



JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
RICE UNIVERSITY

WELCOMING REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE
“EMERGING U.S. CLIMATE POLICY: TRANS-ATLANTIC
APPROACHES AND MARKET HARMONIZATION”

BY

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Welcoming Remarks: “Emerging U.S. Climate Policy”

Good morning, Your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to welcome you to today’s conference on “Emerging U.S. Climate Policy: Trans-Atlantic Approaches and Market Harmonization.” This conference aims to explore U.S. and European policy responses to climate change and to analyze how future international policies may evolve. Our conference is designed to facilitate a positive exchange of ideas with our trans-Atlantic allies on this challenging area of public policy. This event is a continuation of the discussions from the February 2008 conference, “Beyond Science: The Economics and Politics of Responding to Climate Change.”

A onetime chairman and CEO of Chrysler Corporation once complained, “We’ve got to pause and ask ourselves: How much clean air do we need?” Well, we know the answer to that one!

These days, we no longer have the luxury of losing our focus on energy issues. A rise in global average temperatures above 3 degrees centigrade could place not only our national security but also our very global security — the planet itself — in peril.

Scientists say that huge reductions in world greenhouse gas emissions will be necessary to avoid major, and perhaps irreversible, harm to our planet. This means that any successful international response to climate change would very likely require a massive economic transformation of the global energy system.

Over the past year, the issue of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions policy has climbed to the top of the agenda in political and media circles in the United States. The 110th Congress introduced more than 125 bills, resolutions and amendments specifically addressing climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. Still, in the absence of federal legislation, many U.S. states have adopted their own individual greenhouse gas emissions policies, such as New York and California.

In addition, a number of states have formed multistate coalitions, which have pledged to take joint action to reduce emissions, such as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative in New England

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and the Western Climate Initiative. Goals include developing a market-based emissions trading system, producing 30 percent of electricity from renewables by 2030 and requiring carbon-capture standards on coal-fired plants by 2020.

President-elect Obama has promised to put climate change at the top of his policy agenda. He has emphasized his commitment to creating green-collar jobs, instituting carbon controls, perhaps through a cap-and-trade system, and passing into law a national renewable energy standard. The incoming administration will have the challenge of harmonizing not only these disparate state and regional programs but also bringing them into line with federal goals and, perhaps, the standards set by the European Union.

Our European allies, who are well-represented here this morning, face similar but not always identical issues. France, for instance, generates 80 percent of its electricity from nuclear power. The European Union also faces some different geopolitical challenges. Increased use of Russian natural gas may prove a climate-friendly approach, but this raises questions about the security of Europe’s energy supply. Nevertheless, it is through cooperation — not conflict over energy resources — that the world will be able to address the challenge of climate change.

As legislation moves forward in both America and Europe, we will have to be vigilant that trade protectionism does not reappear in the guise of discouraging high carbon imports. We are moving into lean economic times. It is all too easy to resort to protectionism as a means — however short-sighted — of sustaining domestic industries.

Last but not least, the research, development and deployment of low-carbon energy technologies will not be successful if these are concentrated solely in the United States and Europe. The clean energy revolution may begin with us, but it cannot end there.

I would like to thank the British and French Consulates General, Suez Energy North America, ConocoPhillips, and Baker Botts L.L.P., for their support of this conference. A generous grant from the ConocoPhillips Foundation has enabled the Baker Institute to embark upon a major climate change research project, which includes today’s conference.

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Now, I am pleased to introduce our esteemed opening keynote speakers: Dr. Neal Lane, Baker Institute senior fellow in science and technology; and His Excellency Monsieur Brice Lalonde. Both have been at the center of U.S. and European climate change policy.

Dr. Lane is a University Professor, a professor of physics and a former provost of Rice University. During the Clinton administration, Dr. Lane served first as director of the National Science Foundation and then as science adviser to President Bill Clinton. Since leaving public service, he has been a leading advocate for American action to address climate change.

His Excellency Brice Lalonde is the special ambassador for France in charge of climate change negotiations. Over the last decade, as an adviser to the private sector and local governments, he has implemented environment, energy and development programs and policies in developing countries. Prior to this, he was chairman of the Round Table on Sustainable Development at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris. From 1988 to 1992, Ambassador Lalonde served as the French Minister of the Environment.

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