



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

Climate Change, Energy, and the Americas Forum Synopsis

On May 23, 2007, I convened a Forum on Climate Change, Energy, and the Americas, along with my colleagues Representatives Jerry McNerney, Hilda Solis, Jay Inslee, Sam Farr, and Dennis Moore. The forum featured distinguished scholars and representatives from North, South, and Central America, who discussed critical environmental and energy policy issues relevant to all the Americas. Panelists have significantly contributed to international policy on climate change, including work on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Kyoto protocol.

The Panel Featured:

Dr. Graciela Chichilnisky (Moderator), UNESCO Professor of Mathematics and Economics and Director Columbia Consortium for Risk Management, Columbia University, who was a Lead Author of IPCC and the main architect of Kyoto Protocol's market-based greenhouse gas "cap and trade" system.

Chairman Hernan Carlino, Argentina, United Nations Executive Committee of Clean Development Mechanism, Chair of the Kyoto Protocol CDM Accreditation Committee (Bonn) of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change

Professor Torcuato Di Tella, Argentina, Sociologist and Political Sciences, Author, Former Minister of Culture

Professor Peter Eisenberger, Columbia University, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Expert in Solar Energy, Founder of the Columbia University Earth Institute and Director Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory. Founder and former Director of Materials Institute at Princeton University

Ambassador Gustavo Guzman Saldana, Bolivia

Professor Klaus Lackner, Columbia University, Expert in carbon sequestration, Chairman of Chemistry Department Engineering School and Director LENFEST Institute, Columbia University

Luis Gilberto Murillo-Urrutia, former Governor of Choco, Colombia, Senior Fellow on International Policy, Phelps Stokes Fund, former Director of Environmental Protection Agency, Choco, former Deputy Director of Environmental Administration, Bogota

Dan Restrepo, Center for American Progress, Director of The Americas Project

Alvaro Umana, Costa Rica, Expert in Environment and Economics - former Minister of Environment, currently Costa Rica's Representative to Inter American Development Bank.

I was truly amazed with the breadth and depth of knowledge of all the panelists and my Congressional colleagues, and I believe that the forum was both constructive and enlightening. By addressing the diverse issues that face all the Americas, the complexity of shifting energy and environmental policies, and the need for collaborative solutions, the forum contributed significant and new elements to the ongoing dialogue of how to best address human-induced climate change, while considering the unique needs of developing nations in the Americas. As such, I wanted to share with you some of the highlights of the forum.

The following key issues and proposals were discussed:

- The climate system is a shared resource. The policies of individual nations which impact the atmosphere, and contribute to global warming have an impact on all others. Similarly, mitigation strategies taken by one nation can benefit all others. Consequently, there is a great need for collaboration across the Americas to jointly address environmental and energy issues.
- Much could be gained from holding regular hemispheric forums on climate change and energy policy, and with representatives from across North, South, and Central America to participate in U.S. planning on climate change.
- Through collaboration, a Western Hemisphere proposal to fight climate change could be prepared in advance of the Bali Meetings in December 2007 where the international community will meet to discuss continuation of the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.
- Current methods of energy production are so dependent on the combustion of fossil fuels that appreciable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will only be possible with carbon sequestration. Many forms of sequestration are possible, such as no-till agriculture, carbon capture at emission sources, and reforestation, as well as promising new solar-powered technology to extract carbon from the atmosphere.
- Solar energy is the renewable energy source that has the greatest potential for increased capacity in the long term, and should be the focus of research and technology development. Other forms of renewable energy may be useful during transition phases, but may not have the capacity or carbon-reducing potential of solar.
- The United States can learn from the actions that other nations have taken to reduce carbon emissions and to end their reliance on imported oil. Costa Rica, for example, has implemented a carbon tax that provides funds for reforestation and sustainable development. Costa Rica is also shifting more of its energy production to renewable energy, such as hydroelectric, wind, geothermal, and biomass.
- Resources and energy needs vary between nations. A solution for one nation may not be transferable to another. While biofuels are effective renewable alternatives in South America, a mass transition to biofuels in the U.S. using current technology is neither feasible nor desirable considering the land needs for food production, water scarcity, and current fuel demands.
- The harmful consequences of global warming will most likely have disproportionate impacts on poor developing nations. Drought, harmful temperature increases, rising sea level, and habitat destruction will most greatly harm the people in developing nations, which have produced the least amount of carbon dioxide. Industrial nations have a moral obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent this environmental injustice.
- Indigenous people, who depend on biodiversity and healthy forests for their livelihood, stand to lose the most from global warming and continued environmental destruction. Their carbon-neutral way of life is endangered by deforestation and land grabbing in the name of economic development. We may learn from those who live in harmony with nature that exploiting the Earth is not living well.

- A new, comprehensive energy policy for the Americas can address poverty issues, energy security, and global warming. Improved access to new renewable energy technology can promote sustainable growth and economic development in developing nations.
- Market driven mechanisms can provide a source of funding for developing nations to implement greenhouse gas reduction strategies. The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the UN Convention on Climate Change allows industrial nations to invest in measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in developing nations. Such investment would qualify for matching financial support from the European Union and Japan. If the United States were to participate in this structure, the investment could be even more efficient than reducing emissions domestically, because of the reduced cost of implementing measures in developing nations.

As the House of Representatives moves forward on legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote energy security, please consider the views that were expressed in this forum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael M. Honda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress