenge like global warming. A draconian proposal ordering emitters to change their ways immediately with no flexibility could probably do more economic harm than good. But that's not what John McCain and I have proposed.

Instead, we have taken the best of our experience in environmental legislation and crafted what I truly believe is a moderate proposal, a series of first steps that will allow American businesses and individuals to adjust over time.

All we are asking business and industry to do by the end of the decade is to hold their emissions to what they were in 2000. Putting everything else aside, the average person on the street, I think, will see this as a perfectly reasonable thing to ask. Don't make the problem worse is what we are saying.

As many of you know, our proposal has its roots in the acid rain trading program of the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments. I worked on those amendments. I worked with members of both political parties in Congress and, in fact, with the environmental leadership and the White House leadership of an administration in power then whose President did in fact have the last name Bush, we worked together to develop the cap and trade program to control sulfur dioxide emissions from power plants that were destroying forests, waterways, and wildlife, with acid rain.

I remember at the time of the debate, a lot of people in the energy industry warned it would cost them more than \$1,000 a ton to comply with the acid rain cap and trade plan. But using the same flexible market-based system that we now propose in our legislation to use to address global warming, those emission credits sell today not for \$1,000 a ton, but for about \$100 a ton. And, of course, what is very important, bottom line, we have reduced acid rain significantly.

Critics were way off then, and I'm confident they are way off now with their predictions of sky-high costs if our bill becomes law.

In fact, a recent MIT study estimated that the Climate Stewardship Act would cost approximately \$20 per household per year. That's just about a nickel a day for a family of four.

Another study by the Tellis Institute predicted that our legislation would save Americans \$48 billion by the year 2020 because of reduced energy demand.

And, remember, as we reduce our reliance on overseas oil, not only will the price of crude naturally drop with demand, but we will increase our national security and strength as well.

Just as with the acid rain trading program, I am sure that once we set clear goals in law, American businesses and entrepreneurs and scientists will innovate. They will find better and cheaper ways to reduce our emissions than we have thought of yet.

I was really encouraged this week when a group of companies that have come together and called themselves the Climate Group submitted to the Senate estimates of the emissions reductions they are confident they can achieve with simple methods that will increase energy efficiency.

Some of them have already tried these and, incidentally, they find they save money at the same time.

Clearly confronting global warming need not be wrenching to our economy if we take simple, sensible steps now.

Consider the costs of inaction, for they will ruin the economy with a certainty far more destructive than any greenhouse gas control program ever could.

Imagine the cost of fighting the rising seas overtaking our cities and towns and lowlying coastal areas. Imagine the costs when now-productive farmland here in the U.S. and around the world shrivels and dies from withering heat. Imagine the growing global famine that would result. Imagine the medical costs to treat insect-borne diseases, now rare in the United States. And imagine the costs of the severe regulatory program that we will be forced to enact if the environmental impacts of global warming arrive here uncontested and we must deal with them in an emergency crisis atmosphere.

The nation truly cannot wait for us to stumble toward an answer. The consequences and costs of inaction are too great.

That is why Senator McCain and I will continue to push for passage of our comprehensive legislation as quickly as possible.

As in "The Fall of the City," we have been warned. We know there is a long and menacing shadow marching toward our shores, toward our cities, and our towns. But we know that if we act now, global warming is not a conqueror to be feared. Historically we Americans have risen to challenges. For us to do less now, when so clearly confronted with this threat, would be to dishonor our past, disgrace our present, and devalue our future.

Global warming is a problem we really needed to start dealing with yesterday. We certainly must get started today. We cannot wait until the day after tomorrow.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. : Thank you, Senator, for that characteristically lucid and incisive remarks.

You know, I am especially grateful for your story about the spacesuits for the moonwalk because it is now explained to me the most inexplicable public policy decisions the Bush administration has made, which was the decision to put high tariffs on Chinese bras, and so I now understand that this was part of our protection to deal with climate in the future.

As I said, the Senator has agreed to take about 15 minutes for questions, so I am going to turn it over to him to call on you. If you could just identify -- wait for the microphone, and then identify yourself, and we will be off.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Jim.

Yes.

MR. : Reverend Jim Ball with the Evangelical Environmental Network, and What Would Jesus Drive campaign.

Thank you for your work on this. We really appreciate it. We have been working with Tim on helping to improve the bill in terms of its impact on the poor, and we appreciate Tim's working with us on that.

That is part of my question. Actually the center of my question is for us in the religious community, this is a moral issue, and we consider climate change at its core to be a moral issue that we are needing to deal with. One of our main concerns is its impacts on the most vulnerable, especially the poor, children, and then God's endangered creatures, and so just a question to you:

How do you see climate change as a moral issue?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: First, thanks so much for what you are doing, because you do give voice -- and I'll use the term in response to your question -- bear witness to the moral dimension of this problem. The word stewardship in the title of the act was not chosen

coincidentally, because John McCain and I believe that we have a stewardship responsibility over the earth and the people on it, who are, after all, God's creations.

To me, work on the Climate Stewardship Act is, if you will allow me to say so, a faith-based initiative.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: And that faith sustains us.

So, look, this is about facing the reality that we are acting in a way that is desecrating -- and I choose the word intentionally -- desecrating the good earth that we are blessed to live on, and that we have a moral responsibility to act responsibly and to be better stewards of the inheritance we have.

We all know that we have limited times here on earth, and that we have a responsibility as part of that stewardship to pass the earth on to the next generation in at least as good condition, hopefully better, than we received it. There is a Hebrew term which the rabbis have used over the centuries to try to summarize the length of the Bible and the Talmud, and which is tequenolom (phonetic), which means to improve the world or, in the most optimistic light, to perfect the world, ultimately, which God has created. And we are doing quite the contrary when it comes to the environment.

So I really appreciate the work. This coalition has reached out into communities that, you know, beltway types don't think are environmentally conscious, but they are. And you are helping not only to awaken that consciousness from a faith base, but to express it, and you are going to be part of the mighty wave that will flow like the waters of justice to achieve the result that we want.

Thank you.

Yes.

MR. : Hi. I'm Paul Wapner (phonetic) and I teach at American University. I wondered if you could give us some insight about how you and your colleagues think politically about raising environmental issues in Congress. Specifically we have heard today just the timeframes are different. We're talking about issues which take place over, you know, decades and we're thinking about objections of climate change, yet people have to run for office, you know, every two and four years.

So when you talk to your colleagues and you try to get them concerned about this issue, how do you talk to them about their own political calculations and how do you think about your own?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: It's a good question. Look, this is a test of leadership, as I said before. Let me just paint the picture in this way, which I alluded to in my remarks. There is in this area as much of a gap between those who govern and those who are governed as I have seen in any other area. I can tell you as I go around Connecticut and around the country and go into rooms and people are not wearing Republican or Democratic or independent tags, and we talk about the environment, I couldn't tell you who the Republicans or Democrats or independents are.

There is an extraordinary base of concern about environmental issues. Some are seen, are felt. People get worried when they hear -- to use the local example about lead in the water, right? When people see, as we have in Hartford, for instance, a shocking increase in asthma among children there, they think maybe there's something going on in the environment.

Well, you know, again, here we go to points that are not always -- the connection, scientific connection hasn't been proven, but when there are outbreaks of cancers in areas,

people wonder why is this happening. Could it be accidental or is something happening in the environment.

In those cases, they really want us to act. You know, I know people -- what I'm about to say seems like an issue from yesteryear, but people don't like the idea of big government, but let me tell you something. If people think that their health and that of their children is being threatened by air pollution, water pollution, et cetera, they want us in the broadest sweep of the American people to do something about it.

When you get here to Washington, too often the interest groups, the existing entities that will be asked to change, to improve the environment, are disproportionately represented. I don't know how to say it any better. Maybe I could say it more clearly. They have more clout too often than the people who want change.

But, you know, if the people get agitated and organized and things will happen. I would say that in the last half century, there's probably not an area overall -- we've had our ups and downs, of course -- where government has done better work than in the protection of the environment. We've got a lot more work to do, but we have come a long way.

Now global warming has been a great challenge because we see hints of the problem, but it's not as real as reading a statistic that tells you that tens of thousands of people will die prematurely this year because of dirty air. And that's the test of leadership.

But, unfortunately, we have waited long enough that we begin to see the glaciers melting, and my favorite story -- I apologize for those who have heard it -- but it's that the Inuit tribe in Northern Canada, 10,000-year history, has seen robins the last two or three years for the first time in their history. And they don't have a word, as one of their spokesmen said to us at a hearing a while back in the Senate, for robin because they never saw it before.

Talk about the canary in the coal mine, that's the robin in Northern Canada that's sending us a message.

So the challenge to all of us is to close the gap between what is the understanding and desire for help from the people with the inside-the-beltway influence of groups that don't want to change because they're afraid it's going to cost them money. That's our challenge.

Yes?

MR. : My name is Paul Epstein, Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School.

Senator, you mentioned the business sector, you mentioned the Climate Group, which is a coalition of businesses.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Yes.

MR. : Don Kennedy this morning talked about the role of Swiss Reinsurance and other insurance industries, and clearly the Pew Center has devoted itself to working with the business sector, the corporate sector.

I wonder how you see that voice, which clearly is beginning to evolve, different from the dependence on fossil fuels, how you see that voice weighing in on the McCain-Lieberman bill.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: That voice helps a lot. Those voices help a lot. I just spoke the other day with the CEO of Swiss Reinsurance, who was on the Hill and, you know, this is a powerful story, because in the midst of the back-and-forth debate, here is somebody just saying -- making a very cool, rational, business judgment, that this thing is coming, and if we don't start to do something about it, it's going to hurt his company and hurt the economy.

So those voices are very important.

I will tell you this, though, the 43 votes that McCain and I got for this, that you all got for it last October, was a lot more than the administration and the opponents of the bill thought we were going to get. But they have now dug their heels in, and as we make our rounds and we're in active dialogue with other Senators who said to us last October, you know, I'm voting against it this time, but work with me. They're getting worked over by businesses in their states, and we are going toe to toe, and the voices that you bring and the business leaders that you're talking about are very important.

Let's deal with this directly, in a sense put ourselves in the shoes of some of those on the other side. They are running a business. They've got a board and stockholders to account to, and their perspective is much more on the next three months, the next quarterly report, than it is on what looks like it's happening in the Arctic, and what looks like it's going to happen in the future. Some say soon, some say midterm. And we have got to convince them and their boards and stockholders that the smarter business move is to get with the program and go for the Climate Stewardship Act. And the businesses are the most important allies we have in making that case. The business leaders -- and it's a growing group -- are the most important allies we have in making that business case for our act.

Yes?

MR. : Hi. Bill Mitzer (phonetic) with the Gemstar Group.

Senator, because of your leadership and that of others, it strikes many of us that there is indeed hope in the Senate to actually get your bill through in some form. Can you comment on the situation in the House where Republican leadership seems to have a bit of a lockhold on issues of this kind, particularly with their own caucus, and where to many of us the situation appears somewhat bleaker?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Yeah. Well, I cannot resist saying that the voters have the opportunity to bring new leadership to the House this November.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: You know, this is a process, and in McCain and myself, you have two steadfast and also stubborn advocates. And we've got supporters in both parties. In the House, what's the numbers, Tim? We have the bipartisan group of 10 and 10. It's grown. The original cosponsors of our bill in the House, 10 Republicans, 10 Democrats. So it's growing.

There was somebody who opposes our legislation. I guess I give you this by way of optimism. I read an article, I forget who it was, in one of the papers recent, op-ed piece, and he presented this horror which is that -- I forgot how the initial step was going to occur, but he projected the passage of our amendment in the Senate, maybe as a result of -- the movie. That was it. It was going to be as a result of "The Day After Tomorrow," there would be a motion that would fill the Senate Chamber. This would surge through and we'd put it up, it would go to the House, they'd be in a panic, and adopt it. It would go to the President, he would veto it. Senator Kerry would use this as the centerpiece of his campaign for the presidency, get elected, and we'd adopt the Climate Stewardship Act next January.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: That unfortunately is probably as much science fiction as the arguments used against our act. So that's the most optimistic -- we've got a battle. But in the long run the people are going to have their way.

Look, something like our act is going to pass. The question is when. And that's the challenge we have.

Yes?

MS. : Jonette Rankin (phonetic), the World Resources Institute.

One of the problems with people is that they tend to compartmentalize problems. The very last comment from the floor before you came was that whenever we talk about climate change, we end up talking about something else. In the last session we talked about, we heard from Jim Woolsey about national security. We heard about jobs and the economy. And I think climate change is a problem with its roots in fossil fuel and all of those areas. So maybe you're selling it short to call it the Climate Change Stewardship Act. Maybe it should be just the Stewardship Act.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: That's very interesting. I'll think about it.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I understand what you're saying, and of course, John McCain and I and those who support the bill have the hope that by setting up this market mechanism that we are going to stimulate innovation across the board.

I'll just share with you this story. This unfortunately goes back, oh, God, eight or 10 years ago. I was at, I think it was an Aspen Institute program on global warming, and there were probably 20 members of Congress of both parties, and Jim Greenwood. And the scientists really laid it on. We had a very interesting exchange, and Greenwood said at the end of it, so let me get this straight: If you're right -- no, excuse me. If you're wrong -- wait. No. If you're right, and we act, we will have preserved and protected the earth as we know it. If you're wrong, if you're hyperventilating, all we will have done is reduce America's dependency on fossil fuel, clean up the air. . .

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. . . so that people will live longer, and create whole new industries in America.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: That's a pretty good choice.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: And that, I think, touches your point.

MS. : [Off microphone.]

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Yes?

MR. : Thank you. My name is Angus Dock (phonetic) and I'm with the Bonneville Environmental Foundation. I am here from the Pacific Northwest, and we have seen some of the same kinds of surveys that you cited earlier that a majority of the people, the scientific argument is essentially over.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. : But then we push some of the voters a little bit further on it, and we come up with a couple of fairly paradoxical conclusions, almost internally inconsistent ones.

One is that this is not only a cause much bigger than themselves that they should rally to, but it's a cause that's so much bigger than themselves that they just go limp. They can't quite figure out how to deal with anything this big, this remote.

The other conclusion that we see is folks saying, well, yes, but if the consequences are really so catastrophic, the government would be doing something about it, wouldn't they?

[Laughter.]

MR. : And I wonder if you can comment on those.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I don't know if I can. In some ways your comment speaks for itself. In the debate we had on this proposal last fall, the part of it that amazed and infuriated me most was that some of my colleagues were still contesting the science. You can argue about how soon the worst effects would come, I suppose. You could argue about the impact on the economy. I'm not a scientist; I'm a layperson. But my sense is that there is such a broad consensus on the science here, that it's time to get on with arguing about the responses.

I am very interested in that polling. This is the story of the city that the people have the courage, but the leaders have to strengthen that courage. The leaders have to be strengthened in this case by the people, and in turn give them the courage to move on.

The people know. You know, we see it in all those recycling bins that are filled up. We see it in the waiting lines for hybrid cars.

There was a fascinating moment -- I don't think I'm violating any confidence -- a bunch of Senators, bipartisan group, had a meeting with the business round table CEOs about a week ago, and there was a CEO of one of our major auto companies there who said, you know, we need your help on how to power cars. Some of the other countries in the world, particularly the Japanese, the governments are investing enormously in the future, and we all pretty much see where it's going.

I can't resist reminding everybody how much trouble my old friend Al Gore got in when he said we may be approaching the end of the age of the internal combustion engine, but this is what this man was saying, that we are going to go to hybrids, and then probably to fuel cells that are hydrogen powered.

You know, the Japanese are just investing enormously through the government and we are not. So attitudes are changing, and this is going to hit a point in some ways to mirror the science fiction of "The Day After Tomorrow," where I think there is going to be a political reaction that way, where it is just going to click and people are going to say this is ridiculous. We've got to do something about it now.

Meetings like this really help to hasten that day.

I thank you very much for your interest, for your commitment, and for your leadership. God bless you.

[Applause.]

MR. : Thank you very much to the Senator, and now I would like to invite you to lunch. There is a buffet in the hall just to the left of me, and then seats and tables in the open room that is immediately behind this conference room as well as in the overflow room we have set up. There's a good crowd today, and so I expect that that room will also need to be used. So, please, we will meet back here at 1 o'clock.

Thank you.

[Lunch recess.]