

International Cooperation to Combat Climate Change

Written by Mike Honda

Tuesday, 18 September 2007 19:00

I recently addressed the Latin American Economic Forum in New York City on the impact of climate change and the role of the United States in the issue. Below are selections from my speech: **On the need for international cooperation to address climate change:**

For better or for worse, climate policy has always been and will always be a global issue. What we do here in the United States impacts Nicaraguan climate, and what our neighbors do in Brazil, impacts the Canadian climate. Now that Democrats are in charge of the U.S. Congress, we are beginning to take legislative action on energy and climate change that focuses on both our own country and on our relationships with our neighbors. ... Any policy changes our neighbors make will have an impact on all of us. The interaction of natural cycles - such as the water cycle, the carbon cycle, and the redistribution of heat in the atmosphere - are all affected by human activity across the globe and know no political boundaries. That is why our neighbors in the Americas are our logical allies. But one obstacle to a transition to renewable energy for developing nations is the cost - they don't have the luxury of thinking about expensive energy solutions.

I also spoke about the heavy cost that developing nations pay through a dependence on oil:

For the poorest countries, energy is a source of their poverty. About 38 of the world's poorest countries are net importers of oil, and 25 of them import all of their oil. As oil prices rise, these countries are impacted disproportionately. The top recipients under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative are spending the money they save from debt relief on the rising price of oil rather than children's education, fighting HIV/AIDS, or clean water. Developing countries are also the ones most susceptible to the climate change caused by the use of fossil fuels, in part because the world's poor live in areas more prone to natural disasters, drought, and disease. Famine that may result from climate change could potentially displace more than 250 million people worldwide by 2050, which will destroy communities and disrupt the institutions that countries rely upon and impact the rest of the world as well.

We need to develop and implement solutions now:

For example, shortly before our August recess, the House of Representatives passed an initiative that will require utility companies to produce 15 percent of their power from renewable sources by 2020. That legislation also improved efficiency standards for appliances, lighting and buildings. On the global level, this bill created the position of Ambassador at Large for Global Climate Change and it promotes international energy efficiency standards and United States involvement in other international partnerships to address energy issues and climate change. We still have a long way to go before this bill is signed into law – we have to negotiate with the Senate and then get something through the President. Now we are also looking at legislation to address global warming, which we hope to develop through this fall. This is all a process that is

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still far from finished, but the wheels are already turning. I also hope that we make a more aggressive effort in the United States to shift away from fossil fuels. Not only are they proven to bring a high environmental price tag, but they also get us involved in sensitive geopolitical situations that also have significant expenses associated with them. ... One of the most important things the United States can do is to help make these solutions affordable. By adopting policies that increase the size of the market for renewable energy here, we can reduce prices and make it more affordable for developing countries. A way to do that is investing in new technologies such as nanotechnology that can help improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of renewable energy sources. A bill I introduced, the Nanotechnology Advancement and New Opportunities Act would invest in energy related nanotechnology research. I know that the United States has fallen behind in the past few years, but I am hopeful that with new political leadership at the helm, we can reclaim our position of prominence. It is not something that we choose to do; it is something that we must do to ensure the future of our planet and our species.