

Actively Engaged

by U.S. Ambassador William McCormick, October 5th, 2007.

U.S. Ambassador Bill McCormick responds to Gwynne Dyer's criticisms of U.S. Climate Change Policy.

[As prepared]

The United States takes the issue of climate change very seriously, and our climate change policy is ambitious, but realistic.

Earlier this year President Bush declared his wish to see America and other concerned nations set national midterm targets and a long-term global goal for reducing greenhouse gases by the end of 2008. As part of the effort to achieve this, last week in Washington, D.C. the United States hosted the Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change -- an initiative based on the fundamental premise that climate change is a generational challenge requiring a global response.

During last week's meeting, representatives discussed each nation's activities related to energy security and climate change, worked through opportunities and priorities for progress after 2012, and identified urgent needs for research and development around clean energy technologies. Representatives heard from nongovernmental organizations and the private sector about the funding challenges they face, as well as about technologies now available to them and those in development.

This was the first in a series of meetings that will include 17 of the world's major economies, both developed and developing, as well as the United Nations and the European Union. This new international initiative was endorsed by G-8 leaders in June and by the 21 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders in Sydney earlier this month. Combined, participating countries represent about 85 percent of the global economy and 80 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

Kyoto Protocol targets expire in 2012, so time is of the essence. This series of meetings is intended to accelerate discussions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and contribute to a global agreement under the Convention by 2009.

There is already international consensus that addressing climate change is a complex and long-term challenge. Likewise, there is a common recognition that the challenge will require a combination of actions that protect the environment, encourage economic growth, and ensure energy security. Nations around the world are already working in partnership to find the technological solutions that hold the key to reducing greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Indeed, our two governments have been working closely together for several years under the United States–New Zealand Climate Change Partnership, which addresses climate change in the agriculture, forestry, and energy sectors, and co-ordinates bilateral climate change science, development, and policy issues.

The process will put special emphasis on how major economies can, in close cooperation with the private sector, accelerate the development and deployment of clean technologies -- a critical component in the effective global reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It will also create incentives for key sectors such as advanced coal and transportation, strengthen emissions reporting and harmonize how we measure both emissions and emission reductions.

A post-2012 framework should recognize the diversity of solutions and approaches that nations will take, based on their needs and resources, to combat climate change. Rather than a “one size fits all” approach, the United States is advocating flexibility, innovation, and teamwork on a global scale; for instance, amending our tax codes to encourage the purchase of solar panels and hybrid automobiles. Others will have their own creative ways for governments to lead.

The President's initiative recognizes that responsible action to address climate change and economic growth go hand in hand. It is only through strong economies that we can sustain the investment necessary to achieve lasting solutions. While all countries must do their part to reduce emissions, we should not seek to impose on any countries measures or frameworks that thwart their efforts to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people for better and more prosperous lives.

If the world's major economies can agree on a way forward, that consensus could accelerate the prospects of broader agreement through the United Nations. And it could lead to agreement on the kind of sustained global commitment it will take – from developed and developing nations alike – to protect and manage the planet's fragile balance for this generation and for generations to come.