10-27-1993

"Global Climate Change", National Press Club

Max S. Baucus

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches

Recommended Citation
Baucus, Max S., "Global Climate Change", National Press Club" (October 27, 1993). Max S. Baucus Speeches. 525.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches/525

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Special Collections at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Max S. Baucus Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Senator * or Department*: BAUCUS

Instructions:
Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.
Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.
For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: Speeches & Remarks

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: October-1993
(Example: JANUARY-2003)

(1) Subject*: Global Climate Change
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject* Remarks at the National Press Club

DOCUMENT DATE*: 10/27/1993
(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"
"Global Climate Change"

Remarks of Senator Max Baucus

at the National Press Club

October 27, 1993

If you've heard a lot of speeches, you know that all too many of them use the phrase "we are at a crossroads" to describe the present state of their topics. Today, I am pleased to report that we are not at a crossroads on global climate change. With the Administration's new Action Plan, we have taken the right turn and are heading up the road in the right direction.

So my speech today will not be a plea for action. Instead, now that we are on the right road, I will talk about how we can drive on it as safely and smoothly as possible. We still need to work harder to make sure the public is informed about the facts and what we are doing to address the problem; and we have to make some tough decisions about how to pay for the actions we take. We are moving beyond a debate over basic principles, and beginning to solve problems.

State of Scientific Debate

The British writer H. G. Wells said some decades ago that "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." This was never more true than it is with respect to global climate change.

While the scientific community generally agrees that global warming is real and dangerous, the public as a whole is not entirely convinced. We still need to educate.

Those who do not believe in climate change speak with loud voices, and at times they are capable of frustrating progress. I believe that the high pitch of their arguments is a
sign that they are losing the debate. Opponents of action are shrinking in numbers and sounding more extreme all the time.

A book entitled *Apocalypse Not: Science, Economics and Environmentalism*, for example, argues that evidence of warming and its effects is small, and claims that slowing global climate change "will require a degree of bureaucratic control over economic affairs previously unknown in the West."

Within the scientific community, this kind of hyperbole is probably its own best refutation. But with the public as a whole, it does have an effect. It creates an illusion of intellectual deadlock over the existence of climate change; it contributes to the mistaken belief that environmental protection and economic growth are at odds; and it tells the public that any modest attempts to slow climate change will have radical economic effects. That is why we must work as hard as ever to make sure everyone knows the truth.

**Scientific Consensus**

There are two undisputed facts about global climate change. First, carbon dioxide, the waste gas produced by burning coal, oil, and wood, has been accumulating in the atmosphere over the earth for the last century. Second, the more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the more heat it traps, and the more quickly the Earth's climate changes.

Scientists agree that, given these facts, and given the rapid rate of CO2 accumulation in the last 150 years, the Earth's climate is likely to warm by several degrees during the next decades.

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded in 1992 that unless we take remedial action, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will double by the year 2100. They consequently predict an average global increase of three to eight degrees Fahrenheit.

- The National Academy of Science similarly finds that unless we do something now, by the middle of the next century the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will have doubled its pre-industrial level. This will result in an average global temperature rise of 1.5 to 4.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

- George Woodwell, the Director of the Woods Hole Research Center, recently said that new influences on the trapping of greenhouse gases -- for example, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines -- which were not incorporated in the IPCC or NAS models, may mean that these projected temperature increases are too low.

**Consequences of Global Climate Change**

The uncertainty, therefore, is not about whether the phenomenon exists, but the details of precisely how big it will be, and what effects it will have on particular regions of our country and the world.
Even so, we know enough to be worried. While climate change will affect different parts of the world in different ways, research shows that:

- A warmer planet will have less polar ice and thus higher seas. That will worsen flooding and erosion problems in coastal areas. As coastal populations grow, the exposure of people and property to these hazards, and the risks posed by extreme events like Hurricanes Andrew and Hugo, is rising.

- Climate change will make inland areas drier and hotter. That will make water resources in my home state of Montana and other western states even more scarce, exacerbate the existing bitter political conflicts over these issues, and make life for Western families much more difficult and expensive.

- Higher seas will drown coastal wetlands, worsening our water pollution problems and reducing our biodiversity.

- Temperature changes will affect agricultural lands in unpredictable ways, making food more scarce.

- Warming causes fires, insects and the spread of disease that will degrade forests and ecosystems, and ravage communities.

- Changes in habitat will cause the extinction of species with limited geographical range.

These possibilities are quite alarming, and they are their own best argument for why we must act now to curb the emissions of greenhouse gasses.

The United States Must Lead

The U.S. has no choice but to lead. We must lead in cutting our current greenhouse gas emissions, and we must lead in research and development of new technology that will do the same in the future.

Why must we do more? Simple. First, we are the largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Twenty percent of all greenhouse gas emissions come from the United States. We contribute more, so if the problem is to be solved, we must do more.

Second, our scientific capacity is great. We can conduct the research and develop the technology that developing countries need to slow global climate change. This is essential because developing countries, particularly in Asia, are growing and adding industrial capacity much faster than the U.S. or Europe.

For example, China uses coal-fired power plants to meet its growing electricity needs. If the growth in Chinese power capacity continues at its projected seven percent a year, China will surpass the U.S. as the largest contributor of greenhouse gases by the year
2010. Thus, reducing our own emissions without inventing and transferring technology which developing countries can use, will mean little in the long run.

So, we need to curb our own emissions, and we need to develop the technology both to make our own actions more efficient and to help other countries find ways to reduce emissions. That is precisely what the Clinton Administration Action Plan envisions. Education is beginning to pull ahead of catastrophe.

Evaluation of Clinton Plan

The Clinton Administration's National Action Plan is solid. It requires genuine cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and offers realistic ways to achieve them. I commend President Clinton for using his Earth Day address to go beyond what is required by the Convention on Global Climate Change -- and far beyond the policy of the last Administration -- to commit the U.S. to reduce American emission of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Just as important, this is a plan the public will accept. It helps the economy, rather than hurting it, as books like Apocalypse Not predicted. President Clinton asked "not for more bureaucracy or regulation or unnecessary costs, but instead for American ingenuity and creativity, to produce the best and most energy-efficient technology."

The plan reflects modern environmental policy. It uses the best ideas of industry, scientists and environmentalists alike, and it uses carrots rather than sticks. This is what so many in industry tell us every day: just give us incentives and see what we can do. Well, they've got the incentives. And we'll watch what they do very closely. I hope they meet this challenge.

The plan also uses existing laws, rather than asking Congress to write new ones. That's good. When we have good laws, we should use them instead of adding years of Congressional debate and layers of new law.

And it helps the economy by forcing us to develop new technology. In fact, we should be doing these things anyway. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is not an onerous burden or an environmental penance. It makes economic sense.

Funding Problems

That's the good news. As always, though, problems start to crop up when we talk about setting priorities and spending money.

Implementing the Climate Change Action Plan will cost the Federal Government $1.9 billion dollars through the year 2000. However, the Administration has not proposed specific funding for it. And, because the Budget Act requires us to cut spending or raise taxes if we want a new program, we can't just borrow the money. We have to account for it.
It is hard to imagine that the public wants a new tax to pay for this, and I know Congress is in a mood to cut spending, not to tax. Just last week we chose to sacrifice the Superconducting Supercollider. Therefore, the Administration has said that the money will come out of existing programs.

EPA's share of the work will be about $65 million per year. I can already predict that people will ask EPA to pay for its share by cutting other programs -- that is, to reduce waste-water treatment grants to states, Superfund site clean-up money, and so on, to fund implementation of this plan.

I will oppose that very strenuously. Funding the Climate Change Action Plan should be a top EPA funding priority, but it must not be the only priority. The money must not come from other environmental programs within EPA.

Where do we get the money from, then? Rather than from other areas within EPA, it should come from existing climate change research programs in other agencies. NASA and other agencies have nearly $1.4 billion for scientific research on just the question of how much the climate will change. NASA gets by far the lion's share, with its annual research budget at nearly $1 billion dollars, which is more than half the amount needed to fund the entire National Action Plan for its seven-year life span. If it comes to a choice, and I believe that it will, then we must transfer some small portion of that money to fund these mitigation efforts contained in the Action Plan.

Need for Action

Research is important. Very important. But at a time when our federal resources are shrinking, we have to set priorities. An Office of Technology Assessment study released this week says that some aspects of our present research program may not be as high a priority as the types of programs found in the Action Plan. According to the OTA study:

"the ambitious U.S. Global Change Program is predominantly a physical science program aimed at observing, understanding, and predicting climate change...it will not provide decision-makers and natural resource managers with the information they will need to respond to climate change."

We have to make some tough choices. If we have to transfer some small portion of this research money to pay for EPA's or DOE's actions on climate change, that is what we have to do. Because if we wait to find out whether the absolute worst-case scenario does in fact materialize, we could find ourselves too hot, too poor and too busy finding high ground to do anything about it.

The Action Plan asks us to take some modest steps to cut greenhouse emissions. After we take them, we may never be able to prove in retrospect that they prevented drastic changes in our climate. But our earth will be intact, and I prefer that outcome to the
former. That is why we should make a tough decision, and spread out the research over longer periods of time rather than delay action on climate change and this plan.

Continuing to Look for Opportunities

At the same time, we must not view the Action Plan as the last word. We must continue looking beyond it to find ways to slow climate change. If we are creative, we can adopt policies in other areas that give us more help and are worthwhile on their own terms.

For example, when the Administration proposed its deficit reduction plan last year, it included a tax on the energy content of fuels -- the so-called "BTU" tax. The BTU tax would have cut the deficit and greenhouse gas emissions at the same time.

I thought it was a good idea and, if I may be mildly critical here, I was disappointed that there was not more broad-based support for the proposal. Partly because of that, Congress wound up passing a different tax -- a gas tax which does less for reducing greenhouse emissions and more to hurt working people.

Conclusions

Rather than dwell on this or other missed opportunities, we should learn from them. We should look for new opportunities in the future and take them. The Administration's Action Plan is a good first step. We have to get it moving, and then find the right second step.

At the same time, we must continue educating the public and ourselves. Education is precisely what we are trying to do today, so I view both this event and the Administration's Action Plan as signs that we are on the right road.

That being the case, I think that if H.G. Wells were to appear here in his time machine and sit in to listen for a while, he would find us following the advice he gave many years ago. He would find education pulling ahead of catastrophe.