

☆☆☆☆ **THE WHITE HOUSE** ☆☆☆☆

**Report on Consultation  
with  
U.S. Religious Leaders  
regarding  
Global Climate Change**



1:00 PM, Tuesday, September 13, 2016  
Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
Conference Room 173

On Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, twenty representatives from America's leading religious groups concerned about the increasing threat of global climate change met with White House officials. The purpose was to present religious perspectives on U.S. climate policy and to emphasize the increasing impacts that rising levels of carbon dioxide are having on the oceans and climate generally. An incomplete and partial set of meeting notes follows below.

## White House Participants

**Rohan Patel** is Special Assistant to President Obama, and leads the delegation.

**Mark Antoniewicz** is Assistant Director for the White House Council on Environmental Quality. He has often traveled with the President and speaks on behalf of the Administration.

**Kate Segarra** is the Assistant Director of ocean policy for the White House Council on Environmental Quality and Oceanographer for the U.S. Navy.

**Bo Machayo**, Office of Public Engagement, Council on Environmental Quality

**Drew J. McConville**, Council on Environmental Quality

## MEETING NOTES

Assembled by Ryan Ono  
plus  
supplemental comments

**Rev. Dr. Owen Owens**, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, is co-chair of the NRCCC delegation. He is also past chair of the National Council of Churches' Eco-Justice Working Group and the former director for the American Baptist Churches USA, department of Environmental and Racial Justice in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. He opens the meeting with a prayer for inspiration and guidance.



**Rabbi Warren Stone**, Kensington, Maryland, is the co-chair of the NRCCC. He is the past chair of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' environmental affairs committee, and has set up his synagogue Temple Emanuel as a model of ecological practice and awareness. He relates the history of the NRCCC and reports how the NRCCC has been regularly visiting the White House since 1999 when at that time it advocated for the end of commercial logging on National Forests.

**Dr Richard Miller**, from Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, began the dialogue on climate change and its impacts on oceans. He thanked the Obama Administration for their work on climate change, especially the Clean Power Plan.

Two scientific studies maintain that sections of the West Antarctic ice sheet face an unstoppable melt that will lead to a sea level rise of four feet. If these are correct, the flooding of Charleston, Galveston, New Orleans, Tampa, and Miami are locked in. This melt will likely trigger the collapse of the rest of



the West Antarctic ice sheet, and cause sea level rise of 10 to 16 feet. Already current atmospheric CO2 levels are outside the safe zone for coral reefs. Their decline will likely lead to mass extinctions in the oceans. With this perspective we ask President Obama to make a speech from the oval office. He would outline the threats to the United States and the world. Such a statement could prepare for future climate legislation. Further, we want all trade agreements to include the emission reduction targets of the Paris Climate Agreement.

**Rev. Tom Carr**, an American Baptist Minister from Suffield, Connecticut, spoke next. He declared that the current U.S. level of carbon dioxide emissions rate is morally indefensible. He asked that, because of the urgent need to radically reduce emissions, the President address the nation from the Oval Office and be truthful with the American people and the world about our situation, to state that we need to act swiftly and boldly, and to declare this crisis is not only a moral, ethical and spiritual issue, but a matter of generational justice as well.



**Rohan Patel**, Special Assistant to the President, responded. He pointed out that the television networks do not always accept the President's invitation to broadcast his speeches. They have to rely on the networks to give them air time. Rohan then pivoted and requested suggestions on how The White House might better place President Obama in front of new audiences.

**Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas**, an Episcopal priest from Springfield, Massachusetts, suggests that President Barack Obama should announce a climate emergency from the Oval Office. Top religious leaders from different faiths could stand behind him to emphasize that all major religious groups are united in their concern for climate change. This is a moral issue, not a partisan one. It would be easy to organize religious leaders from across the faiths to assist in this.



**Mark Antoniewicz**, Assistant Director, Council on Environmental Quality, adds that the White House is particularly receptive to any messaging suggestions directed to economically and environmentally vulnerable communities, such as meeting that took place during their recent initiative to increase access to clean energy in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and more recently in Detroit, Michigan.

**Dr. Robert Jonas**, Director of the Kestral Land Trust (far right) Amherst, Massachusetts, added that mayors from coastal cities, many of which are already experiencing flooding from rising seas, could also stand with President Obama when he makes this public announcement.





**Frederick Krueger** from Santa Rosa, California, spoke next. He pointed out that new, often unexpected, manifestations of climate change are appearing with increasingly regularity. New toxic algae, for instance, are now emerging in the Pacific ocean, and elsewhere. Dungeness crabs this past winter were not edible because of toxic algae.

A study off the coast of California showed plankton levels are in sharp decline. Because plankton represent the bottom of the ocean food chain, this has serious implications for oceans as a future source of food. About one-fifth of the world's protein derives from the oceans.

These examples show the urgency of our predicament. A key step for the Administration would be to apply its climate policy more consistently across government departments. For instance, the Dept of Interior should end drilling for oil or gas on public lands and put a moratorium on new coal leases. This would show that the Administration is serious about address climate change.



**Rohan Patel** quickly responded. He says that the Obama Administration is vigorously promoting renewable energy via programs such as its Desert Conservation Plan. The Administration's strategy combines a carrot and stick approach – promoting solutions that increasingly cost less in the future, while making other energy options costlier. The hope is that the next administration will continue to use fuel efficiency standards, and tax credits, and ramp up the cost of fossil fuels. They presume that climate change is not a partisan issue.

**Dr. Chad Hanson**, from Big Bear, California, spoke next on logging and forestry issues as they relate to climate change. He supported an end to commercial logging on public lands. Ending logging on National Forests and other federal forestlands would reduce CO<sub>2</sub> by an amount equivalent to about 6% of the nation's GHG reduction goal. Protecting federal forests from logging would be the equivalent of removing the emissions of 13 to 24 millions cars in the U.S. per year.

Hanson also said that the U.S. Forest Service should end salvage logging. His research shows that burned forests are necessary for some bird species. He then reported on a new study that showed that forests which are not logged are less likely to burn in forest fires. Logging reduces the resilience of forests to fire.



**Rohan Patel** seems amazed. "We haven't heard that before," he says. He asks if Chad's research has been published and peer reviewed. This was important new information to Rohan. [At a prior White House meeting in 2015 Rohan had declared the importance of some logging for purposes of forest thinning]. Now he requests that Chad send copies of his studies on the impact of fire and logging on national forests. He particularly wants to understand the science behind the benefits of ending post fire "salvage logging" and ending commercial logging on national forest lands.



**Susan Bass**, Executive Vice president for the Earth Day Network, spoke about the importance of climate education in schools and in the public discourse. In four years, Earth Day 2020 will be a potential date around which to schedule events since it will mark the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Earth Day celebrations. In addition to promoting climate education in our schools, the faith community can also support initiatives that create green infrastructure, and promote green jobs.

**Rohan Patel**, speaking for the White House, replied by describing the partnerships the Administration has forged with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities through the Workforce Innovation Act, Clean Energy for All Initiative, and the National Solar Training Network.

**Ryan Ono**, representing Interfaith Oceans, from Los Angeles, thanked the administration on its leadership in expanding the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary, initiating the Clean Power Plan, and ratifying the Paris Climate Agreement. Ryan mentioned the support by faith groups for a New England Marine National Monument, recently established as the “Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument.”



He emphasized the need for the Department of Commerce to ensure that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries continue to promote sustainable fishing policies and practices in the U.S. by not enacting a rule change to National Standard 1 under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act.



**Cynthia Harris**, representing the Interfaith Moral Action on Climate (IMAC) network, noted the recent turn of events in North Dakota, near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, where the Obama Administration has halted work on the Dakota Access Pipeline as of Friday, September 10th. She said that this is important for restraining the rise of carbon dioxide, and called it a “teaching moment.”

**Rohan Patel** responded saying there is currently no clearing house for the maps of oil and gas pipelines across the US, and they are working to correct that absence.

**Connie Hanson**, representing Christians Caring for Creation Prayer Network, in Pasadena, California, said that we are calling for an end to commercial logging of our National Forests, both green forests and post-fire. Our National Forests sequester a tremendous amount of carbon, thus mitigating climate change and slowing ocean acidification. When our public forests are logged, they no longer sequesters carbon, but contribute to rising levels of carbon in the atmosphere. We also ask you to veto any bill that would weaken environmental laws or increase logging, such as the "Wildfire Budgeting, Response, and Forest Management Act of 2016."



**Dave Carroll**, Grantsburg, Wisconsin, recommended the use of the 1973 Presidential War Powers Act to address climate change. The Department of Defense (DoD) can be redirected to this national threat once congress is consulted. He provides ongoing reports while avoiding hostilities. The purpose is to redirect the DoD to speed the implementation of worldwide solar power. It is the low-cost, efficient and distributed solution. New power storage options are ready. This lowers greenhouse gas emission hugely with a warlike effort. The Pentagon's analysis confirms climate change is the number one threat to national security, so mission remains; protect the country. Dave said, "Drop solar systems, not bombs."



The U.S. Energy Information Agency estimates world energy demand will increase 48% by 2040. We must greatly increase the already steep rise in the use of renewables or fossil fuel use will also rise. Our nation is best protected by offering renewable power to everyone. It is a gift to planet life. We are in an emergency so this action is clearly appropriate to the DoD mission, to the presidential oath and the constitution.

**Connie Hanson** read two Biblical passages for reflection as the meeting ended.

**Reverend Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas** closed the meeting with a group prayer.



A special note of thanks to **Christine Ellman** for her “Beautifell Photography”

Other participants, not noted in the report.

**Allen Johnson**, Christians for the Mountains, Dunmore, West Virginia

**Dr. Ann Sloat**, Christians Caring for Creation Prayer Network, Honolulu, Hawaii

**Fr. Sergei Kapral**, Ecumenical Officer, Orthodox Church in America, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

**Dave Hanson**, Christians Caring for Creation Prayer Network, Pasadena, California

**Christine Ellman**, photographer, Beautifell Photos, Arlington, Virginia

**Irene Owens**, NRCCC, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania