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White House Conference on Science and Economics Research Related to Global Change
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Thank you very much for the welcome. I apologize for the slight delay in there. Thank you, Secretary Brady and members of the U.S. delegation; members of my Cabinet and the cochairmen of this Conference, Michael Boskin and Allan Bromley, Michael Deland. And I'm pleased to welcome this international field of distinguished high-level officials, experts all on the environment, economics, science, and energy. Welcome to the White House Conference on Global Change.

Two months ago I had the honor of addressing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. And let me recognize Bert Bolin, who is here -- IPCC Chairman -- here with us this morning. I see this Conference helping to accelerate the IPCC's agenda as it searches for understanding of some very critical questions, broadening the dialog by exploring the link between scientific research and economic analysis in the study of global change.

And of course, this Conference is itself another sign of the growing importance of the environment on the international agenda. Here in the United States, we've moved one step closer to a great victory for the environment, strengthening our own clean air statutes, already the world's toughest, with a comprehensive package of new clean air initiatives.

Ten months ago we renewed momentum lost in legislative stalemate for 12 years. Just this month, a clean air package cleared the United States Senate, with House action hopefully possible in May. We're moving forward on clean air legislation because it is in America's interest. But like so many of the environmental issues that concern us, we aren't the only beneficiary of a better environment.

When it comes to the environment, we are learning that local actions can have global consequences. Understanding the effects of our actions on our Earth's system is the first step to a sound environment. And the subject that led me to invite all of you here is just exactly that. I want to speak just briefly this morning so you can get on about your work. But I want to speak about what we can do over the course of the next couple of days to advance our understanding of global change. This Conference will help in three ways. First, it provides an opportunity to help sort out the science on this complex issue; to start with what we know about the Earth and this home we share, about the factors, natural as well as man-made, that cause our environment to change; and to work from what we know toward answers to the many uncertainties that abound.

Perhaps it's not surprising, when the subject is global change, that the debate often generates more heat than light. Some of you may have seen two scientists just on one of our talk shows on Sunday -- respected men debating global change. One scientist argued

that if we keep burning fossil fuels at today's rate, and I quote, "By the end of the next century, Earth could be nine degrees Fahrenheit warmer than today." And the other scientist saw no evidence of rapid change and warned against a drastic reordering of our economy that could cause us, in his words, "to end up the impoverished nation awaiting a warming that never comes." Two scientists, two diametrically opposed points of view -- now, where does that leave us?

What we need are facts, the stuff that science is made of -- a better understanding of the basic processes at work in our whole world, better Earth system models that enable us to calculate the complex interaction between man and our environment. And that's why I've asked our Congress to approve a 60-percent increase in our budget for the global change research program, an aggressive research program for which we budgeted more than \$1 billion in 1991 to reduce the uncertainties surrounding global change, to advance the scientific understanding we need if we are to make decisions to maximize benefits and minimize the unintended consequences.

The second way this gathering can advance our understanding is to address the economic factor in environmental questions. We know that cleaning up our environment costs money -- a lot of money -- and we know it means changes in the way we work and live. Here in the United States, we're already making those changes -- moving forward on clean air, planting trees through our America the Beautiful initiative, and working with other nations to find ways to halt deforestation, phasing out the use of CFC's, encouraging conservation, exploring alternative sources of fuel and energy and market-based incentives for pollution control. And yet as we move forward, all of us must make certain we preserve our environmental well-being and our economic welfare. We know that these are not separate concerns; they are two sides of the same coin. Recognizing this fact is in the interest of every nation here today. It's in the interest of the developed world and the developing world alike.

Let me focus for just a moment on the developing world. In a climate of poverty or persistent economic struggle, protecting the environment becomes a far more difficult challenge. Cold statistics don't begin to capture the harsh realities that are at stake. Development doesn't mean just another point in the gross national product, the GNP; it's measured in human lives, an end to hunger, lower infant mortality, longer life expectancy -- not just quality of life but life itself.

Environmental policies that ignore the economic factor, the human factor, are destined to fail. But there's another reason to consider the economic factor when the issue is the environment. There is no better ally in service of our environment than strong economies: economies that make possible the increased efficiencies that enable us to make environmental gains, economies that generate the new technologies that help us arrest and reverse the damage that we've done to our environment. We need new economies that allow us to make vital investments in our common future.

And that brings me to the third way this Conference contributes to a net gain in knowledge: the fact that it provides us the opportunity to form a partnership between

nations and across the many disciplines represented here. Few subjects offer a greater challenge to the understanding of man than global change. And yet too often the different disciplines focusing on this question have worked in isolation, with little interchange of ideas, analysis, information. This Conference is a new departure because it brings together environmentalists and economists, experts on energy and science to search for common ground, to search the expertise each discipline can bring to this difficult and demanding concern. And this new partnership must bind nations as well. The fact of the matter is, no one nation acting alone can safeguard our Earth environment. Success requires a sense of global stewardship, an understanding that it is the Earth that endures and that all of us are no more than tenants in temporary possession of a sacred trust.

For the next 2 days, you, in essence, will be grappling with the questions, the fundamental questions, of global stewardship, questions of global consequence. I know there's a debate raging out there, but I am confident that this approach that brings all of you experts together is the way to go.

I thank you very much for joining us here. I will be over after digesting the product of your work tomorrow to have a few more words to say. But from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for coming. There have been a lot of these environmental conferences around the world; but this one, I think, approaches the fundamentals. And we are fortunate to have here in America you experts from all around the world.

Thank you for coming. I look forward to hearing the results of your work. God bless you all. Thank you very much.

Source: George Bush: "Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Science and Economics Research Related to Global Change," April 17, 1990. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.