

Testimony by Senator John Warner (Retired)

House Energy and Commerce Committee

April 24, 2009

Mr. Waxman, Mr. Markey, Mr. Barton, and Mr. Upton, thank you for the invitation to provide this important committee with my thoughts on the pressing issues of a new energy future, global climate change, and the potential consequences to national security, of not only the United States, but the security of many nations worldwide.

The views that I express are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of my law firm, Hogan and Hartson, and I provide them consistent with the rules of the U.S. Senate and the statutes which are applied to all retiring members of the U.S. Senate.

It is a particular pleasure to appear with my former colleague, whom I served with in the Senate, the former vice president, Al Gore. We shared many years working together on two important Senate Committees, the Environment Committee and the Armed Services Committee.

On behalf of the people of the United States, I thank the Committee for recognizing the need for America to have a framework of laws to guide our future on these issues of energy and climate change.

Having had the privilege of serving my state of Virginia and indeed the people of the United States for 30 years in the U.S. Senate, I believe this framework of issues poses one of the greatest challenges to the Congress that I have ever witnessed.

I thank Vice President Gore for his leadership in bringing not only attention to the issue of climate change but providing

recommendations and solutions to this Committee on tackling this difficult subject matter before you today. His leadership benefits many nations beyond our borders.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I believe that it is the duty of this Committee, the witnesses who have shared and continue to share their views, and the Congress at large to engage the American public in a straightforward and honest manner. These are highly technical and complex issues before us today, and we must find a way to have a continuing dialogue with the public in a manner – and with words -- that can be understood by all.

It is the level of enthusiasm of the American public, their willingness to listen and learn, and reach into their pockets and give that measure of financial support required, that will continue to drive forward the solutions to reach our goals.

As the Committee well knows, in the last Congress, I was privileged to work with an extraordinarily capable legislator, Senator Joe Lieberman, with members of the Senate Environment Committee, under the able chairmanship of Senator Barbara Boxer, to produce the only climate change bill to reach the Senate floor.

I have continued my study and work and now realize that we should have incorporated in our legislation a greater emphasis on national security.

Accordingly, I firmly believe that the challenge before us is to build a foundation resting on three legs: energy, climate change and national security. Eventual success requires all three legs to remain equally strong.

The very comprehensive body of opinion and fact that has been submitted to this committee by witnesses this week

covers the energy and climate change legs of the foundation; I address the third leg -- national security.

I want to credit the many national security experts who have expressed their concerns, which I share. Many senior retired officers, from all branches of our services, have come forward and joined in the public debate, expressing clearly their views in support of action on climate change. One extraordinary soldier, the former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, General Gordon Sullivan, who chaired the Military Advisory Board of the Center for Naval Analysis, succinctly framed what we face: "The Cold War was a specter, but climate change is inevitable. If we keep on with business as usual, we will reach a point where some of the worst effects are inevitable... back then, the challenge was to stop a particular action. Now the challenge is to inspire a particular action. We have to act if we are to avoid the worst effects."

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I would like to share a personal experience. I grew up with the World War II generation and was privileged to serve in the U.S. Navy, at the age of 18, in the last year of that conflict.

Americans were inspired in the darkest hours of the Great Depression, and that war, by the immortal comments of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, given in his first inaugural address, in 1933: “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” The U.S. emerged from a depression, World War II, and rebuilt a strong nation that exceeded all our dreams and expectations

Today our nation and much of the world is in the grips of an economic crisis without precedent. The brave men and women of our armed forces and that of other nations are engaged in two wars. Understandably there is a measure of fear in our hearts as to whether we should undertake at this time such an enormous and uncertain challenge as posed by the issues

before us in this hearing. But I say, in the spirit of the past generation, that it is our duty to dispel fear and press on.

We as a nation can do it again, provided we come up with sound solutions, solutions understood and acceptable to the American people.

Our President has committed to work with the Congress, and I hope the resulting legislation will rest on the tripod that I have described.

If I were serving in the Senate today, I would be working with others to incorporate legislative language in any future bill that would give a seat at the table -- equal to other cabinet members who testified earlier this week -- to the Department of Defense, to the Intelligence Agencies and to representatives of the industrial complex which supports our national security. They bring to this issue a very different and critical

perspective, but also vast knowledge and resources to get this job done.

I urge members of this committee to see whether or not, as part of the forthcoming markup, you add this concept to your bill.

Looking back, we should have included such language in the Lieberman-Warner bill. We could have garnered more support. A reasonable objective analysis of polling data today shows that the American public is motivated toward action on climate change by the likelihood that more jobs will be created and our national security strengthened.

To be specific, in the arena of national security, one of the most critical components is maintaining stability in the world.

Many factors can lead to instability. To name a few associated with global climate change: severe droughts, excessive sea level rise, erratic storm behavior, deteriorating glaciers, pestilence, shift in agriculture ranges.

These factors can result in water wars, crop failures, famine, disease, mass migration of people across borders, and destruction of vital infrastructure, all of which can further lead to failed nations, rise in extremist behavior, and increased threat of terrorism. Much of this is likely to happen in areas of the world that are already on the brink of instability. In other words, climate change is a “threat multiplier” making worse the problems that already exist.

Global climate change has the potential, if left unchecked, of adding missions to the already heavy burdens of our military and other elements of our nation’s overall national security.

To the extent we can plan today how best to minimize these contingent disasters means, the less we may have to call upon our armed forces tomorrow.

Whose military is best equipped, most capable to help with the evacuation of distressed areas? Who is going to be called upon to intervene in such humanitarian disasters? The United States military will be called to action. Such action will not only bear financial costs to our military, and thus our taxpayers, it will divert resources and troops from other areas of the world.

For those volatile nations that are not capable of dealing with the pressures of climate change, governments can fail and extremism and terrorism can fill the void.

In 2007, the Military Advisory Board (MAB) of the Center for Naval Analysis, a non-profit think tank, issued a report titled “National Security and the Threat of Climate Change.” The MAB

is comprised of many of the most distinguished and highest ranking retired military leaders in the United States. They made several of the conclusions I have shared with you in today's remarks. To quote from that report, in the words of Admiral T. Joseph Lopez, USN (Ret.), "You have very real changes in natural systems that are most likely to happen in regions of the world that are already fertile ground for extremism."

Delaying action on global climate change will exacerbate these threat multiplying effects and will cost the U.S. more in the long run. The difference is that these later costs will not only be economic; there will be a human cost.

On the battlefield, we never wait until we have 100 percent certainty or wait for the conditions to be 100 percent ideal. We have to act when we have enough information to act. And I think the information we have is clear.

The last point I would like to make is that we cannot and should not wait for other countries to take the lead. Their participation in a global treaty is critical, but the United States is a world leader, and it is upon us to act now and join other nations in exerting leadership. Only then can we expect others to follow.

Thank you.