



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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March 13, 2006

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
Chairman
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Domenici and Ranking Member Bingaman:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I thank you for the opportunity to offer the bishops' perspective on the issue of global climate change. I commend your leadership in furthering a debate that has too often been far too polarized and that has used "science" more as a weapon than as a source of wisdom, insight and guidance.

The U.S. Catholic bishops believe God has given us the gift of creation: the air we breathe, the water that sustains life and the fruits of the land that nourish us. While the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has not taken a position on any specific piece of legislation, we are convinced that "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family." (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, 2001).

Today we are confronting the challenge of global climate change. Climate change may trigger drought, flooding, famine, disease, and other extreme weather events that lead to massive human and environmental devastation. As stewards of God's creation we are called to respect and protect our natural resources not only for ourselves today but also for future generations. We recognize our common moral responsibility of stewardship and care for God's creation. The traditional virtue of prudence would dictate taking preventive and mitigating action, domestically and internationally, even when we do not know everything with certainty.

As a world leader, the United States bears a special responsibility to lead and help shape responses that serve not only its own interest but those of the entire human family. We welcome serious efforts that would make clear that the United States is committed to addressing the potential impacts of climate change. Technological advancement and entrepreneurship are hallmarks of our society. Applying them innovatively could help bring about progress and be helpful in mitigating the harmful impacts on global climate. It is not enough to criticize and oppose other initiatives. Our nation has a moral responsibility to lead and join with others to fashion a real response to this growing threat and reality.

The United States Congress will play a key role in determining how the United States responds to the challenge of global climate change. As you consider the particulars of proposed

legislative initiatives to address this challenge, we especially urge you to make the plight of the vulnerable – poor people, displaced workers and people of developing countries – a central priority. These concerns are further discussed below.

Caring for the Poor and Issues of Equity. Too often the voices of the poor in our land and in poor countries are missing or ignored. Because of where they live and their limited resources, poor people will experience most directly the possible harmful effects of climate change. Certainly, poor people in developing countries will bear the brunt of environmental distress, adjustments and destruction. They are also without the resources to alleviate the impacts without significant financial and technical assistance. In our own country, it would be unjust and unfair to place the burdens of adjustment on the backs of poor people, who will have the fewest resources to adapt to respond to potential increases in energy costs and to climate related impacts.

Mitigating Potential Workforce Displacement. We also expect that there will be some industries that will bear more of a burden in adjusting to any changes in the energy sector. Targeted and responsive assistance to workers who may be displaced will be necessary. Any regulatory proposal to address climate change should include adequate and targeted resources to assist the poor here and abroad and workers in affected industries.

Technological and Economic Assistance to Developing Countries. Encouraging the development and use of clean energy technology will be particularly necessary to help developing countries meet the challenges of global climate change. To that end, the United States will need to not only provide leadership, but also financial and technological assistance to help developing countries adopt less harmful and more efficient energy production. If the United States adopts meaningful climate change measures, it will be easier to encourage full participation of other nations in a serious international system of emissions reductions. We also would support climate change research to mitigate the effects of climate change and help us adapt to changes in climate, especially research focused on minimizing disease and premature death among the poor and most vulnerable, like children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

By advancing a constructive and long overdue dialogue on how our nation can help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, particularly as they affect the poor and other vulnerable populations, your efforts and initiatives can serve our nation and move us toward necessary steps to better protect our natural and human environment from the potential risks of climate change.

Thank you for your leadership on this important priority and for seeking our perspectives concerning the important decisions to be made to address climate change.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International
Policy

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources