

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006

MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2006

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

12:30-2:00 P.M. OPENING LUNCH

SPEAKER:

**LARRY J. SCHWEIGER,
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION**

*Transcript by:
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Washington, D.C.*

JEROME RINGO: And with that, I would like to introduce to you my dear friend and colleague, Mr. Larry Schweiger, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

(Applause.)

LARRY SCHWEIGER: Thanks, Jerome. In keeping with Harry Reid's theme, I wanted to start off by telling you that I'm here to speak for wildlife, but I'm also here to speak for my grandson, Thaddeus (sp), and his future.

Something is wafting through our air that spells change, irreversible change, and if we fail to act now, global warming spells catastrophic damage to human communities and unfathomable damage to our natural world. The National Wildlife Federation recently completed a study of America's hunters and anglers. There's some 40 million people who enjoy the outdoors through hunting and fishing. And we find that 76 percent of those people surveyed report seeing global warming changes in their world. Most know that global warming is happening because they see it in their communities and their out-of-door places with less winter, hotter summers, more intense storms, persistent droughts, forest and grasslands fires, melting ice tops of mountains, and wildlife losses.

Few Americans and even fewer political leaders fully comprehend that we have little time to act before we lose control; that is, until the planet hits a tipping point where so much ice has melted, that permafrost gives up its stored carbon, that dead and dying forest across the planet become carbon sources rather than carbon sinks, that large ice masses in Greenland and Antarctic to give way. Several potentially tipping points, collectively, can trigger untamable, runaway global warming.

The Arctic has already lost 40 percent of its ice by volume, 20 percent by surface area, drastically increasing the amount of energy that's absorbed in our north. The Arctic region has already warmed up five degrees on average. Greenland and Antarctica combined annually dump more than 90 cubic miles of fresh water into the oceans each year. Greenland's glaciers are sliding and calving at twice as fast as they were five years ago. A sudden mass failure of ice in Greenland is more probable today than a decade ago.

Several Rhode Island-sized ice sheets have already slipped away from Antarctica. Russian scientists, calling out like a voice in the wilderness, warn that there are 70 to 80 billion tons of methane and other carbon compounds stored underneath the ice of the permafrost in Siberia. They're afraid based on their science that this ice will begin to leak and give off its gases.

All over the world insects are killing millions of acres of forest because they no longer freeze in winter times. Leading climate scientist have recently issued a warning, telling us that we have less than ten years to cap and curb carbon emissions before we see dire consequence. Dr. James Hansen of NOAA has been studying the issue for decades, and based on the latest data that he has examined, Hansen has warned if we do not get a grip on the threat, we will create a fundamentally – and these are his words – different planet. I don't know about you, but I don't want a different planet.

Little wonder: humans have put nearly a trillion tons of carbon dioxide into the biosphere during the past 150 years. We're now conducting a massive planetary experiment outside the range of human experience or competence, as we've raised the carbon dioxide levels by over 36 percent in our atmosphere. For many years I called this the greatest story never told because the issue got little media attention, and what it did get was muddled by Exxon Mobil.

Rising seas, melting polar and mountain-top ice, strange weather all over the planet are finally grabbing the attention of the media and the American public as Earth's climate is changing much faster than earlier predicted.

I'm reminded of a Hebrew story -- an ancient Hebrew story about Balaam and his ass. You may remember the story. As the story goes, Balaam ignored God and set off on a path that was the wrong course, leading to a very dangerous place. His ass, sensing the impending danger that set before them, tried to warn Balaam. After three failed attempts to get his attention, the ass sat down and started talking to Balaam. Shocked into silence, Balaam finally started listening to his ass. To fully appreciate this ancient story, we must understand that in Balaam's time, talking asses were very rare. (Laughter, applause.)

We, too, can learn a lot from fish and wildlife if we're willing to listen and listen carefully. There are important biological indicators of our stewardship performance. In fact, there's a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the quality of our stewardship and the fruitfulness of all living resources on the planet. As we degrade our world through global warming pollution or habitat destruction, the number and diversity of native fish, wildlife, and plants goes down. As we restore habitats, eliminate greenhouse pollution, or better manage the harvest, the diversity of native species and their relative abundance goes up. Nature can be amazingly resilient, capable of adapting in constantly changing ecological conditions. Wildlife habitats, unencumbered by damaging human intervention, are inherently durable and sustainable, but their resiliency is limited and rapidly being depleted through these various forces that I mentioned.

Published science warns us that misdirected human activities are impoverishing ecosystems around the world, and when coupled with global warming, scientists say that we can expect to see over a million extinctions by the year 2050, by the time Thaddy (sp) is my age. Polar bears are speaking to us. Are we listening?

As early as 1950, Rachel Carson was listening to the fish and wildlife of the planet, and she saw that they were shifting their ranges towards the poles. Her second

book, which was written the year that I was born, was entitled “The Sea Around Us.” Rachel wrote in 1950, these words: “Now in our own lifetime we are witnessing a startling alteration of climate.” How did she know? She was listening to wildlife.

Let me say something else about this day. Like it or not, global warming will be the defining issue of the 21st century. (Applause.) Also understand this; that in this baseball game, nature bats last. And because of the steroid-like effect of global warming, nature will swing a mean bat.

There is good news. The good news is that we still have time to avoid the worse consequences of climate crisis; but we must act now, and tackling on global warming will lead to opportunities for entrepreneurs, for investors, for farmers, for laborers, and for all those who care about the future.

Much like our story about Balaam, we are standing before two gates leading to two separate paths, and we have a decision to make about which path we’re going to take. Let me paint the story for you. The first gate is painted brown and in bright letters, red letters, are these three words: ignorance, greed, and the third word: indifference. Behind the brown gate is a torturous path leading to unthinkable human suffering and ecological tragedies never before seen by humankind. On this fool’s path, behind the brown gate, carbon energy continues unabated. We double or quadruple atmospheric CO₂ in the next few decades and push world temperatures to levels never seen before by humans. The global thermostat has already been bumped up by one degree, and with it, the hydrologic cycle has been energized and intensified year by year. As the planet warms, climate becomes not only hotter, but much more unstable – brittle with intense coastal storms, hurricanes and tornadoes. Insurance for coastal property will be simply unattainable. Even the federal government will not be able to continue to subsidize this practice. People will be forced to abandon their coastal communities and migrate inland as so many have already done in the Gulf Coast.

At the same time, interior agricultural lands become drier, less productive and more flammable, as they were this past January in Oklahoma, Texas. Worldwide deserts have already doubled in the past 30 years. On the brown path, persistent droughts, as we’re seeing in the southwest, and deserts consume millions upon millions of agricultural acres and forestlands. Famines will be the norm in many regions worldwide, particularly those regions of Africa.

It’s clear; this is the pathway to large temperature increases. Behind the brown gate, a bevy of Exxon-Mobil-funded skeptics continue to ignore, insult, and create baseless doubts about leading scientists, who have repeatedly warn that a build up of greenhouse gases is unacceptable. A million species of fish will become extinct as oceans acidify with carbonic acid, and terrestrial habitats will be decimated by drought and heat and fragmentation.

This pathway is littered with billboards. Let me read a couple to you. One says, “What’s good for Exxon is good for America.” The second is simply, “Question

Science,” something that’s in vogue today. The third is particularly troubling because it said, “If global warming doesn’t interfere with your TV reception, don’t sweat it.” We don’t know who paid for these misleading ads, but they are white and they all have big, bold, red lettering.

Deep down we all sense relatively small changes in the planet’s climate have a dramatic consequence. Yet we enter the brown gate with our wallets where our hearts should be and our heads where our wallets should be. (Laughter, applause.)

Let me tell you about the second gate. The second gate is green and has these simple words in gold letters: “For our children's future.” (Applause.) Behind that doorway is a pathway leading to thoughtful programs like the Apollo Project -- and I want to compliment you, my brother, for the good work that you and all the people who are a part of this gathering. There’s also another program, 25 by 25 -- getting 25 percent of energy from agricultural sources by the year 2025.

The 2030 project -- endorsed by the American Institute of American Architecture and more recently by the Conference of Mayors -- to make our buildings, which consume about 40 percent of the total energy in America, carbon-neutral by they year 2030. Now that’s a goal that I can live with. (Applause.)

The third thoughtful program is technology forcing industry-transforming auto fuel efficiency standards that applies to all classes of vehicles, including those Hummers that we’ve talked about; new source performance standards that cut carbon emissions by 80 percent; cap and trade programs that internalize the real cost of carbon pollution for existing emissions; tax reform codes that spawn greater human ingenuity by providing needed private capital to foster energy innovation, efficiency, and conservation. Collectively, these actions could annually cut carbon dioxide emissions by 2 percent of our current emissions for each of the next 40 years to meet the goals in the most supported documents that the scientist have put together on the subject.

With the stark contrast presented by these two alternative pathways, even Balaam’s ass could see the right path. A scientist by the name of Svante Arrhenius published this clear warning, and I’d like to read it to you. “We are evaporating our coal mines into the air, adding so much carbon dioxide into the air as to change the transparency of the atmosphere. With each passing year, air must be trapping more and more infrared rays and more and more earthlight. Eventually this change might very well heat the planet to heights outside all human experience.”

The reason why I read that quote to you is that it was written some time ago. You see, Arrhenius published this warning in a philosophical magazine in April 1896. So we have been thoroughly warned for more than 100 years, yet we continue to press forward through the brown-gated pathway.

NASA has various space probes at this very moment that are tracking planets in our galaxy. We have learned from the photographs transmitted back to earth that there

are some strange-looking planets out there, but none remotely come close to being inhabitable. After much investigation, we can now conclude that good planets are hard to find. (Applause.)

Caring for the planet, as Al Gore has talked about so eloquently, is not a left or right issue. It's an issue of right and wrong. (Applause.) A verse in Proverbs says that a good person leaves an inheritance for our children's children. For me that verse has hands, and feet, and a cute face, and a name of my child's child. I do not want a fundamentally different planet for my grandson, Thaddeus. Let me tell you, he deserves a whole lot more. We do indeed all each have a moral obligation to go through the green gate marked "for our children's future." For the sake of Thaddy and for all the children of this world, let us tend and keep this earth. For their future, let us set aside our political differences and work together in the grand tradition of Americans unified to solve this planetary crisis.

When I was a teenager, I worked at a gas station and pumped gas, and changed oil, and I looked at a lot of dipsticks over the years. (Laughter.) You might ask, why is that relevant? I'll tell you why it's relevant. I know when a car needs an oil change, and I know when a nation needs an oil change, and let me tell you, it's time for an oil change in America. (Applause.)

And I have to tell you something else. I sense an upwelling of people in America who understand that, and who want to deal with global warming, who want to stop this ridiculous energy policy we have in this country. I was out west and they were talking about how we exempted the oil-well drillers from safe drinking water standards, and from the Clean Water Act on runoff. What are we doing to ourselves? We can work together to change this; we must work together to change this. Working together for the sake of our children, we can stop global warming. It's time to come together as Americans for this great and terrible cause.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

(End of remarks.)