

A Message from Vice President Al Gore

These are challenging times for people around the world who know that the climate crisis is real, urgent, and worsening. Despite the mounting evidence that prompt action is essential, many international leaders continue to treat the facts as inconvenient. In their eyes, there are always reasons to oppose commitment: for some politicians, it is the desire for the power that can be gained by pandering to carbon polluters and ideological opponents of action; for others it is fear of being targeted for retribution by those same forces. For the carbon polluters, of course, it is profit—coupled with the vulnerability inherent in human nature that leads us to reject and lash out at truths we perceive to be counter to our own short-term self-interest.

And for the general public, understandably, it is fear that one way or the other it is they who will pay. Moreover, the unprecedented nature of this crisis—and the unprecedented scale and scope of the needed response—leads many to eagerly seize upon any purported reason to believe that the climate crisis may not be real after all. That is why the deniers gain such leverage by manufacturing doubt from blatant falsehoods.

For their part, climate scientists are naturally unaccustomed to the political combat that often now seems necessary just to communicate these crucial truths to the general public—across the great divide between science and politics.

It would be a deep and welcome relief indeed if the climate crisis turned out to be not real, or not dire. Unfortunately, however, it is both. Voluminous evidence makes the broad outlines of the unfolding catastrophe crystal clear. Moreover, the data are consistent across 12 separate and different scientific lines of evidence used to measure and understand global warming.

Every day, we humans continue to dump 90 million tons of global warming pollution into the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding the earth – as if it is an open sewer. Twenty percent of each day's spew will still be there 1,000 years from now. In keeping with the laws of physics, it traps a lot of heat for a long time.

The resulting damage to the earth's ecological systems – direct and indirect – is already accelerating. The hydrological cycle, to pick only one example, is being massively disrupted. The timing, location and intensity of precipitation are all changing significantly. The warmer air is holding more water vapor. Storms are stronger and last longer; big downpours play a larger role. Millions of subsistence farmers can no longer predict the safest and best time to plant. Major floods, mudslides and resulting infrastructure damage are increasing. Important regions in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and Australia are suffering from deepening droughts. The fires are burning. Living species are being driven to extinction. Deserts and diseases are on the move. The ice is melting. The seas are rising.

The general conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (whose authority and expertise are intact despite several unfortunate errors in its 3,000 page Fourth Assessment issued in 2007, and notwithstanding the ferocious attacks against it) are in line with the views of 98% of the world's climate scientists (according to a recent study), and are shared by the National Academies of Science of every major nation on earth. They are shared as well by every major professional scientific society worldwide.

Paradoxically, even as the scientific consensus has grown ever stronger, the political consensus has grown weaker – at least temporarily. It is a source of hope and inspiration that at the grassroots level public awareness and support for action has grown with astonishing swiftness all over the world in the last 5 years. And tens of thousands of businesses, big and small, have begun to help solve the crisis. But opponents of action have dug in their heels, and many have found ways to use their wealth and power to paralyze the political process in many nations, including especially in the United States.

These are tumultuous times, and in such times it is up to governmental leaders to show the way to security and stability. For our era, any such path must bring us to a place where sustainable economic growth and saving the global environment can be reconciled – or in the end, we will preserve neither.


At this juncture, we realize that American leadership is no longer sufficient, but we must remember that it remains essential. If the United States were to continue in its failure to step up to climate change, a successful international effort would remain out of the question. To safeguard the future of our civilization, we must avoid that outcome. Success may not come in the next two years, but come it must. In the words of the poet, Wallace Stevens: “After the final no there comes a yes and on that yes the future of the world hangs.”

Anyone who believes that isolated national initiatives and bilateral agreements can substitute for a global effort should take note of a little-noticed milestone reached last year: developing nations as a group have surpassed the industrial nations as the largest source of CO₂ emissions. Indeed, 90 percent of the predicted increases in emissions in the years ahead, over and above today's reckless levels, may come from the poor nations, not the wealthy. These struggling societies need help from the developed nations to have any chance of success in making the changes that are essential.

In order to lead an effective international effort, the United States must demonstrate public consensus sufficient to last for years and decades, not just for a season. We have this capacity; we demonstrated it numerous times in the second half of the 20th Century, including in the successful implementation of the Marshall Plan, the building of the interstate highway system, and the Apollo Moon landing program, to name a few of the best known examples. So far, however, with respect to this challenge, we have failed to do so. The reasons for this will be far less important in the eyes of future generations, than the fact.

In order to confront the climate crisis, many policy changes are needed, but it is important not only to advocate but also to move from rhetoric to practical design. We need to convince the public that climate change is an actionable problem; that the solutions are available; that a coordinated approach is feasible; that financing the necessary changes is affordable; and that paying for those changes is, in fact, a wise investment in future prosperity.

That is why I am acting to call your attention to *The U.S. Role in International Climate Finance: A Blueprint for Near-Term Leadership*, prepared by the Alliance for Climate Protection and the Center for American Progress, based on analysis by Climate Advisers and Project Catalyst. This study is a demonstration of how to integrate financing solutions into the key elements of an effective response to the climate crisis. It shows how to match money with actions on the ground and provides the basis for a plan that is simultaneously global in scope, and local in action. And to Americans, in particular, it is a demonstration that not only is our leadership needed for global purposes, but that it is needed for our own self-interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Gore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "G" at the end.