

Testimony of William D. Ruckelshaus  
Before the Clean Air and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Thank you Senators Whitehouse, Sessions and other members of the Subcommittee for convening this hearing on a matter of enormous consequence for our future.

Several months ago, after talking with one another, the four former EPA administrators sitting in front of you found we were convinced by the overwhelming verdict of scientists that the earth was warming and that we humans were the only controllable contributor to this phenomenon. Given those facts we all signed an op ed piece that recommended that America get serious about reducing our contribution to changing the world's climate rather than simply sitting back and accepting the avoidable consequences.

If anything, new reports in the last three months have made the need to act even more urgent. It is hard to believe that there is any question of that.

- The IPCC report validates in the strongest terms the science of climate change and the projected impacts.
- The National Climate Assessment documents impacts occurring here in this country right now.
- And a report from the CNA Corporation highlights the national security and military readiness concerns due to climate change.

We have, as EPA administrators, served four Presidents over four decades. We have successfully wrestled with a variety of public health and environmental problems, all contentious, including severe automobile and industrial air pollution, widespread water pollution and the unacceptable effects of pesticides like DDT.

We have made progress. We have cut automobile emissions, for example, by 95% and greatly improved air quality while the number of cars has doubled. The hole in the ozone layer and acid rain are under control.

Inherent in all of these problems was uncertain science and powerful economic interests resisting controls. The same is true of climate change. In all of the cases cited the solutions to the problems did not result in the predicted economic and social calamity. Scientific uncertainty or the inevitable industry resistance does not mean that nothing should be done unless we are willing to suffer the consequences of inaction.

We believe there is legitimate scientific debate over the pace and effects of climate change but no legitimate debate over the fact of the earth's warming or over man's contribution. The models of the world's leading scientists predict rising seas, drought, floods, wildfires, and more severe and frequent storms. We are seeing impacts already. Since the ocean absorbs 25-30% of the carbon from stationary or mobile sources we thought the ocean was our friend. It was keeping significant amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. But our friend is paying a penalty. The carbon from the burning of fossil fuels is causing the acidity of the ocean to rise and is already threatening shellfish, coral reefs and other ocean species. The culprit is the same carbon that originated from fossil fuels that is contributing to planetary warming.

We also know that if America does not get serious about our responsibility to deal with this problem nothing much will happen in the rest of the world. Not taking action is a choice. It is a choice that means

we leave to chance the kind of future we want, and opt out of the solution to a problem that we are a big part of.

We like to speak of American exceptionalism. If we want to be truly exceptional then we should begin the difficult task of leading the world away from the unacceptable effects of our increasing appetites for fossil fuels before it is too late.

This is an extremely complex problem whose solutions are not straightforward. We believe this is no excuse for complacency or not stepping up to our responsibility.