



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

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June 2, 2008

Senator []
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20015

Dear Senator:

As the Senate takes up vital climate change legislation, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wants to remind you that “the debate about how the United States is responding to questions and challenges surrounding global climate change is a test and an opportunity for our nation.”* The Catholic Bishops of the United States insist 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.”

As chairman of the Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, I urge you and your Senate colleagues to focus in the coming debate and decisions on the three ethical priorities outlined in the bishops' statement on climate change:

- The moral and practical demands of **prudence**, which require wise action now to address problems that will grow in their magnitude and consequences: “Significant levels of scientific consensus – even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious – justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers.”
- The focus should be on the “bold and generous action on behalf of the **common good**” rather than the demands of narrow interests. We need “a different kind of national discussion. Much of the debate on global climate change seems polarized and partisan ... The search for the common good and the voices of poor people and poor countries sometimes are neglected.”
- A clear priority **for the poor**, who will bear the greatest burdens and pay the greatest price for the consequences and costs of climate change: “Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk.”

* Unless otherwise indicated the quotations in this letter are from the 2001 U.S. Catholic Bishops' statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good* (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>).

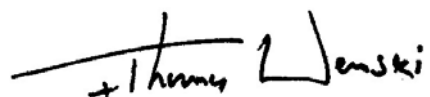
The introduction, improvement and now the Senate-consideration of the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act of 2008 (S. 3036) represent important steps forward in addressing this moral challenge and advancing the principles articulated by the bishops. This landmark legislation offers a welcome opportunity for principled, constructive, realistic and civil discussion on climate change. As Catholic bishops, we do not endorse the many details of this or other climate change legislation. However, the bishops welcome and support this important legislation to the extent that it lifts up and seriously addresses how climate change will disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable in our country and around the world.

As pastors and teachers, we believe that a central moral measure of climate change legislation is how it touches the poor and vulnerable. As you consider this legislation, we urge you to actively support the essential anti-poverty provisions now in the legislation and support efforts to strengthen these provisions, which will help ease the burdens of poor people at home and abroad and assist them in adapting to climate change. In USCCB testimony, it was pointed out “[t]he real ‘inconvenient truth’ is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk.”

The USCCB and the religious community have been working and will continue to work with the sponsors and Committee chair to shape the necessary provisions which offer substantial resources and other much needed assistance to poor persons and poor countries for adaptation and mitigation of climate change. We will continue to work to build on and strengthen these essential commitments. We support and urge you to support legislative efforts and amendments to further assure that those with the greatest needs receive the most help through effective, targeted and workable allocations, vehicles and programs.

In our recent statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the United States Catholic Bishops expressed a desire for “a distinctive call to seriously address global climate change, focusing on the virtue of prudence, pursuit of the common good and the impact on the poor, particularly on vulnerable workers and the poorest nations. The United States should lead in ... promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery.” We urge and hope that the Senate will respond to the urgent moral challenge of climate change by acting on “fundamental moral values: the universal common good, respect for God’s creation, an option for the poor, and a sense of intergenerational obligation.”

Sincerely yours,

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.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace