



Climate Leaders Summit, Montréal, Québec
Governor Jim Douglas
December 5, 2005

Allow me to begin by thanking Premier Charest and Premier Doer for the invitation to be here and for the leadership they have shown on issues related to climate change.

There is now a broad, scientifically based, consensus that climate change is occurring. The evidence is quite clear. Whether to do something about it is no longer debatable: we can do more and we must do more.

Our small state is doing its part to combat climate change. We are, as a popular bumper sticker suggests, thinking globally and acting locally.

If any of you have been to Vermont, you recognize that it is “clean and green.” Our air is clean, our waters are clean – though they can be cleaner – and our environmentally aware citizenry are committed to keeping it that way.

We reject the notion that environmental protection comes at the expense of economic development.

Our clean air and water and our commitment to environmental protection are integral to our economy: it is one reason many people want to live work and raise their families in Vermont and why many people visit us each year.

It’s who we are—a clean, green, pro-business, pro-growth state.

While our emissions are a tiny fraction of those of emitted by other states, we don’t have scores of industrial smokestacks, or mammoth power generating facilities that you find elsewhere, we are trying to do our part to combat climate change.

The vast majority of our emissions come from the cars and trucks that we rely on to get to work, drop the kids off at school, and travel to our mountains and lakes on weekends.

When I became Governor, I recognized that to most effectively address climate change it was imperative that state government transform itself into a leading steward of our natural resources.

If any government is going to tell private industry, municipalities, and its people what they should do to reduce emissions, government must be able to hold itself up as an example.

That's why I directed a group of top administrators to find and implement ways that we could reduce energy consumption, reduce emissions, improve the market for environmentally preferable products and—this is important—save taxpayer dollars that might be returned or reinvested in other priority areas like economic development, education and workforce training.

We are designing more energy efficient buildings, making our old buildings more efficient and reducing our energy consumption—which is saving money.

And we're converting our fleet of state vehicles to smaller, more efficient vehicles, including hybrids—which is saving money.

We are, in short, proving that environmental responsibility and fiscal responsibility go hand-in-hand.

We are taking other steps as well. We're working to responsibly expand Vermont's renewable energy portfolio through grant programs and tax incentives, green power pricing structures and a newly enacted Renewable Portfolio Standard.

We're proud to be the first Northeastern state to adopt the new California emissions standards for automobiles and we are one of nine states engaged in discussions about the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI.

I'm sure that many of you have been following the progress of this important initiative, under which signatory states would act together to control emissions of carbon dioxide from electricity generating power plants in the region.

I was hoping that prior to this conference the Governors of the northeastern United States would have already signed the RGGI memorandum of understanding, which I regard as an important step forward in our efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and turn the tide on global warming.

I understand that some of my fellow Governors still have concerns over what impact RGGI will have on energy prices - that concerns me as well - but I can say that if you put that document in front of me right now I would sign it. I would sign it because it's the right thing to do for my state, my region, for my nation, and for our planet. We simply must find ways to break down barriers and work across borders.

Vermont is also embarking on another important effort.

I have established a new commission that will look beyond state government, beyond auto emission standards, beyond the electrical generating industry, and engage our entire state in this discussion.

We will be reaching out to municipalities, to private businesses, to institutions of higher learning and others to develop mechanisms that will allow us to reduce emissions.

At the end of the day, Vermont will be an example of how a government can address environmental issues in a thoughtful, intelligent, and deliberative manner—and ultimately, use these policies to create more and better paying jobs.

Before concluding, I want to address why I felt it was important to be with you today: I want you all to know that there are many leaders in the United States who want to be part of the solution.

It has been said by many people in Montreal this week, by people in beautiful rooms like this and by the thousands of committed people out there on the street: America has only 5% of the world's population, but we are responsible for 25% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

I believe that the American people want to be more engaged in these discussions.

Any climate change strategy that does not include all major developing countries is an incomplete strategy.

There are many issues of global importance on which nations have respectful disagreements, but this is an opportunity for all nations to come together, to move forward on behalf of all mankind, for the good of our world.

These are the reasons that I'm attempting to address climate change in Vermont, and it is my hope that others will be able to learn from our efforts just as we want to learn from you.

Again, I thank Premier Charest and Premier Doer for their kind invitation to be here tonight, and I thank each and every one of you for the efforts you are taking individually and collectively to address climate change.

Working together, in a spirit of cooperation and with a commitment to achieving real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, we will leave future generations a healthier, stronger, and more closely connected planet.

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