

Comments by Frederick W. Krueger at White House Meeting

The following introductory comments on religion and climate change were made by Frederick W. Krueger, Executive Coordinator for the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care, at a meeting with the Council on Environmental Quality at The White House Conference Center, February 23, 2010.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the formal positions of religious organizations on climate change.

There are three considerations that I would like to emphasize about this religious delegation and its message to the White House. From these considerations I will draw several conclusions. First, our interfaith coalition represents leaders and delegates from over thirty of America's largest religious institutions.

Second, people of faith represent a majority of American citizens. When all of the members and adherents of religious organizations are tallied, the total is more than enough to swing any election. In this regard people of faith represent a crucial sector of American society.



NRCCC Washington Week delegates stand before the White House Conference Center prior to their presentations before the Council on Environmental Quality.

And third, religious organizations, insofar as they have studied the problem of climate change and issued formal declarations, are united in their request for strong legislation to address this problem. Across the spectrum of religious persuasions there have been scores of studies and formal inquiries into the conclusions being offered by scientists about the consequences of rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

In the packets which we are presenting to you, you will find a collection of the formal statements from organized religion on climate change. The authors of these statements represent the spectrum of religious leadership in this country – from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and from the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals to the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America – plus a variety of church organizations such as the United Methodist Church, the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church USA, and American Indigenous people among others. You will notice that in every single statement one common theme runs through all of them. Organized religion in its many faces is calling you to take strong action to restrain the forces leading to global climate change. A reading of these statements will show that there are different rationales; there are different theological emphases, but there remains one single unified conclusion. Religion in America is declaring that climate change is as serious as any issue which we face. For this reason we ask you to initiate strong and vigorous action to address this grave problem.

What do we mean when we ask you to take “strong action”? We mean that any genuine response to climate change must restrain and reduce our profligate use of fossil fuels. It must include an end to the logging of our public forests, and it should especially emphasize preserving tropical forests. It means reducing our use of coal, including coal-fired electrical production. It will require a reduction in the release of methane from sanitary landfills and farms, finding alternatives to nitrous oxide producing fertilizers and the venting of refrigeration gases. Our nation will need legislation that rewards conservation of energy. This list is just a beginning, and you already are familiar with all of these solutions.

For anyone who is sober minded about this issue, there should be no question that the measurable and relentless rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases has an anthropogenic cause. The peer-reviewed studies from academia affirm this conclusion. The conclusions from every one of the National Academies of Science of the G-8 nations affirm this. The United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledges this conclusion. There is no controversy among peer-reviewed science on this question.

Why then does there appear to be confusion about the causes of climate change? The answer is obvious. The only organized dissent to action against climate change comes from one source – the fossil fuel companies and their surrogates in public relations and the media. It should be clear to anyone who examines this situation that these corporate entities are merely placing short term financial considerations before the health and welfare of the American people – and the entire world. This deliberate lack of vision has to be labeled as immoral and ethically unacceptable!

This immoral action provides an opportunity for reflection. The fossil fuel companies are all corporations. The for-profit corporation by its nature has no innate capacity for morality or genuine ethics. It has only a fiduciary responsibility to stock holders to turn a quarterly profit. That's it. The corporation has no other purpose. The drive for profits is the corporation's sole measure of value and success. It lacks all capability to do anything else.

With this in mind, despite the largess of multi-national corporations to elected officials through campaign contributions, there must be an impeachment of the corporate perspective because, by its very nature, the corporation has no capability for a genuine assessment of this problem. It has no heart, no soul, no spiritual capacity to embrace real values. The health and future of our nation is at stake in how we discern what is right and necessary in our engagement with climate change. The corporations may hire well meaning people to advocate in their interests, but in the end those views are subsumed into the goals of the corporation. This is inevitable because the corporations are not real people. They are artificial entities whose only purpose is to turn a profit. There is no service involved; there is no altruism; there isn't even one wit of genuine patriotism. Our law may accord corporations some of the rights of personhood, but in fact they are not real people, and they certainly do not behave like real people. They don't feel and they don't die. They have no capacity for compassion. They only grow and seek larger market shares for themselves. President Abraham Lincoln was prescient in his observation that the rise of the for-profit corporation could mean the downfall of the Republic.



Frederick Krueger, NRCCC, in discussion with Amy Saltzman of the President's Council on Environmental Quality

In contrast religion is presenting to you its assessments based upon sound science integrated with prudence and traditional values. These different religious organizations are rarely unanimous on anything. In this situation, they have each independently examined the consequences of inaction on climate change. They sought the good of local communities and families into the future. They brought the widest possible range of insights to the deliberative process. And they fortified their examination with prayer and they solicited contrary views.

After the great diversity of citizens inherent in religious organizations examined this problem, we are submitting to you a common conclusion. With virtually one voice, religion in America is speaking to you and declaring the need to restrain our nation's unbridled use of fossil fuels. We are asking you to press the Congress for strong legislation to reduce our excessive reliance on carbon fuels. We encourage you to emphasize alternative sources of energy. Climate change, in the end, may be the defining issue of our time – and the Obama presidency.

Listen then to the voices of religion as the individuals gathered here present to you and to President Obama the positions of their organizations on this vital issue to our nation and to every person alive as well as those yet to be born.

Thank you.