

# Focus the Nation

## Stabilizing the Climate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**“How far can it go? The last time the world was three degrees [C] warmer than today – which is what we expect later this century – sea levels were 25m higher. So that is what we can look forward to if we don't act soon...I think sea-level rise is going to be the big issue soon, more even than warming itself...**

**How long have we got? We have to stabilize emissions of carbon dioxide within a decade, or temperatures will warm by more than one degree. That will be warmer than it has been for half a million years, and many things could become unstoppable....We don't have much time left.”**

— **Dr. James Hansen, Director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. 2/17/2006**

**Focus the Nation** is a major educational initiative that will coordinate teams of faculty, students and staff at over a thousand colleges, universities and high schools in the United States, to collaboratively engage in a nationwide, interdisciplinary discussion centered around the theme of “Stabilizing the Climate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. The project will culminate in the month of January 2008, in the form of one-day, national symposia held simultaneously on campuses across the country.

From a base in educational institutions, Focus the Nation will also incorporate participation by religious, civic and business organizations, and has the potential to organize thousands of institutions and, with sufficient effort, millions of participants across the country to focus national attention for a day around a serious discussion of climate stabilization. Our goal is for Focus the Nation to become the “Earth Day 1970” catalyzing event that turns the national conversation about global warming from recognition coupled with despair, towards determination to build a clean energy future.

The first motivation for this project is reflected in the recent statement above by Dr. Hansen, the top US government climate scientist. Over the next decade, critical policy decisions will be made with irreversible consequences for the future. Hansen and other scientists believe that if we do not stabilize greenhouse gas emissions soon, we may set in motion a process leading to collapse of the West Antarctic and Greenland Ice sheets, events that would raise global sea levels by over 35 feet, inundating many of the world’s major cities. This of course is just one of the myriad consequences of human-induced warming, with regional and global impacts ranging across hurricanes of greater intensity and duration, global water shortages, altered patterns of rainfall, drought and flood, massive forest die-back, and large-scale species extinction.

Students today face many important social, economic, and security issues. Global warming however, is unique, in that if we are to reduce the risk of large-scale, irreversible, world-wide damages, then ambitious-- and potentially costly-- policy solutions must be undertaken within a very compressed time frame. At this time, we owe our young people a day of national, focused, non-partisan discussion of the decisions to be made in the next ten years, decisions that will profoundly affect their future, and indeed the future of all human generations to follow.

The second motivation for this project is to explore a new model of collaborative, interdisciplinary education, on a national scale. Focus the Nation will require campus-based teams of faculty and students to draw on campus expertise across the broad range of disciplines: the natural sciences, philosophy, art, economics, history, computer science, communications, government, religion, theater, literature, psychology. In addition, Focus the Nation will promote national interaction among coordinating teams of students and faculty. The project web site, along with a series of regional planning meetings, will provide opportunities to share ideas about teaching among thousands of faculty and students, as the curricula at different schools develop. Focus the Nation provides an exciting model opportunity to create, for one-day, a true community of scholarship bridging traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Focus the Nation is directed by Dr. Eban Goodstein, Professor of Economics at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. (Biography Attached) The project's advisory board includes Dennis Hayes, Hunter Lovins, David Orr, Billy Parish and Claudine Schneider.

The Focus the Nation website will be launched in August, and a kick-off conference for the project will be held in the Fall of 2006 at Middlebury College. Prior to launch, over two dozen schools have already expressed interest in participating. Student governments, faculty senates, and University Presidents will support the project by endorsing the following resolution:

**“Global warming presents a serious challenge to the well-being of both people and natural systems across the planet. Public and private policy decisions to be made in the next decade regarding greenhouse gas emissions and technology investments will have impacts lasting for generations. Therefore, on January 31, 2008, [institution], in conjunction with colleges and universities across the country, will hold a symposium focusing on “Stabilizing the Climate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. On that day, faculty are strongly encouraged to incorporate either a focus on climate change into their classes, or else travel with their class to attend either symposia programming related to their discipline, or a class offered by a colleague that incorporates a perspective on climate change. The symposium program committee will work with interested faculty to develop appropriate material for their classes, and to insure that throughout the day, diverse disciplines are represented in symposium panels and workshops.”**

Climate change is unique in that in virtually every discipline, major scholars are engaged in important research. Thus, while classes would not be cancelled, and faculty would face no mandate to participate, we anticipate broad and exciting involvement as teachers across the curriculum bring leading scholarship from their field into the classroom.

This is an opportunity for educators to take a leadership role, and catalyze a process which indeed will “Focus the Nation” around a non-partisan, reasoned, campus-lead discussion about the scientific, economic, political, philosophic, aesthetic and moral dimensions of this essential 21<sup>st</sup> century issue. As a species, we now understand that for the last 150 years we have been engaged in an unprecedented natural experiment, in which we have been drastically altering the basic nature of the planet's climate control system. Focus the Nation will engage the country with the question: How far do we want to let that experiment go?

## **Biography for Eban Goodstein**

Eban Goodstein is Professor of Economics at Lewis and Clark College in Portland Oregon. Goodstein is the author of a college textbook, *Economics and the Environment*, (John Wiley and Sons: 2007) forthcoming in its fifth edition, as well as *The Trade-off Myth: Fact and Fiction about Jobs and the Environment*. (Island Press: 1999)

Goodstein's current research focuses on the economics of global climate change, a subject on which he has spoken widely. Articles by Goodstein have appeared in among other outlets, *The Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, *Land Economics*, *Ecological Economics*, and *Environmental Management*. His research has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Scientific American*, *Time*, *Chemical and Engineering News*, *The Economist*, *USA Today*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Goodstein received his B.A. from Williams College and his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He serves on the editorial board of *Environment*, *Workplace and Employment*, is on the Steering Committee of the Center for the Applied Study of Economics & the Environment, and is a Member Scholar at the Center for Progressive Reform.

Goodstein is also the volunteer Executive Director of the Green House Network, a non-profit organization dedicated to public education about clean energy solutions to global warming. The Green House Network ([www.greenhousenet.org](http://www.greenhousenet.org)) has developed a nation-wide speakers bureau, whose more than 300 members are committed to fostering public discussion about climate policy in the United States.