

Alaska Conference of Catholic Bishops
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November 17, 2009

Dear Senators Murkowski, Begich and Congressman Young:

We, the Catholic Bishops of Alaska, write to respectfully encourage you to take action on climate change by supporting meaningful legislation such as the Clean Energy Jobs & American Power Act.

At its core, addressing global climate change is about our responsibility to care for God's creation and to care for one another, especially the weak and the vulnerable. Pope Benedict XVI is calling upon the Church to take responsibility for creation and to assert this "responsibility in the public sphere."¹ This letter is an answer to his call.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI stated "in order to protect nature, it is not enough to intervene with economic incentives or deterrents; not even an apposite education is sufficient. These are important steps, but the decisive issue is the overall *moral tenor* of society."²

We recognize the innate complexity of climate change and the subsequent challenge before you (and all of Congress) in crafting a sufficient political, economic and moral response. As people of faith, we can recommend a moral equation to serve as a guide in shaping each facet of this response; an equation not only giving rise to meaningful climate and energy legislation, but also elevating America's *moral tenor* by including legislative provisions reflecting the principles of *prudence, poverty and the common good*.

Prudence: Thoughtful, deliberate and reasoned action

As Catholic Bishops, we accept the conclusions of the International Panel on Climate Change and the climate impacts we are witnessing in Alaska, as the basis for prudent action.

Prudence is paramount in addressing climate change. This virtue is not only necessary for individuals in leading morally positive lives, but is also vital to the moral health of humanity. Prudence is intelligence applied to our actions, requiring a deliberate and reflective process. This helps us identify what is truly at stake in a warming climate, and moves us to adopt a course of actions that are in the best interest of the common good.

¹ Encyclical Letter "Deus Caritas Est" Pope Benedict XVI. July 2009. Paragraph #51

² Encyclical Letter "Deus Caritas Est" Pope Benedict XVI. July 2009. Paragraph #51

Poverty: Concern for those least able to bear the burden

Natural disasters place the greatest burdens on the world's most vulnerable communities. To survive severe storms, prolonged droughts, extended heat waves and other climate-related events, our vulnerable sisters and brothers must receive assistance—both public and private.

Inaction and inadequate or misguided responses to climate change will place even greater hardships on already desperately poor peoples. Therefore, the Catholic Church draws focus to the needs of the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of justice that does not put the poor at greater risk or place disproportionate burdens on peoples living in developing nations.

The Common Good: The promotion of solidarity over self-interest

Like the air we breathe, the earth's climate is by its very nature a part of the planetary commons. Our earth's atmosphere encompasses all people, creatures, and habitats. The melting of ice sheets and glaciers, the destruction of rain forests, and the pollution of water in one place can have harmful environmental impacts elsewhere. As Pope John Paul II said, "We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well being of future generations."³ Responses by all nations to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and weigh self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions.

The Moral Equation: Prudence + Poverty + Common Good = Meaningful Legislation

Climate change presents the United States with an opportunity to act with courage and compassion as individuals, as people of faith, as a nation. As a first-world country and the primary contributor to greenhouse gases per capita, the United States bears a special responsibility to craft meaningful legislation that serves the interests of Americans but also those of all people.

We believe all nations must be held accountable to address global climate change. However, no strategy to confront a rapidly warming climate will succeed without the leadership and participation of industrial nations, particularly that of the United States of America.

Therefore, as the Climate Conference in Copenhagen approaches and the eyes of the world look upon the United States for leadership, we ask you to seize this opportunity to meaningfully confront climate change by supporting and shaping the *moral tenor* of legislation such as the Clean Energy Jobs & American Power Act through the inclusion of the following prudent actions:

- Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions as quickly as possible to avoid the worsening impacts of climate change. By doing so we put prudent stewardship into practice while living up to our responsibility to tend to God's Creation.⁴
- Support Adaptation Funding for Domestic and International Communities Vulnerable to Climate Change.

³Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* (Washington, D.C.: USSCB, 1990), no.6.

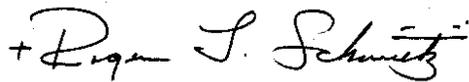
⁴ Genesis 2:15

- International Provisions: At least \$3.5 billion of the revenue generated by the cap and trade system be dedicated to international adaptation to help people living in poverty in the most vulnerable developing countries adapt to climate change. This amount should steadily increase to at least \$7 billion by 2020.

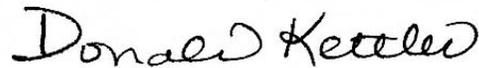
- Domestic Provisions: Ensure that funding provided to domestic consumers makes the needs of low-income people a clear priority by including a progressive formula and a comprehensive system so that those most in need are protected from and not harmed by any potential rise in energy prices. This would include providing adequate adaptation funding to Alaska's most vulnerable communities.

Pope Benedict XVI states, "Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions" to curb climate change. As pastors, teachers, and citizens, we bishops are calling upon you, our elected officials who will help shape public policy on climate change, to heed the urgent call of Pope Benedict and the entire Catholic Church. With your leadership, the Clean Energy Jobs & American Power Act is our Nation's collective opportunity to make morally and politically courageous decisions to confront the challenges of a changing climate.

Sincerely yours,



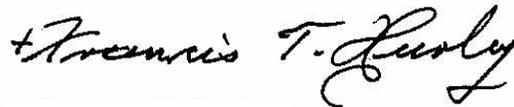
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