

U. S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

**FULL COMMITTEE Hearing on
State, Regional, and Local Perspectives on Global Warming
Thursday, March 1, 2007 – 10:00 a.m.
406 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

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Mayor, City of Des Moines, Iowa**

Chairman Boxer, distinguished members of the Committee, good morning, and thank you for inviting me to testify about the important role of local governments in responding to global warming. My name is Frank Cownie, and I am the Mayor of the City of Des Moines, Iowa. My testimony today will focus on the leadership role that my city has played in practicing and promoting energy conservation.

As both the capital and largest city, Des Moines is the cultural, economic, and geographic center of the State of Iowa. About 200,000 people live in Des Moines, and the City is recognized as a center for government, education, business, culture, and the arts. Des Moines is also quickly becoming a national leader in using energy conservation and environmental protection strategies.

I signed the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement along with over 400 other Mayors because our residents recognize that there is a finite amount of energy and resources available. Scarcity of resources increases costs. We view this as a crucial issue in protecting our economic vitality and our high quality of life. Our quality of life is our single greatest asset in Iowa, and we are committed to protecting it and to minimizing costs that would jeopardize it.

That is why we have taken action at the local level. Last year I established the *Mayor's Task Force on Energy Conservation and Environmental Enhancement* to examine energy usage and environmental protection in Des Moines. We, as the local government, united the broad-based support of residents, businesses, faith-based and non-profit organizations. In addition to the

direction set by the Mayor's Task Force, my colleagues and I on the City Council have made sustainability part of our overall goals for the City. Our objective is to become a leader in promoting environmental sustainability and transportation alternatives. To that end, we are pursuing a number of green initiatives.

One of our first major initiatives was introducing hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles into our city fleet. Our Police Department now uses hybrid vehicles for neighborhood patrol and in the detective bureau. As a routine practice, our centralized fleet management staff strives to obtain greater fuel efficiencies every time they purchase replacement vehicles. This is accomplished by writing bid specifications for smaller vehicles or vehicles that utilize alternative fuels, like biodiesel and ethanol.

Another important piece of our goal for sustainability in Des Moines is about providing transportation options to give our residents alternatives to driving their cars. The Greater Des Moines region is building a one-of-a-kind trail system, with over 300 miles of recreational trails to connect Central Iowa. The City of Des Moines alone maintains 29 miles of trails, and we are adding more bike lanes to make it easier for our residents and visitors to bike and walk rather than drive their cars.

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART) was created last year as a regional approach to public transit. DART is planning to expand its routes and hours of operation. This year, for the first time, buses will run on Sundays, which will make it more convenient for our residents to get around without their cars. The City is also leading by partnering with the state and the business community to provide the initial seed money for a downtown shuttle. This service will encourage downtown workers to choose transit, again--instead of their cars, to get around the central city during the day. This will ultimately reduce energy consumption and emissions.

We're also working to improve the energy efficiency of our municipal buildings and infrastructure. We have improved lighting and installed timers in our City parking facilities and in some municipal buildings. We have replaced incandescent traffic signals with more energy-efficient LED bulbs to reduce our electricity consumption. This alone is saving the City \$120,000 on energy costs. We have done numerous facility roof insulation upgrades to reduce heating costs and emissions.

We have completed comprehensive upgrades in our fire stations and parks facilities. These include energy efficient windows and improved roof insulation. In one building, the roof insulation alone will reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 40%. As another unique improvement, we are installing a solar hot water heating system to augment an existing gas-fired water heater. A solar hot water heating system can supply, on average in the Midwest, 65% of the demand for hot water. This will result in significant energy savings and reduced carbon dioxide emissions. The City is also working on LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for municipal buildings, with one currently under construction. All of these improvements are part of previously planned and budgeted upgrades. In Des Moines, we view routine maintenance as an ongoing opportunity to pursue energy efficiency.

Our Park and Recreation Department staff and volunteers have been strong leaders in the sustainability movement, particularly as it relates to preserving our open land and green spaces. The Park and Recreation Department is pursuing water quality projects, natural management plans for parks, natural forest regeneration, and planting native species. By planting more trees and native prairie grasses, we reduce the need for irrigation, conserve water, and use less chemical fertilizers. In short, conservation has become our way of doing business in Des Moines parks. A "Green Design Checklist" helps to ensure conservation efforts are infused into the design of all parks projects.

For its efforts, the City of Des Moines Park and Recreation Department won a 2006 Urban Steward Award from the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District. The City of Des Moines was recognized for its recycling program as well. MidAmerica Recycling awarded Des Moines with a Certificate of Recognition for Recycling Excellence for recycling nearly 6,800 tons in 2006.

The City of Des Moines is also engaged in promoting the research and development of alternative fuel sources. We are in the process of selling land in our Agrimergent Technology Park to a company for a 100 million gallon ethanol production facility. As part of the contract, the business is required to produce a LEED-certified project and to pursue innovative technologies to reduce its natural gas consumption through alternative fuels that will be more environmentally beneficial and more cost-effective, such as biogas.

Finally, the Metro Waste Authority in Des Moines is recovering enough methane at our solid waste landfill to provide electricity for 10,000 homes. This electricity is sold and provides a revenue stream for the Authority. Like our other initiatives, this action not only benefits the environment, but it helps our economic bottom line.

In closing, I want to encourage the committee that federal action on this issue is needed now, because the challenge to protect our quality of life is one that every city and town in the country faces. We cannot address the issue on our own. We need your help.

First, it is important for you to enact legislation to create incentives to promote energy efficiency and reduce resource consumption. These incentives might include federal tax credits, CAFE standards, recycling standards, water use standards or packaging standards that take into account the life cycle costs of product manufacturing, use and disposal.

Second, it is essential for you to fund (a) research and development activities that can be commercialized, (b) greenhouse gas emissions inventories, and (c) demonstration projects in which municipalities like Des Moines can participate to engage our residents to DO JUST ONE THING.

Many of our local initiatives have been aimed internally at improving energy efficiency in our municipal buildings and fleet. The next step is to help our residents to recognize the environmental and economic benefits of practicing energy conservation. It can be as simple as using compact fluorescent light bulbs, dialing the thermostat down in winter and up summer, buying vehicles that use bio-fuels or hybrid technology, taking the bus to work, planning trips for efficiency, carpooling, walking, biking, and planting trees—all that result in saving money and in protecting resources for future generations. These are steps that every citizen can take.

Similarly, we need to convene our business partners and key greenhouse gas emitters and begin to empower them to take actions that will make a difference. Imagine all of the resources that could be conserved and costs averted. Imagine all of the new business opportunities that could result from increased market demand.

We have a choice. Either we can stay the course, working on our own with marginal success, or we can move forward in partnership with the federal government to create a significant, positive impact upon on our environment and economy. We choose to go forward. It is now time for federal action to invest in our future, our children's future, our grandchildren's future and with a vision for the next seven generations. We are committed to improving the quality of life in our communities and appreciate your leadership to assist us in accomplishing this far-reaching goal. Thank you.