

## U.S. Climate Policy: Toward a Sensible Center

June 24, 2004

Excerpt: Larry Schweiger, President and CEO, National Wildlife Federation

MR. : It's my pleasure to introduce and welcome to Brookings Larry Schweiger, recently appointed President, and I'll share more about that later.

I personally believe that we're on the verge of a reawakening of the American public to environmental concerns. I see a sense of frustration growing that I haven't seen since the days of the '60s prior to the first Earth Day.

And then second I would like to suggest that legislative signals and incentives are necessary so that America's free enterprise system--

[Tape change.]

MR. SCHWEIGER: -- on solving this problem. We need our innovators, our entrepreneurs and our inventors to go to work in a framework that rewards them for those works. Buggy whip manufacturers, I appreciate Secretary's comment earlier about the problems of New York of many years ago. The buggy whip manufacturers are no longer on, and I would suggest that our energy picture is changing fast, and so we need to be prepared for that change as we go forward.

Political change is in the wind. The public is waking up. Some may hear those messages and be cynical about it since we've had this debate going on for now more than a decade. One of my friends, who is a bit of a skeptic says, "Let's face it, Larry. We're not really going to change policies on climate change until it begins to interfere with our TV reception."

Wildlife are the first responders to change, and as such, they are messengers of that change. Species in delicate balance with a given ecosystem respond by either moving, moving further north in the case of North American species, or suffer from the effects of the new and changing environmental conditions. Therefore, wildlife biologists are often the first to see such changes. A good example of that is Dr. Roger Latham, a number of years ago, who was--Roger was head of the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Wildlife Research Unit, and he recognized, Roger recognized that opossums were moving north. And to put some perspective on that, when Robert E. Lee came into Pennsylvania, he penetrated the southern tier counties. That's about as far north as the southern opossum got during that time.

During the industrial revolution until this day the opossum has moved from the southern tier counties of Pennsylvania, all the way through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, all the way through New York, and they're in the province of Ontario now and moving further north. All that has happened for the most part in the last 50 years.

I share that with you because this opossum is an interesting character. He's been around since the time when carbon was being deposited, was being sequestered, and it hasn't changed much during that time, so we can expect that this opossum will probably be around in a globally heated environment.

The opossum has another problem, as it were. One is that he doesn't have any hair on his ears and he does not have hair on his tail. So when you have a bare backside and your ears are not covered, you pay attention to climate conditions. Frostbitten ears and shriveled tails bear witness to an animal on the northern edge of its range.

Conservationists, hunters and anglers with an eye to the land and to living things, then notice subtle changes. A good example of that is my father-in-law who is now deceased. His name was Barrett Hershey, and Barrett lived on the same property for 93 years. And his

grandfather used to cut ice on a pond on their property, and he would sell the ice to the community. It was part of their refrigeration system prior to refrigeration. And so as a young boy he remembers cutting ice, and they actually kept records of the thickness of the ice on that pond. They would never cut ice until it reached 17 inches. In his last 20 years of his life, Barrett Hershey used to say, "I don't need a scientist to tell me that the climate's changing because I have not seen ice on my pond over 6 inches thick in the last 20 years." So in his lifetime he saw on his farm the changes that have occurred.

I think that's true of many people who are close to nature. Those of us who love nature see the changes and are able to identify those. A great example of that is Rachel Carson. I share this book with you because this book was written the year that I was born, and it's entitled The Sea Around Us, and was written by Rachel Carson, who at that time was an aquatic biologist. And Rachel noticed in her research, looking at aquatic resources, particularly looking at oceanic fish, that the fish were migrating further and further north and further and further south in the southern regions. And she also noticed that the bird life were moving further north and they were finding birds in places that they hadn't seen before.

She say this: "Now it is in our own lifetime that we are witnessing a startling alteration of climate." And so Rachel Carson, 50 years ago, warned us because she had been watching wildlife and watching what wildlife does. She recognized that we were warming up our planet and that we were changing the environment for wildlife.

Native people in Alaska are seeing robins for the first time. Senator Lieberman mentioned that this morning. Much more disturbing though is that a village of Shishmaref is forced to relocate because the breakup of the arctic ice has exposed its coastline and making its continuation there more fragile. The permafrost is also thawing so they are in danger of losing their community and are in the process of moving. The eight degree rise in Alaskan winter temperatures over the past 30 years is threatening their very way of life.

Native wildflowers are also being affected by a climate change. Those who pay attention to wildflower blooms are noticing that they're blooming earlier and earlier around the country, and they're noticing in some cases that the wildflowers are actually blooming before the pollinators get there. So we're seeing change, and change that is harmful to resources.

I might say when I'm talking about wildflowers that species like opossums can get up and move and transport themselves. Wildflowers and trees and other vegetation have a hard time moving. They move at a much slower rate, so as the climate changes at a faster pace it's harder for them to make adjustment.

The 500-year, the 200-year flood stages have been reached along the Mississippi River twice in the last 10 years. The U.S. Geologic Survey scientists have warned us that the drought in the west this year is the most severe seen in 500 years. All over the American West I run into people who are concerned about another season of devastating forest fires followed by a season, I might say, of early snow melt. We're seeing the snow melting early again this year. Coral reefs are the ocean incubators of rich diversity of marine life. The 25 to 30 years of bleaching has caused a die-off in many coral reefs around the world.

All of this leads me to a story that I would share with you. It's a biblical story. It's the story of Balem, it turns out, was riding his ass along a roadway, and he was going to a place that was very dangerous, and his ass tried to get his attention on three different occasions through three different attempts. And finally, having failed to do that, his ass sat down and turned and started talking to Balem, and warned Balem that he was on the wrong path.

To fully appreciate that story you need to understand that there were far less talking asses in Balem's day than there are today.

[Laughter.]

MR. SCHWEIGER: My point is simply this: all nature is speaking. America is on the wrong energy course. Are we listening?

Are all these events completely attributable to global warming, to climate change? Ecological scientists studying noisy, complex, natural systems seldom give us a definitive answer on that question. What we do know is all these events that I mentioned before are consistent with what scientists have been telling us to expect from global warming for a long time, and people like Barrett Hershey draw their own conclusions as they watch things change in their own world.

America is waking up and coming to the conclusion that global warming is real, and that immediate action must be taken to address it. The full dimensions of the threat are still obscure to many, but the potential devastating nature is becoming more apparent. Some species like our opossum, as I mentioned, are going to be around and continue to be around, but others are going to perish because they will not be able to adapt to changing environment.

This past January, in the magazine *Nature*, which is a peer-reviewed publication, there were 19 scientists that looked at six eco-regions of the world encompassing about 20 percent of the world's land base. They looked at the species in that area, in those areas, in those regions, and overlaid those areas and the knowledge that they had on the species in those areas with the information taken from the global climate models. They have concluded, using three different methodologies, that about 17--I think it's 17 to 39 percent of the species studies will be either on the road to extinction or will become extinct in the next 50 years based on the model as it relates to those ecosystems.

This is a surrogate, I believe, for what may happen to wild things on our planet. We are at risk of losing up to one-third of the species for extinction within the next 50 years, particularly in those areas that are most fragile. 50 years, that's the wisp of time it took since Rachel Carson's book was written and I presented it here to you today.

As an advocate of wildlife I'm compelled to the chilling conclusion that global warming threatens to overwhelm generations of conservation accomplishments. The most important chapter in the history of wildlife conservation, I believe, is the chapter we're about to write right now.

Last fall the National Wildlife Federation conducted a poll, as had many other organizations and entities over the last several months. Our poll shows that a wide majority of the American public believe that global warming is a real threat and want to see action.

Earlier this year we asked ourselves if there might be a more quantitative finding behind the anecdotal evidences that people who we talk to are raising concerns about what they're seeing in nature. We decided to poll a sample of the 20 million hunters and anglers. And I might say something about hunters and anglers. Hunters and anglers voted 3 to 1 for George Bush in the 2000 election. They look on environmentalists with skepticism. They generally are more conservative, and they--but on the other side of the coin, they also care about their wild places. They often know special places. They hunt in the same place year after year, climb the same tree on the first day of deer season. They know those special places.

And here's what they have found--and I should say we hired a Republican polling firm by the name of Bellwether Research--and here's what the poll showed to us. They looked at over 750 hunters and anglers this month. In fact I'm able to share this information with you

because we just got it two days ago. Here's the upshot. By an overwhelming majority, 75 percent of American hunters and anglers agree with the proposition that the United States should reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide, that contribute to global warming and threaten fish and wildlife habitats.

A majority of the hunters and anglers also believe that on wildlife and conservation issues, this administration gives more weight to the opinions of the oil and gas industry and the developers than it does to sportsmen, conservation groups and scientists.

And a conclusion we find most telling--and here's the one I would like to draw your attention to--almost two-thirds of America's hunters and anglers tell us that they believe global warming is already impacting hunting and fishing conditions, or will impact them in the near future.

Finally, the views of the nation's hunters and anglers are consistent with those expressed by mainstream Americans saying by a 74 percent majority that addressing global warming is a high priority and that we can improve our environment and strengthen our economy by investing in clean renewable energy technologies that create jobs while reducing greenhouse gas pollution.

These important findings from the heartland for men and women whose lives are directly involved with wildlife and wild places reinforce the message that I want to restate here today, and that is, Americans are well ahead of their national political leaders in understanding global warming's threats and in supporting action to combat it.

Look outside the Beltway. Northeastern lawmakers and governors are enacting laws to address climate change. Last week California proposed requiring automobile manufacturers to reduce emissions by 30 percent. Half the states have enacted or proposed legislation to tackle global warming. Earlier this week the western governors came out with their own position on climate change and on renewable energies.

Hundreds of local governments and college campuses are taking action to do their part on campus and in their local communities. All this is happening because there's a rising tide among the American people of awareness and concerns about the threats that are posed by global warming. When the people lead, the leaders will follow.

This leads me to my second point. With the right legislative signals, incentives, the American free enterprise system can steer us towards a 21st century successor to our current fossil fuel based economy. The administration's energy strategy is designed first and foremost to find coal, oil, gas here at home and around the world and to continue fueling a fossil fuel-based economy. Even the most sensitive wildlife habitats on public lands are targets for oil, gas, methane and gas development. Pursuing every last remnant reserve on fragile habitats, this policy is doing more and more ecological damage all over the west for less and less BTUs.

I don't need to explain the real cost of increasing our quest for oil from the Middle East and of asserting our interest in oil-rich countries.

Meanwhile, according to the Department of Energy--and we heard a little bit from the Secretary about the growth of energy demand. What was not mentioned was that we're looking at an increase in the amount of carbon dioxide emissions from the United States of one billion tons over the next 10-year period. That growth is twice the total current emissions by our southern neighbor, Mexico.

The Bush energy plan is a failure because it is a slave to these projections of never-ending dependence on fossil fuels and of yesterday's energy technologies. It's hard to take the administration's commitment to technology seriously when one of their first actions upon

taking office was to roll back efficiency standards on air conditioners. This move was not only wrong directed, it was illegal and the courts have overturned it.

When any paradigm shifts--and I think we are in a paradigm shift at this time--bad things begin to happen increasingly until we're forced to move to a new paradigm. And in any change, any paradigm change, there are agents of change and there are victims of change. We as a nation have a choice.

Then there's another view, I think a bolder view, of where the future leads us, and that view holds that tackling global warming is not about economic sacrifice. It's about economic opportunity and a more secure future for Americans. Since 85 percent of the global warming pollution comes from burning fossil fuels, technologies that reduce greenhouse gases will also cut public health risks from emissions, will reduce nitrogen loadings in the bays and estuaries like our own Chesapeake Bay here, and will reduce mercury deposition in fish and shellfish. All who build better, cleaner, more efficient energy technologies can tap a potential global market for energy that exceeds a trillion dollars per year.

We must level the playing field by providing the same level of incentives and tax breaks for alternative energy and efficiencies as we have been providing for the oil development in this country. America has vast intellectual potential to harness renewable energy and the manufacturing strength to produce more efficient energy technologies.

Why should we settle for hybrids claiming just two-tenths of a percent of the automobile market? The fuel economy of cars sold today is actually worse than it was 20 years ago. That's not progress, and it's a tragic failure of leadership to establish auto efficiency standards. Even those forward-thinking business leaders with the courage to meet the challenge ahead have been surprised by how pessimistic the original assumptions had been in retrospect.

Five years ago BP pledge to cut emissions from its own operations by 10 percent from 1990 levels by the year 2010. In the year 2002 Lord John Brown announced that BP had already achieved its target and at a no net cost to the company. According to analysis commissioned by the Apollo Alliance a bold \$300 billion investment in new energy economy for America, they project that America can create over 3 million new jobs by shifting to new technologies. This investment is roughly equal--I should say the \$300 billion investment is roughly equal to what we give to the carbon fuel industry in tax breaks and other governmental incentives over an eight-year period.

Investments will pay for themselves with increased revenues generated by a stronger national economy. They will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, and they'll keep American dollars at home. Clean energy is the future frontier of innovation and economic growth, and America must rise to the challenge and opportunity. When we should be funding an Apollo-like investment in better energy technology, the President instead called for a mission to Mars. Before we can send men and women to a planet that has fried its climate, we ought to protect the one we got.

We must create a framework for advancing solutions that will move us in the right direction. The original Clean Air Act, which was mentioned earlier today, was a technology forcing act. We learned through that process, and particularly through the acid rain controls of 1990 that necessity is the mother of invention. Create the framework and people will find ways to meet the goals at one-tenth some of the costs that had been projected.

I believe that we can work together to take this first step on global warming with a centrist proposal like the Climate Stewardship Act, a bipartisan proposal sponsored by

Senator Lieberman an Senator McCain, and in the House by Representatives Gilchrest and Oliver.

This legislation offers the national political leadership a chance to catch up with the American public. It embraces the same spirit of compromise as the Acid Rain program of 1990, and it borrows the same innovative emissions trading program that allowed every business to find the best way of meeting broad environmental goals. Others look for common ground, but Lieberman and McCain have crafted it.

Some may ask what technology will get us out of the jam? The truth is I don't know for certain which technology will get us out of the jam, but I do know this, with the right legal framework and investment incentives, creative and visionary entrepreneurs will find the most efficient solutions. Government investment in technology and new energy economy are certainly a part of the solution to global warming, but this approach alone will simply not get the job done. The solution to global warming is not in a single silver bullet. We need innovation across the economy and in every sector.

The Climate Stewardship Act creates not one technology partnership, not two, but thousands upon thousands of technology incentives by creating a marketplace that rewards innovation wherever it arises, and it creates a market that values environmental performance which gets the cleaner technologies off the shelf and into the factories, into the cars and into the households.

Pursuing technology R&D alone neglects the emissions reductions that can be achieved today with a clear and dependable market-base signal that rewards environmental progress.

Often conservation groups are accused of being unwilling to compromise, but we have welcomed a move to the center on this debate that Senator Lieberman and Senator McCain have pursued as they work to break through a deadlock on this important issue.

From an international perspective, the Kyoto Protocol, which we believe is a better response to the mounting damage of global warming, would require the U.S. to reduce our emissions to 20 percent below what the nation was emitting in the year 2000. The McCain-Lieberman bill, in contrast, merely calls for the stabilizing of emissions at the year 2000 levels. Further, the bill does not only include the emissions trading system that I talked about earlier that businesses have preferred and celebrate, but also allows other flexible approaches such as offset emissions through better farming and forestry practices, or through overseas projects.

We are pleased by the increasing number of allies in this legislative effort. A broad coalition of support for this type approach is emerging, and it includes religious community leaders, forward-thinking companies. I want to recognize several here, Dupont, Alcoa, Nike. It includes state and local elected officials, farmers, ranchers, sportsmen, financial investors, insurance companies and others.

America must regain its environmental leadership. There was a time when the world looked to America for leadership in meeting global environmental challenges because Americans demanded and drove that leadership through legislation. Some offer as an excuse for inaction the fact that countries like China have not yet cut their emissions. Since when has America looked to China for leadership on anything? Is that vision of our future to wait for China's industry to solve the global warming problem so that we can buy technology from them? I certainly hope not.

As we move forward I believe you will see the depth of concern materialize among the American public that goes far beyond what we've seen so far outside the Beltway. The impacts of global warming, despite the name, are in fact local, and they're more and more

observable to people throughout the nation. It's entering their backyards, largely unseen by the media. People are experiencing global warming firsthand in their lives.

The issue is becoming real to voters. Politicians who are still trying to come to grips with whether global warming is real or not run a great risk of being rolled over by the public that today is coping with everyday realities of these issues.

We need real solutions today like McCain-Lieberman bill to put American industry to work for the environment and to put the environmental technologies to work for creating jobs and bolstering our economy and securing our future.

As I noted in the beginning, I approach global warming as an advocate for wildlife. I don't apologize for that. In fact, it's from that perspective that a growing number of Americans are sensing the true dangers of the threat and the need to address it.

I actually come back to National Wildlife Federation through the voice of my unborn grandchild. Let me explain. A few years ago I was out in the West Coast with my daughters, and I wanted them to see an ancient forest that was about to be harvested, and I wanted them to experience this forest before it had been cut. So we spent a day looking at the forest, walking, hiking. We collected sugar pine cones and just had a great time. When we came out of that forest, we were driving back towards Portland, Oregon. And I stopped at a roadside where the forest had been completely clear-cut and there had been a recent rain. And because of that rain there was a mass failure, the mountainside slid down onto the road. I wanted to get a photograph of this as the sun was setting over the site.

My youngest daughter, who was interested in photography at that time went out and watched me take these photographs, and as I finished, I looked over in her big brown eyes, and she was still at that age where, you know, kids believe their dads can do things. And she was preteen, and she looked up at me with her brown eyes, and she said, "Dad." I said, "What, Lauren?" She said, "Why are you letting them do this?" I got to tell you, it was a quiet ride back to the motel in Portland, and that question haunts me to this day.

I just learned not too long ago that my oldest daughter is due to have a baby in August, and I don't ever want to hear that baby say to me, when it's a young child, "Grandpa, where were you when they wrecked my planet?" And that haunting question is what brought me back to National Wildlife Federation and brings me here today.

If we are not the voice for wildlife and if we are not the voice for the next generations, who will be? I think we have an ethical obligation to step to the plate on this one.

The trend in all of this that we've talked about is unmistakable. The American people recognize that the problem is real, and they realize that it must be addressed. The national leadership should catch up, and the McCain-Lieberman legislation offers an approach to do just that. The time for action on this issue is now.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. SCHWEIGER: I'd like to entertain some questions. Any questions? We have two minutes.

[No response.]

MR. SCHWEIGER: If not, thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. : I'd like to invite you to have coffee in the space where the lunch was served, the buffet. There should be coffee and tea, and we will reconvene here in about 10 minutes.

We will have a panel of state and business leaders, followed by John Rowe and Senator McCain.

Thank you.

[Recess.]

MR. : We're going to get started in just a minute if people can find their way back to their seats, please.

[Pause.]

MR. DIRINGER: Good afternoon. My name's Elliot Diringer. I'm Director of International Strategies at the Pew Center. I'd like to join the parade of Pew and Brookings representatives to welcome you to this conference. I'm up here for just a moment because I've had the pleasure, along with my friend and colleague Nigel Purvis, as serving as co-organizer of this conference. In that capacity, I welcome you and thank you for being here.

Just a couple of quick announcements before I turn the podium over to Sally Ericsson of the Pew Center. First, there will be a reception immediately following the program today. We had originally planned to hold that reception at the new Museum of the National Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, we've had to move it here, so we'll be right across the hall. Save us a little transportation time there.

Second, I just want to take a moment to recognize a couple of people without whom this conference would not have been possible. I'm not sure if they're in the room actually, but Mike Cummings of the Pew Center and Josh Busby of the Brookings Institution. There's Josh. I see Josh.

[Applause.]

MR. DIRINGER: These two gentlemen have given new meaning to the word "tireless." So if you don't mind, join me again in one more round of applause, because really, we wouldn't be here without them.

[Applause.]