



The Pew Center, creating the 'political center' on climate change

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In July 1997, Eileen Claussen, an assistant secretary of State in the Clinton administration, resigned. She had done much of the spade work that set the U.S. policy for negotiating the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, but six months later, when the Clinton administration had successfully completed the treaty, Claussen was seeking another career.

Kyoto triggered excitement in the press and ecstasy among environmental groups, but the fledgling international treaty wasn't going anywhere politically in the United States because there were few centrist groups that supported it. At the time, most major corporations belonged to a group called the Global Climate Coalition that strenuously opposed the Kyoto Protocol and questioned the science behind the notion of man-caused global warming. Meanwhile, the Senate voted 95-0 for a resolution that said the United States should not sign such a treaty unless major developing nations, such as China, signed too.

"I just felt I could be much more influential outside," Claussen said recently, explaining her resignation. She went out and formed the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, a nonpartisan group that, according to both her allies and her opponents, has helped create the political center behind the current push in Congress for federal greenhouse gas regulation. The debate could begin on the Senate floor early next month.

The Pew Center has helped bring academics, state governments, Congress members and corporations into alignment on the need for controls on greenhouse gases. Pew's Business Environmental Leadership Council started with 13 companies in the summer of 1998. Currently, it consists of 42 companies, many of them blue-chip multinationals. They have 3 million employees and a combined market value of more than \$2.4 trillion.

She lured more than a few of them, such as DuPont Co., away from the ranks of the Global Climate Coalition, which quietly folded in 2001. "She [Claussen] is a tough, smart adversary," acknowledged Bill O'Keefe, former head of the coalition.

"There's very little that we agree on. I think cap and trade is a horrible way to go, but I have a lot of respect for her," said O'Keefe, who currently heads the George C. Marshall Institute, a conservative research group. "I think she's commissioned some good work, and it's probably advanced an understanding of policy possibilities that make some sense."

Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) is the chief author of the bill pending before the Senate. It relies on an emissions trading program, called cap and trade, that Claussen helped to pioneer. Cap and trade lets companies buy and sell government-issued permits to emit, using market forces to lessen the financial impact of controls. Lieberman said Claussen has "an uncanny knack" for framing the complex policy issue "in exactly the way that policymakers need so that they can understand it and make the decisions they have to make."

Needless to say, Claussen has not done this all by herself. She has a staff of 25 and is backed by the deep pockets of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which launched the center with \$5 million. Rebecca Rimel, president and chief executive of the trusts, estimates that by now Claussen's center has cost the Philadelphia-based philanthropic organization "a little north of \$50 million, and it's been worth every penny of it."

"We are eager to get this ball over the finish line," Rimel added. In her parlance, the "ball" is to get the United States to "develop some meaningful policy to deal with climate change."

As Claussen describes it, the Pew Center was not designed to act as a lobby. It has never joined Washington's secretive "Green Group," which attempts to coordinate the lobbying efforts of environmental groups. Pew hasn't joined any industry-related lobby groups, nor does it see itself as a think tank, although it produces a lot of information about climate change.

'Neither fish nor fowl'

"We're neither fish nor fowl," explained Claussen, who started out in Washington in the 1970s trying to parlay a master's degree in English literature into a meaningful government job. She had specialized in studying the poetry of William Blake, the 18th-century British artist and mystic, and found her first niche at U.S. EPA.

Environmental issues appealed to her. "If you can analyze anything in a poem, it's the same skill you use to analyze other problems," she said. Described as a strong-willed woman by friends and foes alike, she rose steadily up the bureaucratic ladder. By the late 1980s, she headed EPA's programs to control acid rain and to remedy the weakening of the earth's protective ozone layer.

Using amendments to the Clean Air Act in 1990, EPA created the first major federal emissions trading program, one that allowed utilities to trade sulfur emissions credits to

help curb acid rain. Because the trading involved mainly utilities, not much was known about it until Claussen left government to sell the concept to the outside world.

"They found a niche that was completely vacant," explained Robert Stavins, professor of environmental economics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. "The center was forming a bridge between academia on the one hand and private industry on the other, seasoned by a bit of environmental advocacy, but not too much."

"They didn't go to ideologues on the right or the left of the issue; they just went to economists," said Stavins, who added that his and others' papers "went through extensive editing" at Pew before being released to a broader public. Stavins said that he and other scholars were pushed by Pew to provide surveys of what was generally known about efforts to combat climate change. "That sort of work is not something that academics usually get support for."

So far, the Pew Center has produced 85 peer-reviewed reports on climate change in an effort to demystify the subject for members of Congress and interested companies. It has also used the papers as the basis for workshops to get California and other state governments interested in setting up their own regulations and the results they might achieve.

While polls show that efforts to curb climate change are still not given a high priority among the general public, Claussen asserts that it is an issue on which people are peculiarly sensitive to political leadership. Among the 23 states involved in implementing regulations, once a governor and a legislature decide to move forward, she noted, "they are supported by the people."

The state activity, in turn, has pushed more companies to reconsider their initial opposition to federal legislation. The alternative, they fear, is that the national market will become a maze of differing and perhaps even conflicting regulations. Claussen had formed her initial group of 13 corporations from company representatives she had met as a regulator at EPA.

Some, like DuPont, left the Global Climate Coalition after a period of reweighing the issue. Dawn Rittenhouse, director of sustainable development at DuPont, said the company's atmospheric scientists first raised an alarm about climate change in the early 1990s. But the issue was not absorbed into company policy until after Pew began doing case studies on companies' efforts to measure and do something about their emissions.

Moving from 'assigning blame' to finding solutions

"The great value for us is to see how other people are working on this issue and learn innovative approaches that we can bring into DuPont," Rittenhouse explained, adding that her company was one of the first to leave the Global Climate Coalition "when we realized what their real objective was."

Jeff Sterba, president and CEO of PNM Resources, which owns an Albuquerque-based utility, credited Claussen with changing the debate in Washington "from assigning blame to finding solutions."

Unless Congress passes climate change regulations this year -- which appears unlikely -- it will be hard for the Pew Center to claim a victory anytime soon. Nonetheless, the center is throwing a birthday party for itself July 16, celebrating 10 years of operation. Companies that once were climate change skeptics will attend. There will also be representatives of environmental groups, which once assumed Congress would act after Vice President Al Gore and the Clinton administration successfully negotiated Kyoto.

Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund, said the new political movement behind climate change comes, in part, from Claussen's "tireless efforts to listen to what companies were thinking ... and to construct solutions that are able to solve problems for both the climate and business interests."

"I used to think that once we'd negotiated the international treaty, then the work would happen to bring the U.S. along," Krupp recalled. But the missing piece of the political puzzle was the lack of concern among big corporate emitters about the need to make carbon cuts. "In retrospect, it was important to do this," he added.

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