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Washington, with Western states, Canadian provinces, announces landmark program to reduce greenhouse gases

Former Vice President Al Gore cites Gov. Chris Gregoire's environmental stewardship

Sept. 23, 2008 – Members of the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) today announced recommendations for the design of a regional, market-based cap-and-trade program. The program will slash climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions, spur growth in new green technologies, help build a strong clean-energy economy and reduce dependence on foreign oil.

The cap-and-trade design is a key element of a regional effort by the governors of seven U.S. states and premiers of four Canadian provinces to promote environmental sustainability and economic growth by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.

In Washington state, the impacts of climate change are now far reaching and observable. More serious floods, harsher droughts and more intense forest fires are occurring, consistent with the changes of a warmer climate. Water supply for people, farms and fish is highly dependent on winter snow and spring runoff, both of which will be increasingly affected. The costs of inaction and crisis response far outweigh the costs of taking action now.

“I am not waiting for the federal government to take the lead on climate change. Waiting keeps us tied to a future of high oil prices and certain damage to our environment,” Gov. Chris Gregoire said. “Taking on the challenge of climate change will promote a thriving economy and create new jobs. We can do that while protecting the environment and our most vulnerable citizens. By working together, our eleven states and provinces have demonstrated the leadership required to do this job. There’s still more work to do with the Legislature and Washington’s businesses and citizens to move forward. It’s time to roll up our sleeves, and get the job done.”

Earlier today, Gregoire delivered the opening remarks at the Green Jobs Symposium in Bellevue. She harkened back to March of 2008, when she signed the “Climate Action and Green Jobs” bill. The bill made Washington just the fourth state in the country to adopt comprehensive limits on global warming pollution, and commits Washington to creating 25,000 “green” collar jobs by the year 2020.

“Governor Gregoire has become a real leader on the environment, helping not only to spearhead the Western Climate Initiative but also the Puget Sound Partnership,” said former Vice President Al Gore. “Of course we all need to do more to solve the climate crisis, but the Western governors have begun to put together a plan that will have ripple effects around the country.”

The new, multi-sector program will be the most comprehensive carbon-reduction strategy designed to date. It will cover nearly 90 percent of the region's emissions, including those from electricity, industry, transportation, and residential and commercial fuel use. Together, the seven states and four provinces represent more than 70 percent of the Canadian economy and 20 percent of the U.S. economy.

The cap-and-trade program will require emitters to cut their pollution by setting a limit ("cap") on emissions and then allow the market to identify the least-cost ways to achieve the limit. Through extensive collaboration and consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, the WCI partners decided upon recommendations for the design of a regional program that maximizes total benefits throughout the area. These include reducing air pollutants, diversifying energy sources, and advancing economic, environmental and public health objectives while avoiding localized or disproportionate environmental or economic impacts.

The cap-and-trade program design is a significant milestone in the WCI's effort to reduce global warming pollution. Intense study of existing programs, economic analysis and extensive stakeholder consultation were instrumental in the design of a program that will permit the WCI partners to achieve reductions.

The WCI partners have agreed to begin reporting emissions in 2011 for emissions that occur in 2010. The first phase of the cap-and-trade program will begin on Jan. 1, 2012, with a three-year compliance period. The second phase will begin in 2015, when the program is expanded to include transportation fuels and residential, commercial and industrial fuels not covered in the first phase.

The WCI is one of several greenhouse gas cap-and-trade programs being designed and implemented around the world, including the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord in the Northeastern and Midwest United States.

About the Western Climate Initiative

The Western Climate Initiative is a collaboration launched in February 2007 by the governors of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington to develop regional strategies to address climate change. The initiative expanded to include Montana and Utah and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec.

The WCI is identifying, evaluating and implementing collective and cooperative ways to reduce greenhouse gases in the region.

Formal observers of the WCI include Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada and Wyoming; the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, and the Mexican states of Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora and Tamaulipas.

For more information on WCI, visit www.westernclimateinitiative.org.

WCI Partner Media Contacts

Washington:
Seth Preston, Washington State Department of Ecology, 360-407-6848

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