



# EPA Office of Public Engagement in Dialogue with American Religious Leaders

A summary report on the dialogue between NRCCC representatives and EPA Officials  
on the key issues facing the Environmental Protection Agency

October 24, 2017



Front row: L to R: Rev Dr Richard Cizik; Rev. Dr. Jim Antal; Dr. Richard Miller; Jim Davidson; Allen Johnson;  
Back row: Fr. Sergei Kapral; Rev. Dr. Owen Owens; Rabbi Warren Stone; Dr. Mirele Goldsmith; Dave Carroll; Frederick Krueger  
Not shown: Susan Bass; Christine Ellman

## Scott Gordon

Associate Director, EPA Office of Public Engagement



Good morning. I'm the new Associate Director of the EPA Office of Public Engagement. I'm from Chambersville, Maryland, and I previously worked for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Before that I worked on Capitol Hill for a firm that specialized in fund raising and contributions for republican senatorial candidates. I'm sorry that Kate Benneton can't be with you today. She is flying back from a meeting in Tennessee with Administrator Scott Pruitt. I'm glad you all are here.

Fred, would you like to begin and provide an overview of why you are here and what you would like to talk about.

## **Fred Krueger**

NRCCC Executive coordinator

Religion is very concerned about environmental health and global climate change. Every religious institution across America that has studied this issue has concluded that global climate change is the single most critical issue facing our nation.



What is significant for the EPA is that virtually the entire spectrum of religious organizations has studied climate change, and each has come to the same conclusion: Climate change is more serious than originally thought and urgent action is required now.

From this background of unity across religious organizations, and the advocacy to engage climate change in our own congregations, we urge this same response from the EPA and every level of government. This is our message to you and to Administrator Scott Pruitt. We urge you to recognize climate change as a major challenge in your work. To document this unity, we are presenting this book Religion and Global Climate Change, to you as it depicts the declarations of every major religious group on climate change.



## **Stephen Gordon**

Well, I haven't been here at EPA that long, and so I can't speak for Administrator Scott Pruitt.

## **Rabbi Warren Stone**

Co-chair, NRCCC

We want you to know that we are here about long term issues.

Sometime ago I traveled to the Sahara desert, and there I visited a Berber village in the mountains. Children were there selling unusual rocks. I bought a rock out in the desert. It was a fossilized shell, and what was shocking to me is that this rock showed that this was once an ocean. There is a lesson for us in that rock's history....



The EPA should be in harmony with the voice of faith.... Think about children, and think about family, we want to be sure that there is no turning back on legislation....

We want to be sure that children are guarded and protected against pollution... and that there is no turning back to the pollution and preventable illnesses of the past.

People of every faith tradition share this concern. For this reason we call upon the EPA not to deregulate years of clean air and water actions which have protected children and families. We cannot allow coal powered and pollution emitting plants to return to the past and decades of dirty air!

## **Fr Sergei Kapral**

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania  
Public Affairs Officer, Orthodox Church in America



The Orthodox bishops share this same concern. They are saying that the way we have been degrading the environment is wrong; it is a sin.

The EPA is important to us. But many of us are not happy with what we now see happening inside the EPA. We see that the EPA is changing under this administration. Important rules that protect citizen health are being relaxed. You are shifting the balance over in favor of industry. We see it happening.... and the health of citizens will pay for these changes.



## **Stephen Gordon**

We are trying to listen to all sides. You can't always tell what we are doing because there is so much fake news in the media.

## **Fr Sergei Kapral**

All that we have to do is watch your actions. That is enough to tell us what you are doing. You want to roll back the Clean Power Plan. That is not fake news. You are messing with the health of the earth and the people. Actions like this tell us that you are going off track with the misbegotten goals that you are promoting. This is apparent to all of us. It is important to us that the EPA stay on track with its Congressionally-mandated mission.

## **Rev. Dr. Jim Antal**

President, United Church of Christ  
Framington, Massachusetts

I serve as the national spokesperson for the United Church of Christ, a denomination of 5,000 congregations and over 1,000,000 members. We just finished a national survey of our members and found that their number one issue is climate change. We found that 97% of the delegates to the National Synod want to promote the vision of the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.



In June of 2017 UCC members voted “to resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and demand new sources of renewable energy that are accessible to all communities.”

“For the sake of our children, grandchildren and unborn generations, we ask you to hear us – as representatives of tens of millions of people of faith, all of whom are stakeholders in the EPA and God's creation. We ask you to enforce policies and promote

innovation that will allow the next generation to at least forgive us for what we and a few generations before us have already caused. Overcome the false and destructive divide that dominates climate policy and refocus this nation on providing the next generation with what is their Constitutional right to inherit a world not wrecked by climate change."

Our grandchildren will know the names of Donald Trump and Scott Pruitt. We don't want them to know you for wrecking creation.



### **Dr. Richard Cizik**

Director of Government Affairs, Interfaith Power and Light; and former VP, National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)  
Fredericksburg, Virginia

I am an Evangelical Christian. I've had a climate conversion. For Evangelicals, following Christ means caring for creation. I was once asked to submit my blood for testing. The results showed that I had 39 of 84 toxic chemicals in my system. My vision is to care for God's creation. This is the same as the original vision for the EPA.

Climate change is real and human induced. It calls for action. And we are saying action based upon a biblical view of the world as God's world. To deplete our resources, to harm our world through environmental degradation, this is an offense against God. That's what the Scriptures say. Therefore, if we are to be obedient to the Scriptures, there is no time to wait, no time to stall, no time to deliberate.

Look, Mr. Pruitt needs to include among his Advisors those people of faith who are open to climate change as an environmental crisis and clear defenders of the research by a majority of scientists.

So far, people in the pews have not been getting cues from their pastors and denominational leaders – the people they esteem most. But we know that once they hear this word from their spiritual heads, from their churches, they will respond.

Evangelicals comprise between 40-50% percent of the Republican base, and it has been the leadership of the Republican party, sad to say, that has not shown the leadership it should on environmental issues... in fact, they have stymied action on climate change.

### **Susan Bass**

Vice President, Earth Day Network's religious coalition  
Washington, DC

The faith community is united on this issue. Their witness is vital for the sustainable development of the planet.

Originally faith leaders called for the creation of the EPA.... We are now coming up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day. The faith community is a critical part of our network. My message to you is that the faith community is unified as we move toward immediate action on climate change. For the future development of our planet people of all traditions believe in this.



## **Allen Johnson**

Coordinator, Christians for the Mountains  
Dunmore, West Virginia



I've been involved with health research in Appalachian coal mining areas. We have found that coal mining causes worsened community health. Protecting our fellow citizens from harmful pollution is a moral responsibility." We're the most unhealthy state in the nation. Pollution from coal mining is a significant factor. We need regulation for the benefit of people, not for industry.

I believe in a strong "national defense" which to me means protecting the natural environment that sustains us. If we remember history, there was an important study done in the late 1930s by the Dept of Agriculture. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture William Lowdermilk found that 13 out of 17 major civilizations fell, not because of warfare, but because they abused the land.

I speak out of the historic witness of the Peace churches. We believe that a strong national defense is protecting citizen health, by protecting clean water flow, and ensuring that we have clean air.

The federal budget allocates over \$2,000 per person for military defense, but the EPA budget is about \$17 per person. Our priority is defending what causes our health.

Jesus said that He who would be great among you should be servant of all. American has to serve all of humanity. Upon this America will rise or fall. as people of faith we believe that we should be protecting defending and nurturing God's creation as our first priority. Thank you.



## **Jim Davidson**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)  
Co-chair, Midwestern chapter, NRCCC  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Last night, I was reviewing the original purpose of the EPA. Listen to how the original commission from Congress defines its purpose.  
The EPA's official purpose is to ensure that:

- \* All Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment...;
- \* National efforts to reduce environmental risk are based on the best available scientific information;
- \* Federal laws protecting human health and the environment are enforced fairly....

- \* Environmental protection is an integral consideration in U.S. policies concerning natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and international trade...;
- \* All parts of society ... have access to accurate information ...;
- \* Environmental protection contributes to making our communities and ecosystems diverse, sustainable and economically productive; and
- \* The United States plays a leadership role in working with other nations to protect the global environment.

I remember an enormous amount of pollution in my formative years.... I remember the first Earth Day, and the creation of the EPA. I decided to come here with a simple message: Thank you! Why? For stopping so many pollution issues: DDT; Burning rivers; The ozone hole; acid rain; toxic urban air. The list is very long. I realized that I really liked the EPA. In fact, I am so thankful that the EPA has been here – over these forty some years. You have made an enormous difference.

My worry is that the EPA may become irrelevant. It would be a shame to watch an institution that has done so much good become irrelevant....

Your task is to “use the best available scientific information.” This is your mandate from Congress. Currently, you are not using the best science and the risks are getting dangerous.

### **Dr. Richard Miller**

Creighton University and  
Director, Planetary Emergency Institute  
Omaha, Nebraska



I'm a Roman Catholic. As a church, we've been talking about the environment and climate change since the 1970s. Pope Francis issued his encyclical Laudato Si! The entire encyclical is about poverty and the environment.... The way we treat the environment tells how we relate to God and our neighbors.

Catholic Bishops have a strong position addressing climate change. At its core, according to the Bishops, “global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, it is about the future of God’s creation and the human family. It is about our human stewardship of God’s creation and our responsibility for those that come after us.” For perspective 23% of Americans self-identify with the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis has argued in most urgent terms that climate change and the environment needs to be dealt with. Whether it is pollution or rising levels of carbon dioxide, these are dehumanizing and violating human rights. This highlights the importance of putting people before profits.... I don't think you are aware of the monstrous effect fossil fuels are bringing upon the health of this planet.



### **Dr. Mirele Goldsmith**

Environmental psychologist  
New York City, NY

I'm from the Jewish community and it seems that we all are quoting Pope Francis these days. I'm not a rabbi. I'm a person in the pew. As a religious Jew we have a responsibility to make the world a better place. I'm sometimes disappointed with my own community because we are not active enough. This is changing. We're beginning to understand that the transition to clean energy is good for people... It is bringing jobs and health.

Working for clean energy is about loving your neighbors as yourself. It is also related to helping people getting food, housing and health. These are things that we are committed to making happen. In NY state we are working for clean energy and striving to get off of fossil fuels.... We want 100% clean energy by 2035. I want you to know that we're looking for aggressive action to make that transition.. And we need your help.

### **David Carroll**

Technical Educator, Businessman and Inventor  
Grantsburg, Wisconsin

Like Administrator Scott Pruitt, I am a member of the Baptist Church. As a representative of the faith, engineering and science communities, I ask the EPA to do its homework on advancing technology in order to stay relevant and on-mission.



The EPA can be seen as fulfilling a biblically prescribed task – of taking caring of creation. Top scientists say that if we don't stop polluting the atmosphere and ocean, the world will only support one-half to one billion people. Today, I speak for those missing six billion souls. Scientists and engineers are creating new non-polluting power and advanced power storage solutions like never before. They are making great headway.

Here are just some examples: Just hours ago, Motor Trend magazine reprinted an announcement from Toshiba Motors. They are producing a new material that doubles the capacity and triples the speed of recharging lithium-ion batteries. This anode improvement provides 200 miles of travel from a 6-minute charge. A full charge can now take your vehicle three times as far. This innovation will be commercialized by 2019.

Another innovation is a new ultra-mobile, ultra-capacitor battery. This will be made from super-thin dielectric and nano-layer graphene. I visited a materials scientist at Queens University who estimated this will be commercially available within a few years. This will change everything. Recently, Stanford University announced a large salt-based power storage solution.

New 50% efficient solar photovoltaic panels were just announced by the University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Lab. That's 300% better than what we're getting

now. What's happening is that this PV concentrator converts infrared energy to gather three times the output of current solar systems. Such new solar systems could provide a 4-year return on investment.

Warren Buffet's MidAmerican Energy is now putting in \$1 billion in upgrades to their wind farms. These wind science advancements produce a 30% increase in efficiency. This drops the minimum wind speed needed to turn a profit from 15 miles per hour to 6 mph. Bottom line: Buffet makes \$51 million more in annual profit. We're talking about new levels of ROI. We're going to be lost if we don't wake up to how the technology is racing ahead and giving us new opportunities.

Stay relevant. We have to make these transitions now. In Texas we're taking out three coal fired power plants. Even in Texas they are going to wind renewables. Stay current. Don't stay with these old style power systems because the renewables are racing ahead. If the EPA will pay attention to the many new developments in science and technology, it will see that the future is not in these tired old fossil fuels, but in the many new clean innovations in solar and wind energy systems. The EPA can make a difference and help make the world and our nation great again.

### **Reverend Dr. Owen Owens**

Co chair, NRCCC, and Past chair, National Council of Churches Eco-Justice working group  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



As a child I was taught that Jesus calls us to be good stewards. Later I learned Jesus' parable about the good steward who managed wisely.

In public school in Wisconsin, I learned we became better stewards as we reflected on our policies. We saw what happened when we cut the forests, killed the wildlife and destroyed their habitats, and let soils erode. We admitted we done wrong, learned to take better care of soil, water, forests and wildlife, and found that healthy land and clean streams gave us health.

A half century later, we are falling backwards. Though God's earth is still our home, we are failing to care for the earth, and are disintegrating God's creation..., and our health suffers.

Just as Mid-Western farmers learned that plowing up and down hills caused soil to erode, today we must recognize that the more carbon we pour into the atmosphere by burning coal, oil, and gas, the more the planet's temperature increases. Clearly we must change how we live, and care for God's good creation.

When Pope Francis saw what we humans are doing to the world, he spoke out, telling us that human-caused climate change is an unprecedented emergency. As with prophets of every generation, he reminded us that we can avoid the worst of climate change.... All humans, particularly those in power, must heed the moral and religious imperative to mitigate climate change.

We can no longer use our resources without thinking about consequences. We are now called to change the way we live so that we protect, preserve, and restore the systems of life. The Bible is clear. Stewardship is grounded in God's providential care. The Spirit's still, small voice is speaking today to all of us: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God."

The EPA is mandated to protect and restore our land, air, water, and the systems of life. Do what the Lord tells us to do. Suddenly kindness, humility, and justice will no longer be words on the pages of an old book, but a warm, shining Biblical light drawing you into God's expanding circle of love.

### **Dr. Richard Miller**

Omaha, Nebraska

The EPA has an ethical responsibility to leverage its power for the good of all the American people, not just for industry.



### **Rabbi Warren Stone**

Co-chair, NRCCC and past chair, Central Council of American Rabbis Ecol. committee  
Bethesda, Maryland



I lived in Los Angeles for five years at a time when the air pollution was so bad, you needed a gas mask to drive to work through the pollution. My family is still there. I left when I couldn't breathe the air anymore. The regulations that were put in place were for our benefit. Regulations are for our benefit....

When I recently went back to LA, it was cleaner. We don't want to go back to that era. We need these regulations.

We have requested a meeting with the EPA because standards enacted to protect people from harmful chemicals, air pollution and the worst impacts of climate change are being rolled back at an alarming rate. Don't go back on things that work!

Our purpose in this meeting is to urge EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and all of your staff to consider the moral implications of ignoring climate change science and a wide range of environmental challenges facing the nation from polluted air and drinking water to the degradation of public land and protected waterways.

We call upon the EPA not to deregulate years of clean air and water actions that have protected children and families. We cannot allow a return to coal powered and pollution emitting plants to return us to a past of dirty air!

Our common belief is about the future of God's creation and the human family. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those that come after us,"

## **Dr. Richard Miller**

Omaha, Nebraska

One thing to keep in mind is that there is no opposition between economic growth and the transition to a zero carbon economy.

In 2014 an IMF report maintained that strong measures to limit carbon emissions would not negatively affect economic growth and could actually lead to faster growth.

Modeling from Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) shows that a fee and dividend approach, which is the policy adopted by Citizens Climate Lobby, will reduce CO2 emissions 33% below 1990 levels after 10 years and 50% below 1990 levels after 20 years while saving an estimated 227,000 American lives, lead to 2.8 million more jobs than without fee and dividend, increase disposable income by \$800 per person, and will increase GDP by \$1.3 trillion over twenty years. It is a win-win possibility and since all monies collected from putting a fee on CO2 is returned to the public, it is not a tax.

In addition, it is important to recognize that there is overwhelming public recognition that climate change is real, caused mostly by human beings, and we must reduce emissions.

The polling by Stanford social scientist Jon Krosnick shows that 74% of Americans say global warming is real. 75% see that humans are substantially responsible for the warming. 76% want government to limit businesses emissions of greenhouse gases.

These polling numbers hold up in state by state polling. Even in the deep south, we find that there are just a small group of people who are opposed to this. The more we get these deadly and costly storms, the more people are reminded of this threat.

Finally, one last aspect of this problem that is not commonly recognized is that if you wait on climate change, it can be too late. With carbon dioxide you can only put so much into the atmosphere. This is because, according to David Archer a leading researcher on long life of CO2,

- \* 25% of the CO2 we put in the atmosphere for a 1,000 years
- \* 12% lasts for 10,000 years
- \* 7% lasts over a 100,000 years.

The mean lifetime of CO2 is 30,000-35,000 years. You can't wait on this. You can't keep putting more CO2 in the atmosphere. If you wait until 2020, the consequences are catastrophic. Any foot dragging, any waiting at this point will have catastrophic implications.





## **Rabbi Warren**

Can you please respond? We want to be heard and we want to be part of this conversation....

## **Stephen Gordon**

I appreciate all of this. The Administrator will want to hear this information. I will report all of this information to the Administrator, Mr. Scott Pruitt.

It is just not accurate that we don't listen to insightful information like this. We go out on the road and we meet with many kinds of groups, farmers, and so forth. We want to hear from you.

My job is to get this information from you all. I appreciate you coming in and providing this information.... He is a faith based man himself.

I want you all to reach out to me, that is what I am here for, and I am open to your insights and future comments. That is what I am here for. ...

Closing Prayer: Reverend Jim Antal

**SPECIAL THANKS** to NRCCC photographer Christine Ellman for her 'Beautifell' photography, and to Allen Johnson for his record of the proceedings.

Additional thanks to the staff of the Environmental Protection Agency for the attention, courtesy and thoughtfulness which they brought to this dialogue. Particular thanks are due to Mr. Stephen Gordon for his thoughtful hosting of our dialogue; to Ms. Doretta Reeves for her smiling helpfulness and knowledge in guiding us through the EPA labyrinth; to Mr. Lee Tanner for his attention; to Ms. Emma Daniels for her note taking; and to all of the other EPA staff members who participated or attended our meeting.

