

**Statement of the Honorable William K. Reilly
before the
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety
Washington, D.C.
June 18, 2014**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for convening this session on one of the critical challenges our country faces. It is a privilege to appear with two of my predecessors—three if you count Ruckelshaus twice!—and Governor Whitman, who served after us.

Each of us, during our tenures, had to navigate the complexities of law, science, economics, public policy, the prevailing winds of politics and public sentiments, and more on any number of difficult issues to fulfill the intent of Congress and Americans' aspirations for both a healthy, productive environment and a prosperous economy. We did so in what Bill called a "fishbowl," all of it out in the open.

After I was nominated, my first briefing was on climate by Frank Press, president of the National Academy of Sciences, followed soon by briefings on EPA's reports on climate effects and policy options, commissioned by Administrator Thomas. At that time, climate science was a matter of computer modeling coupled with theory, notably the "greenhouse effect," which I'm sure you appreciate explains why the earth's atmosphere is hospitable to life. At the time, the concern was sufficient to prompt then-Secretary of State Jim Baker in his first statement on the topic to signal a policy of "no regrets"—we will consider those measures that address current priorities that also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The 1987 Montreal Protocol, which Lee helped negotiate, is an example of this kind of thinking.

With this as backdrop, President George H.W. Bush ensured that our Administration took climate change seriously. I met regularly with my counterparts from the European Union to discuss content, timing, targets, and other key issues. We hosted a major conference during the

President's term. And we negotiated with other countries the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which the President signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and submitted to the Senate for ratification, which occurred in October 1992. The Framework Convention remains, for the United States, the most important international treaty in effect on climate change.

That was 25 years ago. Today, the models are far more reliable and they are buttressed by literally thousands of credible scientific studies documenting changes underway. I hasten to add there are still many outstanding questions—the pace of change, tipping points, local impacts, fugitive methane emissions, and more. Earth's climate is a complex system and we do not have a complete picture. We welcome serious, constructive critiques that examine gaps, anomalies, uncertainties. That is how science advances our understanding of such complex issues.

That said, change is underway and we can expect to see many more disruptions, more intense storms, more wildfires, the spread of pests and diseases, storm surges that overwhelm coastal communities, heat waves, and other impacts on our health, on water resources, on food production, and on other sectors of our economy. The longer we delay, the more adverse the impacts will be, and the more expensive to address them.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, can help fend off more draconian impacts later this century. Yet I increasingly believe that we have a second, immediate agenda, namely to prompt states and communities and our federal agencies to begin to adapt to likely changes and to build up resiliency. If you read the *Washington Post's* June 1st front-page story on Norfolk, Virginia, you get an excellent picture of the dilemma that community faces—not to mention what the Navy's base there faces. Dealing with flooding and meeting future projections from storm surges will be costly, and the growing demands on federal, state, and local budgets come at a time when the country seeks to reduce federal debt and tame federal deficits.

In other words, not only is climate change likely to affect natural resources and public health, but it will have profound effects on our economy.

We have to take seriously that climate change and the associated disruptions are a global problem, as Members of Congress, policymakers, scientists, and virtually everyone I know have explicitly acknowledged. Absent action by China, India, and other fast-growing economies, what we do alone will not suffice. Action by the United States, if not sufficient, is nonetheless absolutely necessary if we are to have the credibility to negotiate with other countries, who typically fault the developed world for causing the problem and worry that carbon constraints will thwart their legitimate need for economic growth. We have to take this need for development seriously and frame our approach in the international arena with this in mind.

In this international context, I must express some disappointment that the debate between developed and developing countries has tended to focus more on how much financial aid advanced nations are willing to provide rather than on the substance of how much and how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in those nations. I have participated for years in the China Sustainable Energy Forum; at first, any mention of climate change triggered a lecture about how those who caused the problem should pay for fixing it globally. That has changed: as China has begun to experience serious impacts, especially in water resources, you now hear China's officials and academics taking the matter very seriously. It is now a matter of national self-interest that they respond and join constructively in international negotiations even as they continue to assert their national interest in development.

Markets the world over eagerly seek clean energy technologies. Well over a billion people do not have electricity. For many, it will be small-scale, renewable technologies that will help improve their lives, offer new economic opportunities, preserve essential medicines and reduce food waste as refrigeration becomes possible, and more.

Technology and innovation are a comparative advantage for our country that will help control what we can and help find ways to replace the most serious contributors to the climate challenge. This is an enormous opportunity for U.S. entrepreneurs and exporters even as we deploy more clean energy at home. Former Iowa Governor Chip Culver made wind power a priority and that state went from 5% to 20% of electricity generation from wind power in 5 years; importantly, the state attracted turbine and other manufacturers, which in turn spawned 200 new small businesses in their supply chains. When the Governor asked the companies what they most needed, the response was worker training and education. We can learn from this experience.

We have the know-how, the ingenuity, the entrepreneurial spirit, the ability to demonstrate leadership in tackling this challenge. While the President has taken many important steps, a full and constructive response is needed from Congress, and I encourage you and your colleagues to have the kinds of discussions that will lead to congressional action.

In closing, I have little doubt that the planet will endure major climate disruptions. As scientists have confirmed, there have been many such episodes in the past due to natural causes—changes in solar output, shifts in the earth’s orbit, meteor impacts, volcanic eruptions, and the like. But you would have to reject the “greenhouse effect” outright to conclude that human activities pumping millions of tons of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year are having little or no impact on the earth’s climate. That is simply not a tenable position. For me, the real question is about the future well-being of our communities, our settlements, our economy—in short, how hospitable this earth remains for future generations and for civilization as we know it.

Thank you.