

**Oral Testimony of Frances Beinecke
President, Natural Resources Defense Council**

**Hearing On
America's Climate Security Act**

October 24, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding America's Climate Security Act.

My name is Frances Beinecke. I am the President of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

NRDC is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment.

Founded in 1970, NRDC has more than 1.2 million members and online activists nationwide. We have made solving global warming our highest priority.

We are working with Mayors, Governors, and legislators to advance sound policies and we are a founding member of the U.S. Climate Action Partnership with many of America's largest businesses.

Chairman Lieberman, and Ranking Member Warner, let me congratulate you both on the introduction of your global warming bill, America's Climate Security Act.

NRDC views your legislation as a strong start on enacting comprehensive global warming legislation. We look forward to working closely with you, Chairman Boxer, and the other members of the Subcommittee and Committee, to report legislation to the full United States Senate.

The time for action on global warming has already been delayed too long. Every day we learn more about the ways in which global warming is already affecting our planet.

As described in a full page story in Monday's Washington Post, dramatic new satellite pictures show that summertime arctic ice has declined by 40 percent since 1979 (Figure 1). It is abundantly clear from this and other evidence that the impacts of a disrupted climate are confronting us today, not years from now.



Figure 1: ARCTIC MELTDOWN - Arctic summer sea ice extent in 1979 and 2007.

Source: NASA.

Climate scientists warn us that we must act now to begin making serious emission reductions if we are to avoid truly dangerous global warming pollution concentrations.

Because carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for many decades or longer, the climate change impacts from today's pollution will continue throughout the 21st century and beyond.

A growing body of scientific opinion has formed that we face extreme dangers if global average temperatures are allowed to increase by more than 2 degrees Fahrenheit from today's levels.

To prevent such increases, we need to halt U.S. emissions growth in the next few years and then cut emissions by approximately 80% by mid-century.

This goal is ambitious, but achievable. It can be done through an annual rate of emissions reductions that ramps up to about a 4% reduction per year. (See Figure 2.)

But if we delay, and emissions continue to grow at the business-as-usual trajectory for another 10 years, the annual emission reduction rate needed to stay on the 450 ppm path would double to 8% per year.

This is shown in Figure 2 in my written testimony.

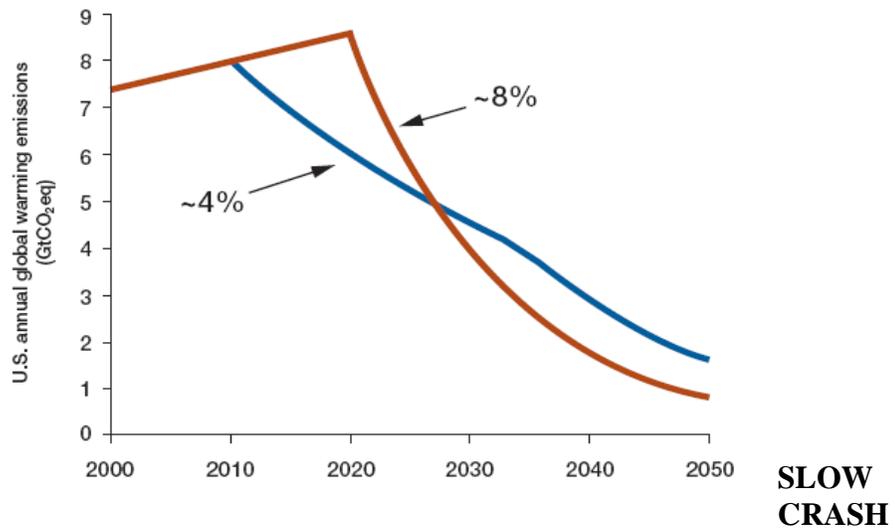


Figure 2:
START...
(OR BURN) FINISH
 Source: Union of Concerned Scientists.

We cannot afford to wait until we are faced with the need to cut emissions 8 percent per year.

Waiting also means that billions of dollars will be misspent on outmoded technology that will “lock in” high carbon emissions for many decades to come.

More than 20 trillion dollars will be spent globally on new energy technologies between now and 2030.

How this money is invested over the next decade will determine whether we can realistically avoid the worst effects of global warming.

We have the solutions – cleaner energy sources, new vehicle technologies and industrial processes and enhanced energy efficiency.

We just lack the policy framework to push business investments in the right direction and to get these solutions in the hands of consumers.

The Lieberman-Warner bill, America's Climate Security Act (S. 2191), is a major step towards establishing that framework.

NRDC greatly appreciates the improvements we have seen since you distributed the outline for your bill in August. In particular, increasing the emission reductions required by 2020 from 10% to 15% sends a strong signal that now is the time to invest in clean technologies.

We also appreciate that the bill includes mechanisms to manage abatement costs without resorting to a so-called "safety valve." The fundamental problem with the safety valve is that it breaks the cap without ever making up for the excess emissions.

We urge you to continue to reject efforts to include a safety valve.

There are many other positive features of your bill, but since time is short, allow me to highlight a few key areas where I believe improvements are warranted:

1. Scientific Review of Targets: The bill requires the National Academy of Sciences to assess whether the emission reductions required by the bill are being achieved, and whether such reductions will be sufficient to avoid dangerous global warming. However, there is no provision for adjustment of the reduction goals, if needed. **The bill should be revised to allow EPA to take all necessary actions to avoid dangerous global warming by requiring additional reductions.**

2. Coverage: The bill would cap approximately 75 percent of U.S greenhouse gas emissions, thereby reducing total greenhouse gas emissions by 13-19 percent by 2020 and 51-63 percent by 2050. **Since additional reductions will be needed to keep pace with science, coverage of the bill should be increased, for example, by covering emissions from natural gas used in buildings.**

3. Complementary Performance Standards: Performance standards for key sectors are an important complement to an overarching emissions cap. The bill includes some important complementary standards for energy efficiency, but additional performance standards are needed to stop further construction of new coal plants that do not control their carbon emissions.

The Sanders-Boxer bill contains two complementary performance standards for coal plants, which we urge you to add to S.2191.

The first standard is a CO₂ emissions standard that applies to new power investments and is based on a standard already in place in California.

The second standard is a low-carbon generation obligation for coal-based power, which would encourage companies to invest early in deploying carbon capture and disposal (CCD) technologies. Coal based electricity generators would have to get some of their power (or purchase credits equivalent to such power) from coal fired-power plants that actually capture and dispose of their greenhouse gases, thereby spreading the cost of new CCD plants throughout the coal-fired generation sector.

Other complementary policies should also be considered for sectors such as transportation and renewables.

- We urge Congress to immediately enact an energy bill including the CAFE standards passed by the Senate and the Renewable Electricity Standard passed by the House.**

- **NRDC also supports a Low Carbon Fuel Standard, such as the one included in Senator Boxer's Advanced Clean Fuels Act of 2007.**

4. Allocation of Allowances

The Lieberman/Warner bill devotes substantial allowances to important public purposes, but the bill initially provides too many free allowances to emitters. **Although NRDC appreciates the substantial improvements that have been made in this area, including eliminating the perpetual free allocation to emitters, NRDC recommends further reducing the starting percentage of free allowances to emitters and phasing them out faster --within 10- 15 years of enactment.** This will free up needed resources for other important purposes.

5. Global Warming and National Security

One final point, I would like to make relates to the issue of global leadership.

The impacts of global warming will be felt to a much greater extent by vulnerable communities abroad, particularly those in the least developed countries that bear the smallest share of responsibility for increases in greenhouse gas concentrations.

The average American is responsible for many times more emissions than an average citizen of most African countries.

Providing assistance for international adaptation is not only the right thing to do, it is also in our national interest.

Global warming is a destabilizing force that will act against our hopes for the advancement of human rights and democracy.

It will elevate the risk of displacement, famine, and poverty—the kind of conditions in which violence, oppression, and radical ideologies can flourish.

But our motive for providing help should not rest solely on whether these countries are a “security” threat, but also because this is the right thing to do, and because we have a crucial opportunity to ameliorate worldwide suffering by assisting these nations in adopting more sustainable energy and development paths.

Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Warner, you have stepped forward at a key moment in history and you are to be commended for your vision, leadership and courage on this profoundly important issue.

Together with Chairman Boxer, and the other members of the Committee, the work that you and your staff have done on this bill marks an important milestone in the movement toward enactment of strong, bipartisan global warming legislation.

We look forward to further progress, and we at NRDC stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be pleased to answer any questions.