



Statement for the Record
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Hearing on “United States – International Climate Change Approach:
A Clean Technology Solution” Monday, November 14, 2005

I am pleased that with this hearing today Senator Hagel, with the support of Chairman Lugar, will continue the dialogue on the issue of global climate change in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Since the United States signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, the persuasiveness of the science, the sophistication of our climate models, and the measurable evidence of climate change and its effects have grown every year. Those effects mean that this is not just an environmental issue. The dislocations caused by climate change will shift growing seasons, water resources, habitats, and other fundamental building blocks of economic, social, and political arrangements around the world. With those shifts will come political conflict, migrating populations, the spread of disease – threats to international stability.

The challenge to find cleaner, more efficient sources of energy also offers us one of the great opportunities of this new century. By moving us toward greater energy independence, lowering our energy costs, and promoting new products and markets, a well-designed climate policy can create jobs and enhance economic growth. Senator Hagel’s legislation – The Climate Change Technology Deployment in Developing Countries Act of 2005, incorporated into the Energy Bill and now part of our national policy – shows us one way we can employ constructive climate policy to promote the goals of economic development abroad and innovation here at home.

Here in the Senate, we have inched closer in recent years to recognizing the need for a bipartisan domestic mitigation program, marked by the recent adoption of Senator Bingaman’s Sense of the Senate Resolution calling on the United States to undertake a program of binding domestic greenhouse gas emission targets. However, that kind of program will make the most sense as part of an international agreement that can establish the coordination – and the trust – needed for effective, shared commitment to reducing human impact on our climate.

This is a global challenge, and it will require an international response.

Unfortunately, the United States, the largest current per capita source, and the largest historical source of greenhouse gases, has retreated to the sidelines of international efforts to meet this global problem. We have taken ourselves out of the game.

The Kyoto Protocol that now guides international climate change efforts has major flaws. Most obviously and fatally, it lacks the participation of the United States, and of the key emerging industrial giants such as China, India, Mexico, and Brazil. But instead of leading efforts to make international efforts more comprehensive, more realistic, and ultimately more effective, the United States is largely absent from the search for a global solution.

We must begin the debate on a post-Kyoto regime to guide international efforts. We must return to the table, and help to lead the way toward a post-Kyoto agreement. Time is not on our side. In our hearing room tomorrow, Senator Lugar and I will welcome a report by the Pew Center on Global Climate Change that can help us begin that debate. Eileen Claussen, the President of the Pew Center, is with us today.

Senator Hagel is right to identify new technology as one of the keys to mitigating climate change. His legislation promotes technology transfer as a potentially profitable and effective way for us to engage with developing countries. But with expanding populations, economic growth, and more intense energy use in those developing nations, there is much more to be done. Greenhouse gas intensity – the focus of his legislation – is a measure of energy efficiency. Our goal, however, must be ultimately to affect overall greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. That is our nation's commitment under the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

I hope we can build on Senator Hagel's initiative to fashion a robust international strategy to confront the issue of global warming, and to the restore the United States to the leadership role in that effort that is our duty and our historical responsibility. In recent years the Foreign Relations Committee has twice, with its unanimous endorsement of Resolutions on climate change negotiations, declared its support for renewed U.S. participation and leadership in the search for a global solution to this global problem. I hope our committee and the full Senate can once again take up a new Resolution, to restate the Senate's interest in renewed action on the international front.