

Florida State University Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law

Volume 13
Number 1 *Fall 1997*

Article 7

April 2018

Global Climate Change: Threats and Solutions

Carol M. Browner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.law.fsu.edu/jluel>



Part of the [Environmental Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Browner, Carol M. (2018) "Global Climate Change: Threats and Solutions," *Florida State University Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://ir.law.fsu.edu/jluel/vol13/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida State University Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law by an authorized editor of Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact bkaplan@law.fsu.edu.

Global Climate Change: Threats and Solutions

Cover Page Footnote

This is an excerpt from the remarks prepared for delivery at Florida State University Tallahassee, Florida, September 18, 1997. For the complete speech, see Administrator's Speeches (visited November 24, 1997) . Since this speech was written as part of Ms. Browner's duties as a U.S. Government employee, the Journal's copyright provision does not attach. Please credit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency whenever reproducing any parts of this speech.

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE: THREATS AND SOLUTIONS

CAROL M. BROWNER*

Four-and-a-half years ago, when President Clinton and I went to Washington, we called on businesses, communities, and all levels of government to build a new generation of environmental and public health protection—one that builds on the successes of the past and meet the challenges of the next century.

Today, we can look back on four-and-a-half years of progress in protecting public health and the environment. Real people in real communities are reaping real, everyday benefits.

We're clearing up more of the nation's hazardous waste dumps—in fact, more in the last four years than in the previous twelve years combined. And we're planning to clean up 500 more over the next four years.

Across this country, we are helping cities begin the process of cleaning up and redeveloping their abandoned industrial properties—the brownfields—which at the same time helps to save the pristine, open spaces *outside* our cities.

Under the leadership of President Clinton and Vice President Gore, we have taken measures to improve our air quality—the strongest measures in two decades—that will prevent thousands of premature deaths each year, and improve health protections for people of all ages.

We have enacted new laws to protect our drinking water and our food from dangerous contaminants.

We have expanded the public's "right-to-know" about toxic pollutants in their own neighborhoods—so they can take steps to protect themselves and their families, and so they can take action to work with industries and reduce pollution in their communities. Indeed, this has been one of our most effective tools in fighting pollution.

But, of course, the job is not done. We cannot rest. We still face tremendous environmental and public health challenges.

* Administrator, United States Environmental Protection Agency. This is an excerpt from the remarks prepared for delivery at Florida State University Tallahassee, Florida, September 18, 1997. For the complete speech, see Administrator's Speeches (visited November 24, 1997) <<http://www.epa.gov/epahome/Speeches.html>>.

This administration is determined to continue to meet these challenges head-on—with standards that are second to none, vigorous enforcement of those standards, by giving the American people the tools to reduce pollution in their own communities.

But the new generation of environmental protection means something else, too.

It means what the President has said, on many occasions, and what has proven to be true: that environmental protection and economic progress *do* go hand-in-hand. Over the past four and-a-half years, we have proved that you *can* have strong environmental protection and still have strong economic growth and prosperity. We do *not* have to choose between our health and our jobs. In fact, the two are inextricably linked.

We believe in building upon this progress. We must bring to this challenge that which has long made this country great—our creativity, innovation, ingenuity. We must reward those willing to do more than just an adequate job—to go further, to push the envelope, and to create new technologies and new ways to prevent pollution. We must seek to build the kinds of partnerships—between industries, governments and communities—partnerships that get the job done.

The challenge of global warming will test this philosophy as never before.

The science on this phenomenon is compelling.

More than two thousand of the world's foremost experts on the global environment have come together to conduct a joint assessment on global warming. They are now telling us there is ample evidence that, for the first time in history, pollution from human activities is changing the earth's climate.

Modern industrial activity—particularly the burning of fossil fuels—namely coal and petroleum products—is filling the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse gases,” which trap the Sun's heat in the atmosphere and cause the steady, gradual warming of the Earth's surface temperatures.

The average surface temperature is now a full degree Fahrenheit *higher* than it was at the beginning of this century—and it may rise another two to six degrees over the next century.

That may not sound like much to many people. But here's what the scientific community says it will mean over the course of the next century:

More frequent and more intense heat waves, causing thousands more heat-related deaths. Severe droughts and floods will become more common. Tropical diseases like malaria will expand their range. Agriculture will suffer. The oceans will rise, perhaps by several feet over the next century—swamping many coastal areas.

This will be our legacy to our children, if we do not look for some way to begin reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases.

As the President has said, this is a great challenge for our democracy. We have the evidence, we see the train coming, but most ordinary Americans, in their day-to-day lives, cannot yet hear the whistle blowing. Unless they live in a place where they have experienced a couple of hundred-year floods in the past decade, the consequences of global warming are not yet readily apparent to them.

But, again, the scientific evidence shows that these consequences are on the way.

Do we know everything there is to know about global climate change? No.

Do we know *exactly* what will happen in the decades ahead? Of course not.

But we have enough to go on—based on years of rigorous scientific analysis—to know that we must begin dealing with this problem. And we should act sooner, rather than later, because—scientists say—of the substantial “lag time” involved. Global warming will continue for many years after we begin reducing the emissions that are causing it. Even if we begin today, you probably won’t see the results of any progress we make today until your own kids are in college.

In December, the nations of the world will meet in Japan to seek a global agreement on reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

President Clinton is committed to securing realistic and binding agreements that ensure that all countries—both industrial and developing—participate in this process and do their part to address the challenge of global warming.

Although the U. S now produces more than 20 percent of the world’s greenhouse gases, our share is expected to decline over the next couple of decades as nations like China and India increase their level of industrialization—and with it their emissions of climate-changing pollutants.

So we cannot go this alone. Pollution does not know political boundaries. And the challenge of global warming brings a whole new perspective to the notion that the nations of the world “are all in this together.”

But those who oppose action are on the march. Some industries are funding a massive advertising campaign attempting to portray the fight against global warming as a loser for America. They warn of dire consequences—drastically higher fuel prices, economic catastrophe. In the words of one campaign sponsor: “All pain and no gain.”

They are wrong.

Addressing the challenge of global warming is *not* about ratcheting down our economy. It *is* about investing in new technologies and using America's technological leadership to develop new ways to make things, new ways to get where we want to go, to work and to play.

It's about economic *growth*. Those who are first in bringing pollution-reducing technologies to market are going to be very well-positioned in the global economy of the 21st Century. And American industries are leaders in developing these technologies.

Much of it has to do with getting *more* out of the energy we are currently using.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, we can cut global warming pollution by one-fifth—right now, at no cost—simply by using technologies that are already on the market. In fact, many of our industries can actually *save* money in the process.

For example, using available technologies, the typical manufacturing plant can cut its pollution and energy use by 10 to 20 percent—and recoup its investment in two years. After that, the yearly cost savings are pure profit. That's an attractive deal, and many companies are already taking advantage of it. We need to encourage more to do so.

When you reduce energy use—when you use more efficient equipment and make better use of electricity—you reduce the need to burn fossil fuels—the coal and petroleum—that contribute to global climate change. Every little bit helps, but we are finding opportunities for huge improvements.

Office buildings can cut their global warming pollution and their utility bills by 30 percent or more—and they can do it by investing in efficient lighting, office equipment, heating and cooling systems, and building materials. These investments pay for themselves over two to four years.

Sometimes the energy savings come from obvious sources—more efficient motor systems in factory equipment, advanced turbine systems, computer workstations that use less electricity—or capturing the enormous amounts of heat that is wasted during electricity generation and, rather than throwing it away, using it to meet our heating and cooling needs. We can save billions of gallons of oil.

Sometimes you can find a huge potential for energy savings—and for pollution reduction—where you least expect them.

Exit signs, for example—like the ones you see over the doors in the buildings right here on campus. Did you know that, in this country, a billion dollars is spent each year on electricity to operate exit signs?

Now they make LED signs that are every bit as effective, but use 75 percent less energy. Think about it. Simply by focusing on one item—exit signs—you can save more than a thousand dollars a year for a 100,000-square-foot building. And, by using less energy, you're helping reduce the creation of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

So this is *not* a question of who is going to sacrifice and how much. Rather, it is about investing in new technologies—available technologies—that make our industries more efficient, more profitable—and cleaner in the process.

And we need to provide incentives for industries to develop even better pollution-reducing technologies. We've found that the best way to do this is through market-based strategies like "emissions trading"—where overall emissions are "capped" and pollution reductions are traded on the open market. These market-based strategies allow industries to find the most flexible, cost-effective ways to reduce their pollution. And they get government out of the business of mandating particular technologies.

We are also looking to make great strides in efficiency and energy savings of the products that many of us use every day in—in our homes and on the road.

After you are graduated from this university—and have a few years to earn enough money to purchase a new car—you'll likely be able to choose one that gets as much as three times the gas mileage of today's vehicles—without sacrificing safety, performance, size or affordability. That's because government and the auto industry are working in partnership to develop a new generation of automobiles.

Considering that today's typical car emits more than 10,000 pounds of carbon dioxide each year, tripling the gas mileage is going to go a long way toward reducing greenhouse gases.

A new generation of consumer products is enabling homeowners to cut this pollution—and their energy bills—by 30 percent or more. I'm talking about energy-efficient lighting, refrigerators, heating and cooling equipment, washing machines, and other appliances—as well as energy-efficient insulation, windows, and other building materials.

Now, how are you supposed to know which consumer products are making use of these new technologies? How can businesses and public institutions make the most of their energy efficiency programs?

EPA and other federal agencies are working with thousands of private sector partners to bring these technologies into more widespread use.

You can look for our "Energy Star" label to find energy-efficient computers, copiers, and other office equipment—as household appliances. We believe that, over the next fifteen years, these more energy-efficient products have the potential to cut the nation's utility bills by \$100 billion—and, most importantly, to reduce global warming pollution by an amount equal to taking seventeen million cars off the roads.

Right here in Tallahassee, the city government is doing something to prevent emissions of nearly fifteen million pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year. How? By upgrading the light bulbs on city property. And the taxpayers here will save some \$325,000 in electricity costs—each year.

That's just one city. The state of Florida will be reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 800 million pounds a year—and its annual utility costs by \$17 million—when it finishes its upgrading the fighting at state facilities. Right here on this campus, Florida State University will be reducing carbon emissions by twenty-seven million pounds—the equivalent of taking 2,700 cars off the road.

You get the picture. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Over time, as we increase the use of available technologies—and as new technologies come on line—this nation can make tremendous strides toward a future where prosperity and economic growth can co-exist with a cleaner, healthier environment.

As the great science writer, Arthur C. Clarke, once said: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Well, now is the time to believe in magic—and to believe in our own ingenuity.

But we're going to need more than magic to see us through.

Global warming is for real. We must squarely face its potential consequences.

I believe we can build a shared commitment and a consensus—among the American people, among industries, among the nations of the world—to develop the kinds of strategies and market-based approaches that will enable us to solve this enormous problem while enabling the economy to grow.

We owe it to our children—to all the children of the world—and all of the generations to come—to give it our best effort.

One hundred years from now, let the people of the world look back and say: "They saw the challenge. They answered the call. And they did not flinch the face of their responsibility to build a better world for us."

Thank you.