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U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Senator Boxer's Remarks

"ASCENT 2014: Developing a New Social Contract for Public Investment in a Green Future, a Conference on Hawaii's Future"

April 15, 2014

(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

Before I begin my prepared remarks, I want to thank Senator Brian Schatz for inviting me here today and for all of his hard work on behalf of the Senate Climate Action Task Force. Last month, Senator Schatz led dozens of Democratic and Independent Senators from all across the country in an all-night, 14-hour session on the Senate floor calling on Congress to wake up to climate change.

Brian, I want to present you with the Climate Hero Award from the Senate Climate Action Task Force for your extraordinary efforts to make our Senate all-nighter such a great success. Thank you.

I am so pleased to be with you here today, along with leaders on climate change like Vice President Gore and Senator Schatz. Climate change has been a top concern for me for many years, and I know it is a top priority for all of you as well.

The purpose of this conference is to lay out a road map for Hawaii to move forward with clean energy, smart growth, and green building. This is an important challenge for you, because Hawaii is at ground zero for climate change, and the issues that you are addressing will help your state avoid the worst impacts of unchecked climate change.

Hawaii has already been proactive in addressing climate change. Since 1998, when Hawaii developed an initial Climate Action Plan, your state has moved forward with efforts to reduce emissions and to adapt to climate change. Hawaii has some of the strongest standards in the country to increase the generation of electricity from renewable resources – your goal is to have 70% of your energy from renewable sources by 2030. Your state also requires new single-family homes to have solar water heaters. I want to congratulate you for having the vision and the political will to protect the state you so love.

Everyone here knows that climate change is real, human activities are the primary cause, and the warming planet poses a significant threat to people and the environment. That is not my opinion -- that is the opinion of 97 percent of qualified scientists.

For decades, scientists have made predictions about the impacts of climate change and what will happen if we fail to address it. In the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) first report, which was issued 1990, we were warned that temperatures will increase at a rate greater than seen over the past 10,000 years and over 5 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the next century.

Two weeks ago, the IPCC issued a report that adds a tremendous sense of urgency for action on climate change, because the impacts are already occurring on all continents and across the world's oceans. The IPCC's report released in March identifies the serious threats to human health, food and water supplies, vital infrastructure, and the world's economy that will multiply as the planet warms and the climate is disrupted.

The lead author of the IPCC report released in March said: "We're now in an era where climate change isn't some kind of future hypothetical . . . We live in an area where impacts from climate change are already widespread and consequential."¹

According to another co-author of the March IPCC study, since 2007: "Things are worse than we had predicted" and "We are going to see more and more impacts, faster and sooner than we had anticipated."²

And just two days ago, the IPCC released its newest report that finds the situation has reached a critical point. This latest report makes clear that we have a path forward using the latest cost-effective and high-performing clean energy technologies to cut carbon pollution. But the longer we wait, the harder and more costly it will be.

According to one of the co-chairs of the report, "There is a clear message from science: To avoid dangerous interference with the climate system, we need to move away from business as usual."

A study published in the peer-review journal *Nature* in January estimates the planet will reach far greater levels of warming -- at least 7 degrees Fahrenheit -- by 2100 if we do not act.

In the intervening years between the IPCC's first climate report in 1990 and its most recent report, many climate scientists have made predictions that are now becoming a reality. Scientists and other experts have testified many times before my Committee about the severe impacts of climate change, including record-breaking warm temperatures, dramatic losses of Arctic sea ice, devastating floods, growing intensity of hurricanes and extreme weather, bleaching and dying coral reefs, and increases in wildfires and droughts.

Right here in Hawaii, we know overall rainfall has declined. When you do have heavy rains, they are much more intense and trigger flash floods, mudslides, and significant infrastructure impacts that isolate your communities.

We also know that warming oceans are impacting local reefs and marine life and that sea level rise is harming beaches, causing coastal erosion, and increasing coastal flooding.

¹ AP, "Global Warming Dials Up Our Risks, UN Report Says, March 31, 2014.

² AP, "Global Warming Dials Up Our Risks, UN Report Says, March 31, 2014.

Yet with all this in front of our eyes, we still face deniers. Let me be clear: the level of scientific certainty on man-made climate change is about the same as the consensus among top scientists that cigarettes are deadly.

Some of you may remember that up until the late 1990s, the tobacco industry scoffed at the best available scientific evidence proving that tobacco is addictive and causes cancer. Year after year, the tobacco industry refuted the science that showed the link between cigarettes and the threat to human health, as well as the Surgeon General's warning that nicotine was as addictive as heroin and cocaine. Let me share a few of the statements made by or on behalf of the tobacco industry.

A 1970 Tobacco Institute advertisement disputed the scientific finding that there is a connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, saying: "The Tobacco Institute does not -- and the public should not -- accept these claims at face value."

In 1971, Joseph Cullman, Chairman of Philip Morris, said "We do not believe that cigarettes are hazardous; we don't accept that."

In 1988, a lobbyist for the Tobacco Institute submitted written testimony for a Congressional hearing stating, "In sum, there is no medical or scientific basis for viewing cigarette smoking as an 'addiction.' The effort to disparage cigarette smoking as an 'addiction' can only detract from our society's attempt to meet its serious drug problem."

At Congressional hearings in 1994, executives from the 7 biggest tobacco companies testified that they "believe nicotine is not addictive," and a tobacco industry doctor said: "The proposed addiction warning and the assumption upon which it is founded are based neither in science nor fact and will have unintended harmful results."

In 1998, Walter Merryman, Vice President and Chief Spokesman for the Tobacco Institute, said "[W]e don't believe it's ever been established that smoking is the cause of disease."

But here's the thing: once we were all on the same page and admitted that nicotine causes cancer, the American people and our elected officials took steps to encourage tobacco cessation. And the percentage of Americans smoking by 2012 went down to 18 percent from 42 percent in 1964.

Investigative reporting has clearly ascertained that those who led the fight against health warnings on tobacco were involved in the climate denial movement from the beginning.³ The American people must understand these connections so they know who is on their side in this battle.

Let me remind you of some of the more memorable quotes on climate change from a few former Republican Presidential candidates.

In 2009, Representative Michelle Bachman (MN) said:

³ Vanity Fair, "While Washington Slept", May, 2006.

“Carbon dioxide is not a harmful gas; it is a harmless gas ... And yet we're being told that we have to reduce this natural substance and reduce the American standard of living to create an arbitrary reduction in something that is naturally occurring in the Earth.”

Texas Governor Rick Perry said in 2011:

“I think we're seeing it almost weekly or even daily, scientists who are coming forward and questioning the original idea that man-made global warming is what is causing the climate to change.”

Also in 2011, Rick Santorum, a former Senator from Pennsylvania, said:

“I believe the earth gets warmer and I also believe the earth gets cooler...the idea that man, through the production of CO2 . . . is somehow responsible for climate change is, I think, just patently absurd when you consider all the other factors, El Niño, La Niña, sunspots, moisture in the air. . . . To me, this is an opportunity for the left to create -- it's really a beautifully concocted scheme because they know that the earth is gonna cool and warm.”

Another Republican lawmaker, Representative Steve King (IA), said in 2013:

“It is not proven, it's not science. It's more of a religion than a science.”

By claiming that climate change does not exist, deniers not only try to refute what scientists have been warning us about for years. They also are going against the will of the American people. According to a *USA Today* poll, an overwhelming majority of the American public recognizes that climate change is real and is happening now, and there is strong support for action to address this growing threat.⁴

Regardless of party affiliation, Americans know we have a problem, and they want their government to act. One poll says young people think deniers are ignorant, out of touch, and crazy, and another says there is very strong support in both red and blue states for the Environmental Protection Agency's efforts to limit the amount of carbon pollution that power plants release.

There has also been a remarkable shift in how some of the nation's biggest corporations view the threat posed by climate change. More than 700 companies that drive the U.S. economy -- including Microsoft, Owens Corning, General Motors, the Portland Trail Blazers and candy maker Mars -- have signed a declaration calling for national action on climate change.

When you consider the scientific evidence that keeps mounting and the strong consensus among the American people and many large corporations, you would think there would be a clear path forward to address climate change, but unfortunately it is not that simple. Protecting the environment used to be a bipartisan issue, and there were strong leaders on both sides of the aisle when our landmark environmental laws were passed four decades ago.

On Capitol Hill, I was initially optimistic about bipartisan support to fight climate change. On October 7, 1992 -- one month before I was first elected to the Senate -- at least two-thirds of the

⁴ *USA Today*, “Poll: Americans see impact of global warming,” December 20, 2013

Senate voted to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In 2008, 54 Senators supported tackling climate change through comprehensive legislation, and in 2009, the House of Representatives passed climate change legislation by a vote of 219 to 212.

Unfortunately, in just a few short years those of us who want to take meaningful action have been forced instead to put our efforts into defending our landmark environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act, from devastating rollbacks by Republicans in the House. Special interests, including big oil, have erected what my colleague, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, calls a special interest “barricade of lies” around the Capitol.

This is nothing less than disastrous, and that is why Senator Whitehouse and I have formed the Senate Climate Action Task Force. On May 21st at 4:00 p.m. you are all invited to join us in a “Wake up Congress” rally in Washington, D.C. We intend to gather in front of the Capitol, and at a certain time alarm clocks will go off. We will synchronize everyone’s alarms at the rally, and we hope people across the country will set their alarms to show their support for action on climate change. I hope you, your friends, and your families make a lot of noise here in Hawaii.

We need to return to a time when Democrats and Republicans worked together to make sure our air was clean to breathe and our water was safe to drink. We also need to work together at the state and local level to accomplish things we cannot yet do in Washington, D.C.

We know we need to take action to protect families and communities from the worst impacts of climate change. We have already seen what happens when you throw the environment under the bus – just look at China, which has hazardous levels of air pollution and toxic emissions. According to a scientific study from the Health Effect Institute on leading causes of death worldwide, outdoor air pollution contributed to 1.2 million premature deaths in China in 2010, which is nearly 40 percent of the global total.

And to those who say carbon pollution is not a problem, just look at the endangerment finding that was started under the Bush Administration, which determined that current and future concentrations of carbon pollution are harmful to public health.

According to the 2009 endangerment finding by the Environmental Protection Agency:

“Climate change can affect ozone by modifying emissions of precursors, atmospheric chemistry, and transport and removal. There is now consistent evidence from models and observations that 21st century climate change will worsen summertime surface ozone in polluted regions of North America compared to a future with no climate change.”

Action to reduce carbon pollution will have a wide range of benefits to public health. Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress passed the modern Clean Air Act back in 1970, and strengthened it in 1990. Before this law was passed, smog levels in many of our cities were dangerously high.

For example, there were years in Los Angeles when many days featured "smog alerts" - meaning people had to be very cautious when they ventured outside. In 1976, there were 166 days when

health advisories were issued in Southern California to urge people with asthma and other people with lung sensitivities to stay indoors. In 35 years, the number of smog-related health advisories issued in Southern California dropped from 166 days in 1976 to zero days in 2010.

Because of the amazing work by our predecessors to enact strong environmental protections, the Clean Air Act has had four decades of measurable success. Despite the claims to the contrary by polluters, the Clean Air Act is working, and if we do not address carbon pollution, the progress that we have made will be reversed.

If we address climate change by cutting carbon pollution, we can reduce many types of air pollutants that threaten human health. We all benefit from having clean air to breathe -- it literally saves lives. So, carbon pollution is not harmless in any way.

Today I want to share a number of things that I am working on at the federal level and in California to meet our climate change challenge.

Of course, I still believe the gold standard solution is to put a price on carbon. Last year, Senator Bernie Sanders and I introduced the Climate Protection Act. Our bill would establish a fee on each ton of carbon pollution emitted from the petroleum, coal, and natural gas that we produce and import. Under our bill, 60 percent of the revenue would be returned directly to taxpayers, and the remaining portion would be reinvested in promoting renewable energy, enhancing job growth and worker opportunities in a clean energy economy, and increasing the resilience in the nation's infrastructure.

When there is a price on carbon to reflect its true impact to society, clean energy becomes the preferred and clear choice, and it will move us much faster to a low carbon world. Not only will this help us avoid the most devastating impacts of climate change, it will create good jobs that cannot be shipped overseas, such as installing solar roofs, building and maintaining wind turbines, and retrofitting homes and buildings to be more energy efficient.

There is a growing consensus that carbon pricing is the most effective way to fight global warming, but that consensus has not yet hit the Senate floor.

But there are other things we can do, such as increasing gas mileage, advancing new forms of low carbon fuels, promoting clean energy like wind and solar, improving the energy efficiency on many fronts -- from buildings to household appliances -- and supporting the states in their efforts to address climate change.

Last year, I introduced the Promoting Efficiency and Savings in Government Act, which builds on current efforts to improve energy efficiency in government buildings. The Federal government is the nation's biggest landlord. So, this effort is important.

In addition to improving energy efficiency, we must make it a national priority to move to clean energy and green technology. Some people still claim that would cost too much, but the facts prove the skeptics wrong yet again, because a healthy environment goes hand in hand with a healthy economy.

I am encouraged that significant steps under President Obama's Climate Action Plan to address climate change are already underway, including establishing limits on carbon pollution from cars and trucks. The Obama Administration is also working on carbon pollution limits for new and existing power plants. Together, these efforts address the nation's two largest sources of carbon pollution and put us on track to reduce our nation's carbon pollution 17% by 2020.

One thing we should NOT do is build the Keystone XL pipeline. Tar sands oil is much more carbon intensive, producing 17 percent more carbon per barrel than domestic crude oil, and if the dirty tar sands oil is produced for the Keystone XL pipeline, it will open up production even more. Canada is seeking to increase tar sands production by 300 percent by 2030.

There is a growing concern about the harmful health impacts of tar sands oil and the Keystone XL pipeline. I, along with Senator Whitehouse, have written to Secretary of State John Kerry asking for a comprehensive health impact study on tar sands oil and the Keystone XL pipeline.

We have been joined in this request by National Nurses United, which is the nation's largest professional association of registered nurses --185,000 nurses; the American Public Health Association, which is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world; and the National Association of County & City Health Officials, which represents 2700 local health departments across the country.

In a letter to Secretary Kerry, National Nurses United (NNU) stated:

“NNU concurs with Senators Boxer and Whitehouse that what is known today about the health hazards associated with the expansion of the tar sands could well be just a sampling of a much larger set of significant risks to human health. NNU believes that the health consequences of Keystone XL have been substantially ignored in State Department's Final Environmental Impact Statement, and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.”

I could not agree more. Current information tells us that misery follows the tar sands from extraction, to transportation, to refining, to waste storage. We should leave them where they are.

The U.S. has proven we can continue to protect the environment and grow the economy. Over the last forty years, despite dire predictions from polluters, since the passage of the Clean Air Act, air pollution has dropped 68 percent and America's GDP has grown 212 percent.

It is in America's DNA to turn a problem into an opportunity, and that is what we have done by being a pioneer in the green technology industry. Landmark environmental laws have bolstered an environmental technology and services sector that employs an estimated 3.4 million people, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And many of these jobs, like installing solar roofs, cannot be outsourced. In 2013, the U.S. solar industry employed over 142,000 Americans. Last year alone, that industry added almost 24,000 additional jobs -- nearly a 20 percent increase.

Clean energy solutions and green technology are critical to future U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace. Over the next decade, investment in clean energy technologies could reach \$2.3 trillion and represent increased job and export market opportunity. This is good news for American workers.

Our nation has shown great leadership on many important global issues, and what we do here in the United States has impacts around the world. When our nation reduces its carbon pollution, it makes a difference, because the U.S. accounts for roughly twenty percent of the global carbon pollution. The destructive impacts that the IPCC and other climate scientists are telling us we face if we do not act can be successfully avoided. And as the latest IPCC report makes clear, the longer we wait to act, the harder and more expensive it will be.

Addressing climate change with clean energy technology is a win-win for the U.S. economy. The newest IPCC report also underscores that we already have the clean energy tools we need to avert catastrophic climate change. In 2012, renewables, led by wind, hydropower, and solar, accounted for over half of the new electricity capacity added globally.

Just the way I am proud of Hawaii, I am so proud of my home state of California because we understand that we cannot wait any longer if we are going to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. In my state, we have already seen record high temperatures and droughts, more frequent and intense wildfires, and reduced water supplies.

California is leading the way to address climate change, while also saving money for families and businesses. California has stepped up to the plate with a comprehensive plan in place to improve air quality by reducing carbon pollution to 1990 levels by building cars that use less gas, requiring cleaner electricity, and making homes more energy efficient.

My state's fuel efficiency standards that require the equivalent of 54.5 miles per gallon have become a model for the nation. By 2025, 15 percent of new cars sold in California will be powered by electricity or hydrogen fuel. California's clean energy plan also requires a 10 percent cut in the amount of carbon in fuels by 2020. Since 2011, this carbon reduction in fuels has already resulted in the equivalent of taking half a million vehicles off the road.

California's strong clean energy standard means that 33 percent of the state's electricity supply will come from renewable sources by 2020 – up from 23 percent today.

And California has put a price on carbon that requires power plants to pay for carbon pollution credits, which has raised more than \$1 billion. That revenue has been directed to state programs that address climate change or will soon be returned to Californians as a Climate Credit that they can reinvest in energy efficiency upgrades to their homes.

I ask you rhetorically what is the right thing to do for your children?

Save, if you can, for their college years? Or let them drown in student loan debt?

Pull your child from an oncoming vehicle? Or wait for someone else to do it?

Keep your kids at home when there is a massive hurricane warning? Or bring them to safe shelter?

We all know the answers to these questions. There is no ambiguity, and there should be no ambiguity as to whether we should take steps now to avert the worst impacts of climate change.

It is the right thing to do. It is the moral thing to do.

And here's the good news. Clean energy is good for your lungs and energy efficiency is good for your pocketbook.

Both create good paying jobs that cannot be outsourced. And as we move forward, we will make sure consumers are protected.

That is the right thing to do. That is the moral thing to do.

Hawaii, California, and many other states get it. President Obama gets it.

And as the voters get it across this great nation, someday soon the House and Senate will get it too.

And our nation will lead the world in deeds and actions that will save the planet. And, after all, that in the end is our ultimate responsibility.

Thank you.

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