



League of Women Voters of Texas

COUNTDOWN TO COPENHAGEN!

The United Nations Climate Change Conference, otherwise known as the 15th Conference of the Parties, occurs on December 7-14, 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark. As I write this, it is 55 days away! You may find a Countdown to Copenhagen Clock--to the second--at <http://www.greenpeace.org.nz/countdown/> . It's fun to watch the seconds tick away!

There are international meetings relating to climate change almost every week leading to Copenhagen. However, the two primary working groups leading to the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties are: the Ad Hoc Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Longterm Cooperative Action. The Climate Change talks that are occurring now in Bangkok are the last of five sessions leading to the Copenhagen conference. These groups are meeting under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol. The outcomes expected are a consolidated and shortened negotiating text under the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol.¹ The two groups will have a final pre-Copenhagen session in Barcelona on November 2-6, 2009. As you may have heard, the current document is 200 pages long!

My favorite meeting was held in London in late May entitled "St. James Palace Nobel Laureate Symposium." One of the most compelling headlines from the conferences was:

Global Warming Must Stay Below 2°C or World Faces Ruin, Scientists Declare

-The London *Times*, May 28, 2009

This goal is listed as one of the milestones in the final document.

The Nobel Laureates were primarily from the fields of chemistry, physics and economics and were joined by 40 additional top scientists in the field of climate change. The conference was sponsored by The University of Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. It was an "invitation only" event, with the London *Times* as the only media partner. The conference was held under the auspices of HRH The Prince of Wales, who spoke on the importance of rainforests and who leads The Prince's Rainforest Project. I happened to be in London that week and while my efforts to attend the Symposium proved fruitless, I was able to follow the conference through the London *Times* Sunday insert as well as the daily updates. I have found no coverage of this conference in the United States, except for an opinion piece by Dr. Stephen Chu, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy, which appears on the DOE website.²

While Dr. Chu gave a keynote speech at the Symposium, his opinion piece featured in the Sunday London *Times* insert entitled "The Man Who Could Change the World" is instructive. He stated "At home, we are committed to reducing our carbon emissions by more than 80% by 2050."³ What he neglected to point out, however, is that the goal for 2020 is only 17 or 20% (17% was the goal passed by the House and 20% is in the current Senate bill) from 2005 levels. Other countries have adopted 20% from 1990 levels, a much more demanding number. In his keynote address, Dr. Chu suggested that "painting the world white to fight global warming"³ would be a low tech way to achieve significant results. He had in mind roofs and paved surfaces being at least the color of cement, which he stated would make it possible "to cut carbon emissions by as much as taking all the world's cars off the

roads for 11 years.”⁴ It was an interesting article! More recently, Dr. Chu has been touting this idea in the U.S., as reflected in the New York *Times* recent article entitled “White Roofs Catch On as Energy Cost Cutters.”⁵

Dr. Chris Jones of the Met Office Hadley Centre in Exeter stated that “time delay had masked the full impact of temperature rises.” He led a team of researchers who calculated that 20 to 40 percent of the forest will be killed off by 2050 if there is a 2°C rise.” Dr. Jones also stated that “We are committed to losing a fair degree of the forest. Everything above 1°C commits us to some forest loss.”⁶

Nobel Laureate Dr. Jack Steinberger said “Europe should scrap its support for wind energy as soon as possible to focus on far more efficient emerging forms of clean power generation including solar thermal energy.”⁷ Solar thermal power involves parabolic mirrors that reflect the sun’s rays to generate heat and electricity.

After three days of conferences, The St. James Palace Memorandum was released entitled “Action for a Low Carbon and Equitable Future.”⁸ Key requirements were identified as “an effective and just global agreement on climate change, low-carbon energy infrastructure and tropical forest protection, conservation and restoration.”

To that end, they listed as Milestones of the Great Transformation as:

1) **Delivering an effective and just global agreement on climate change.**

A long-term commitment under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is now urgently required. The global agreement in Copenhagen must include the following elements:

- Acknowledging the compelling evidence of science we should confine the temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius to avoid unmanageable climate risks. This can only be achieved with a peak of global emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2015 and at least a 50% emission reduction by 2050 on a 1990 baseline. This in turn means that developed countries have to aim for a 25-40% reduction by 2020. A robust measure of assessing the necessary emission reductions is a total carbon budget, which should be accepted as the base for measuring the effectiveness of short-term (2020) and long-term (2050) targets;
- The creation of carbon prices adopted across large parts of the global economy combined with measures to lower the price of low carbon energy, especially in the developing countries. Funds raised should be used to provide the necessary financial support for adaptation;
- The agreement must acknowledge the priority of developing countries to overcome poverty while ensuring sustainable development.

2) **Delivering a low carbon energy infrastructure**

Decarbonizing our society requires an increase in energy conservation and efficiency and a revolution in our energy infrastructure now. *The required technological innovations will not be achieved without an unprecedented partnership between government and business.*

3) **Delivering tropical forest protection, conservation and restoration**

Tropical forests provide the ecosystem services essential for human well-being and poverty alleviation. In addition, deforestation and forest degradation are substantially contributing to climate change and global biodiversity loss at the genetic, species and landscape level. Both locally and globally, protecting boreal and tropical forest cover is an essential tool for mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. *Without a solution to rainforest protection, there is no solution to tackling climate change.*

Thus you can see the Symposium’s emphasis of “**The Fierce Urgency of Now.**” The London *Times* headline which is mentioned above is based on the statement that we must confine the temperature rise to 2° Celsius— which “**can only be achieved with a peak of global emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2015.**” That’s only six years away! Are we as a nation committed to such a goal? Our current climate change bills will not achieve it.

Watch for Copenhagen!

Meanwhile,

How Can We Reduce our Carbon Footprint?

While the U.S. House has passed a climate change bill, the U.S. Senate is now in the process. To bring this to a more personal level, however, let's think about ways that we as individuals can reduce the carbon emissions that lead to climate change.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Write your senator and ask him/her to pass a strong climate change bill.
2. Buy a car that uses less gasoline/mile.
3. Be sure your house is well insulated and include a radiant barrier in your attic.
4. Use white or light-colored roofs to reflect the sun's rays (a primary goal of Secretary of Energy Chu.)
5. Encourage your local community to use light-colored sidewalks, roads, etc. (Also a goal of Secretary Chu.)
6. Add solar panels to your house and perhaps even get a rebate!
7. Buy energy-efficient appliances.
8. Ride mass transit when possible.
9. Add solar film to your house (combined with safety film if you are in a hurricane or tornado area) to reduce the heat entering the house.
10. Use "green technologies" whenever possible. The above suggestions are examples.
11. Recycle, recycle, recycle!
12. Tell a friend to do the same.

--*Laura Blackburn*
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