

## VPIRG Testimony on S.R.7—Senate Resolution Relating to Climate Change

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, or VPIRG. As you may know, VPIRG is the largest consumer and environmental advocacy group in the state.

VPIRG wholeheartedly urges you to support this resolution. We appreciate the leadership demonstrated by Sen. Campion in developing the resolution and Chairman Bray's commitment to bring it forward for testimony and consideration by the committee in a timely manner.

The resolution is important and straightforward. It is unequivocal about the fact that: 1) human activities have substantially altered our climate; 2) Vermont has failed to meet its statutory goal for reducing greenhouse gas pollution; and 3) it is imperative for Vermont to take steps now to promote energy independence and reduce carbon pollution.

A vote for this resolution sends a signal to all that this body is not afraid of science, and indeed will use science as a foundation for sound decision making. By urging you to officially recognize the clear human influence on the climate system and the need for swift action to address this threat, we are not exactly asking you to go out on a limb. You would simply be joining the most qualified scientific, military and economic minds alive today. That is not an overstatement.

And yet, this science-based resolution could not be passed in the U.S. Senate today. Sen. Bernie Sanders found insufficient support in the U.S. Senate when he proposed a similar resolution earlier this year;<sup>1</sup> Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii's proposal was outright voted down.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the new Chairman of the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee has suggested that because it snowed in Washington this winter, there's no such thing as global warming.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he has a book out claiming that climate change is a hoax.<sup>4</sup>

To protest his disagreement with the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) plan to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell wrote a letter urging our nation's 50 governors<sup>5</sup> to ignore requirements of the so-called "Clean Power" plan, despite the fact that researchers from Harvard, Boston and Syracuse Universities estimate could save 3,500 American lives each year, starting in 2020.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Roll Call Vote, available at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d114:SP024>:

<sup>2</sup> See Roll Call Vote, available at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d114:SP058>:

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/politics/inhofe-brings-snowball-on-senate-floor-to-dispute-climate-change/2015/02/26/37f6acb4-bdfe-11e4-9dfb-03366e719af8\\_video.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/politics/inhofe-brings-snowball-on-senate-floor-to-dispute-climate-change/2015/02/26/37f6acb4-bdfe-11e4-9dfb-03366e719af8_video.html)

<sup>4</sup> "The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future," by James Inhofe. Available at: [http://www.amazon.com/Greatest-Hoax-Warming-Conspiracy-Threatens-ebook/dp/B007D2LK4S/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1427250479&sr=8-1&keywords=inhofe+climate+change](http://www.amazon.com/Greatest-Hoax-Warming-Conspiracy-Threatens-ebook/dp/B007D2LK4S/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1427250479&sr=8-1&keywords=inhofe+climate+change)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/20/us/politics/mitch-mcconnell-urges-states-to-help-thwart-obamas-war-on-coal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/20/us/politics/mitch-mcconnell-urges-states-to-help-thwart-obamas-war-on-coal.html?_r=0)

<sup>6</sup> "Health Co-benefits of Carbon Standards for Existing Power Plants" available at: <http://www.chgeharvard.org/sites/default/files/userfiles2/Health%20Co-Benefits%20of%20Carbon%20Standards.pdf>

And in Florida, we learned last week that officials at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the agency on the front lines of studying and planning for climate change, were ordered not to use the term “climate change” or “global warming.”<sup>7</sup> There are many more examples we could point to showing that science is having a tough go of it out there.

In an ideal world, it wouldn't be newsworthy or particularly important for a committee like this to embrace the science of climate change. But we're not living in an ideal world. It is somewhat discouraging to say, but in advancing this resolution you are charting a course that runs counter to a whole slew of recent headlines.

We note that in doing so, you will enjoy the support of most Vermonters. In fact, polling VPIRG conducted just last year found that a whopping 83% of Vermonters would support taking action now to achieve Vermont's clean energy goals.<sup>8</sup>

Vermonters do not believe that global warming is a hoax. They know that, according to some of the most credible, conservative climate scientists in the world at the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “the human influence on the climate system is clear.” And according to former Republican Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, “climate change is the single biggest risk to the economy today.”

You've already heard many other examples of credible experts and important world figures who not only believe in climate change, but endorse bold steps to curb it. In our testimony, you'll see a few more quotes from the Pope to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to Chevron and Shell.

So, your willingness to take up this matter today puts you in good company. We applaud your courage and candor.

At the same time, we note that even more difficult and important work lies ahead. It will not be easy to successfully take on the biggest threat to our economy, our security, our environment and to future generations. It will not be easy, but taking on global warming is the right thing to do.

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<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/09/florida-state-most-affected-by-climate-change-reportedly-bans-term-climate-change/> and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/20/fla-official-says-he-was-punished-for-using-climate-change-in-report/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.vpirg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-06-17-Energy-polling-results.pdf>

## The Chorus of Climate Change: Recognition and Action

**"Science has spoken.** There is no ambiguity in their message. Leaders must act. Time is not on our side."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

"As greenhouse gas emissions increase, sea levels are rising, average global temperatures are increasing, and severe weather patterns are accelerating. **These effects are threat multipliers** that will aggravate stressors abroad such as poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and social tensions – **conditions that can enable terrorist activity and other forms of violence.**"

Quadrennial Defense Review 2014

**"Tackling climate change is one of America's greatest economic opportunities** of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and it's simply the right thing to do)."

–Climate Declaration signed by 1,000+ companies including Staples, Inc., Nike, General Motors

"I don't know if it (human activity) is the only cause, but mostly, in great part, it is **man who has slapped nature in the face.** We have in a sense taken over nature."

Pope Francis

**"Chevron shares the concerns of governments** and the public about climate change risks and recognizes that the use of fossil fuels to meet the world's energy needs is a contributor to rising greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the earth's atmosphere."

Chevron Corporation Website

"Today, as we pass another global heat record, we run the risk of being too late on climate change, endlessly debating causes at the expense of sensible actions. **Just as we have underestimated recent threats, such as the Islamic State and a revanchist Russia, we are in danger of underestimating those threats that follow a changing climate.**"

General Anthony Zinni, USMC (ret), former commander-in-chief of U.S. Central Command  
General Ron Keys, USAF (ret), former commander of U.S. Air Combat Command  
Admiral Frank "Skip" Bowman, USN (ret), former director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program

"It is true that there is uncertainty about the timing and magnitude of these risks and many others. But **those who claim the science is unsettled or action is too costly are simply trying to ignore the problem.**"

Former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson (served under President George W. Bush)