



Staking Jersey's Claim on Climate Change

by Jon S. Corzine, Governor, State of New Jersey

More than 40 years ago, President John F. Kennedy rallied the nation to put a man on the moon. The challenge seemed overwhelming at the time, but spurred on by the security threats of the Cold War era, America proved up to the task and made great strides in technological innovation in the process.

Today, the reality of a changing climate should serve as a clarion call to a new generation. Much like the space race of the 1960's, global warming represents a unique economic opportunity that comes wrapped in a very real threat to our security. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has not only squandered this opportunity, it has made the problem worse through delay and inaction. This has opened the door to bold, innovative action at the state level, and I'm proud to say that New Jersey has met the challenge.

On Friday, I signed a bill adopting ambitious goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in New Jersey. The legislation calls for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, approximately a 20 percent reduction, followed by further reduction of emissions to 80 percent below 2006 levels by 2050. New Jersey is only the third state in the nation to make greenhouse gas reduction goals law. In the absence of a uniform federal policy to curb global warming, our action was born of necessity.

The economic threats of a failure to address global warming vary among states and regions. For New Jersey, they include the effect of sea-level rise on the state's densely developed coastline and the increased incidence and severity of flooding for a peninsula state. New Jersey's economy is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change given our port, agriculture and coastal-based tourism sectors.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will support our economic growth strategy by creating markets for efficient and clean energy technologies and by spurring technical innovation and job growth. Moving aggressively now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also place New Jersey's economy at a competitive advantage in responding to the requirements of an anticipated federal climate change initiative.

Other governors around the country have also recognized the economic opportunities presented by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. My administration and my counterparts in nine other Northeastern states are leading the charge through our work on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. Governors of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Washington, and Illinois

have all set aggressive greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for their states. Additionally, governors of five Western states have formed the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative.

While states are currently taking the lead, we need federal action to set minimum requirements to allow businesses to make long-term capital planning decisions. Absent a unifying federal policy that sets minimum requirements, multiple state efforts will create an environment of uncertainty for business.

Federal legislation should also facilitate the role of states as policy innovators. Any federal program should explicitly prevent federal pre-emption of state programs that go beyond federal minimum requirements and initiatives. States are currently the leaders in addressing climate change, as they were with Superfund and Right to Know legislation. It is absolutely imperative that any federal program continues to allow the states to push the envelope in developing innovative technologies and initiatives to reduce emissions.

To build momentum for federal action, I have reached out to other governors to call for the formation of a Governors' Climate Protection Leadership Council. I believe it is vital for states to coordinate their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to accelerate implementation of state-level emissions reductions policies and to drive the policy debate at the federal level. Such a coalition will help amplify our call for a strong federal climate-change initiative with room carved out for states to continue their leadership and innovation.

At every stage of technological transformation, from the Industrial Revolution to the technology revolution, there have been individuals who have claimed that change is contrary to our interests; at every stage, these naysayers have been proven wrong.

Climate change is real.

We must act now to seize this day, or one day another nation will plant its flag and stake its claim as the pioneer on the greatest environmental and technological issue facing the world today. America is uniquely suited to these challenges. We have the people, the technology and all of the economic advantages.

What those of us in public life must supply now is leadership and the will to act.