

An Open Letter to the President and Members of Congress Strong Leadership Needed Now on Climate

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Strong leadership by the United States will be required to move the nations of the world away from what scientists increasingly recognize as a rapidly developing global climatic catastrophe. That leadership requires the insight, energy and relentless attention of the President and no less vigorous interest from both houses of the U. S. Congress.

The Waxman-Markey bill now being considered by the Congress offers a powerful advance and must be enacted this year. But at its best it will be only a first step in the direction that scientists now recognize as necessary to protect local and regional climates. Our purpose is to call attention to the large difference between what U.S. politics now seems capable of enacting and what scientists understand is necessary to prevent climatic disruption and protect the human future. We urge President Obama to exercise maximum personal leadership beginning now to ensure that the strongest possible legislation emerges from the Congress.

New information arrives daily to confirm what many specialists have known for three decades: human-caused climatic disruption is serious, moving rapidly, and gaining momentum with every delay in correcting the trend. In 1992 more than 180 nations including the United States met in Rio de Janeiro, signed, and later ratified, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and in so doing agreed to “stabilize” the heat-trapping gases of the atmosphere at levels that will protect human interests and nature. We, the nations globally, have not been true to our word, and climate is moving out from under civilization rapidly. Major droughts on every continent are but one current symptom of the scale of the global environmental corruption now entrained.

In many political circles around the world, the view has taken hold that nations should endeavor both to limit the buildup of carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas and a by-product of burning coal, oil and natural gas, to 450 parts per million and to limit the rise of global temperatures to less than 2°Celsius. We and many others are of the view that these objectives are inadequate to sustain the integrity of global climate and to hold the risk of ruinous climatic change to an acceptably low level. United States policy must provide a fully satisfactory U.S. contribution to global greenhouse gas reductions that move beyond these inadequate international limits.

It is essential that the Waxman-Markey bill, strengthened wherever possible and certainly not weakened, advance into law rapidly. It is also essential that it become the basis for a serious, continuing, and urgent effort on the part of the President to lead the American public into recognition of the scale of the climatic

disruption so that the U.S. will embrace still stronger policies to do what we know from scientific investigation is necessary to prevent disastrous climatic alteration.

As we write, we see the unfolding Presidential effort to lead the nation in the area of universal health insurance. We urge the President to initiate an effort at least comparable in the area of climatic change. We recognize the difference in popularity of these two causes, but it is the essence of Presidential leadership to show the way even where adequate public awareness of the risks ahead may be lacking. Speaking in Germany recently, President Obama referred to climatic change as “a potentially cataclysmic disaster.” We agree and believe that message must be communicated and elaborated to the American people in time to assure strong, effective Congressional action in both houses of Congress this year.

The time for national action on climatic change is now. There has already been too much delay. The stakes are far too high to compromise the integrity of, and our responsibility for, prompt national action.

Signed,

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