

A Plan for Global Warming Preparedness

A Proposal to Manage Risk & Invest in Resilient Communities



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PROJECT SUMMARY

This document was created in the Fall of 2006 by The Breakthrough Institute, The Center for American Progress, and American Envionics.

Many in the environmental community so firmly believe that Katrina reached the fury of a Category Five hurricane because of global warming that they assume the rest of America also can be brought to believe this. Progressives and environmentalists have long seen the struggle over global warming as a debate over the science—the public just needs to be convinced that global warming is happening and is a human-caused phenomenon, and then there will be strong public support for capping emissions. In this scenario, Katrina looked to be the final push of evidence and the ideal opportunity to push existing global warming policy proposals.



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Yet, in reality, the decades-old debate between conservatives and progressives over whether global warming is happening has been insufficient to advance the transition to clean energy sources or prepare for the consequences of global warming. Rather than inspiring confidence, the left's willingness to engage in the endless debate over the science has increased public doubt and skepticism over global warming. And rather than inspiring action, the environmental narrative of global warming points a blaming finger at consumers and companies—while the right's narrative provides a reassuring escape under the banner of uncertainty.

If a global warming debate about certainty and cause only deepens doubt and defensiveness, what kind of debate would create support for action? We saw Hurricane Katrina as an opportunity to shift from the tired debate over cause and prevention to a new discussion about preparedness, thus reframing global warming from certainty to uncertainty and from limits on human activity to greater activity. Regardless of the cause, global warming is here and we need to prepare for it in the same way we prepare for any other imaginable natural disaster, not knowing exactly when or where it will strike. Global Warming Preparedness was created to test the possibility that action on global warming could be taken, not in spite of uncertainty, but because of it.

“Weathermen don’t always get it right but I still find myself listening to see what they have to say.”

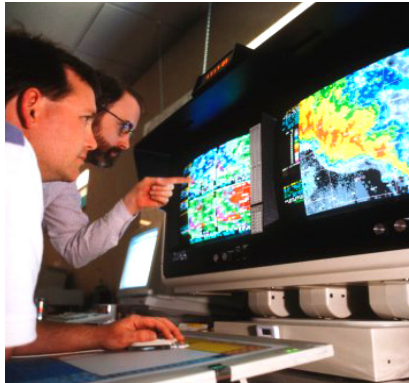
—Focus group participant

In analyzing the Constituencies of Opportunity outside of the Progressive Base, it is distressingly clear that few hold the value of Ecological Concern as a key part of their worldview. Therefore, Hurricane Katrina was not the time to turn up the volume on familiar environmentally-based appeals, but to reach out to these audiences with different narratives and worldviews. Rather than dividing the public in an environmental debate, we believe that a preparedness initiative says “We’re all in this together and we had better get ready,” thus activating important Bridge Values around American potential, the protection

of families and communities, government responsibility, and the commonsense motto of “Be prepared”—values that ultimately advance a clean energy and energy efficiency agenda.

The Global Warming Preparedness initiative says that we should prepare for global warming as we do every other national disaster—by assessing risk, augmenting communication, building infrastructure, coordinating agencies, and creating emergency plans. Among other things, the initiative calls for a national assessment of global warming risk, and it requires property owners and publicly traded corporations to disclose risks to their

property and businesses from global warming to potential buyers and investors.



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Focus group testing of one of the more conservative Constituencies of Opportunity revealed a remarkable thing: a roomful of skeptics and deniers—people defensive about their role in global warming, dubious about the science, and suspicious of hidden agendas—were soon willing to talk about how the local and federal government should divide responsibility for preparing for global warming. When people debate the question

of preparedness instead of the cause-and-blame questions they have been arguing about, it leads to a different set of outcomes, including the implicit acceptance of global warming as an idea—something not even thinkable at the outset of the focus group. From a cognitive perspective, the initiative is able to have this effect because, in a disaster preparedness frame, uncertainty is a reason to act, not to continue debating climatological science. The disaster preparedness frame also helped ground an amorphous abstraction—global warming—in a more concrete concept with which most of us have at least some experience: natural disasters.

Merely putting forward the idea and phrase “global warming preparedness” is not enough to change people’s minds magically. This is not the claim. However, once contestation was introduced into the focus group, two key things changed:

1. **The role of uncertainty.** Having a different kind of argument about uncertainty—when the uncertainty is that of probabilistic outcomes rather than an uncertainty rooted in causation and competing authorities (do scientists agree about the cause, or don’t they)—makes uncertainty an ally instead of an enemy.

“We need all the preparation we can get and all the knowledge from those with the expertise we can get.”

—Focus group participant

2. **The role of the fatalism of this constituency—and of much of American culture—and individual responsibility.** There is movement from resignation to adaptation, from “I can’t do anything about it” to

“I want to know about it so I can make the right decisions for myself and my family.”

As the focus group moderator asked the group, “If the weather forecaster says there’s a 70 percent chance of rain, do you take an umbrella?” Global Warming Preparedness acts in the same context—uncertainty becomes a reason to do things instead of a reason not to. And once this kind of reasoning is in place and global warming becomes a thinkable idea, the hypothesis is that this understanding of uncertainty will be applied to other aspects of global warming, such as, say, emissions.

At the end of the focus group, there was noticeable movement in the acceptance of the ideas that (1) global warming has or will have real impacts on everyone’s life; and (2) it is possible to give people a set of tools so that they can make good decisions for themselves and their families.

When discussed within the preparedness frame, even the global warming deniers in the group were willing to discuss how such coordinated planning could be implemented.

A Plan for Global Warming Preparedness

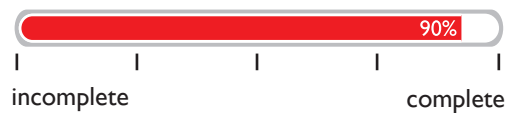
A Proposal to Manage Risk & Invest in Resilient Communities



W H I T E P A P E R

In November 2005, the Nathan Cummings Foundation supported the Breakthrough Institute and the Center for American Progress (CAP) to conduct research and develop one or more Strategic Initiatives that would better prepare America for future disasters. Together, Breakthrough and CAP developed a proposal for “Global Warming Preparedness,” which reframes global warming from prevention to preparedness, from certainty to uncertainty, and from limits on human activity to greater activity.

COMPLETENESS OF THIS INITIATIVE



We are continuing to refine these initiatives with further research and testing, so the white papers that have come out of this project are in varying stages of development.

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Katrina exposed many things about America, from the dangers of concentrated poverty to the deep need to reinvest in the infrastructure of our communities. Perhaps most starkly, it put into real human terms the devastating toll that climate change can have on our economy and our society if we remain unprepared.

It is time to face the fact that global warming is upon us and we had better get ready—just as we prepare for other disasters both natural and unnatural, from earthquakes and forest fires to chemical disasters. Today glaciers are melting and storms are increasingly severe and costly. We are starting to feel the real pain.

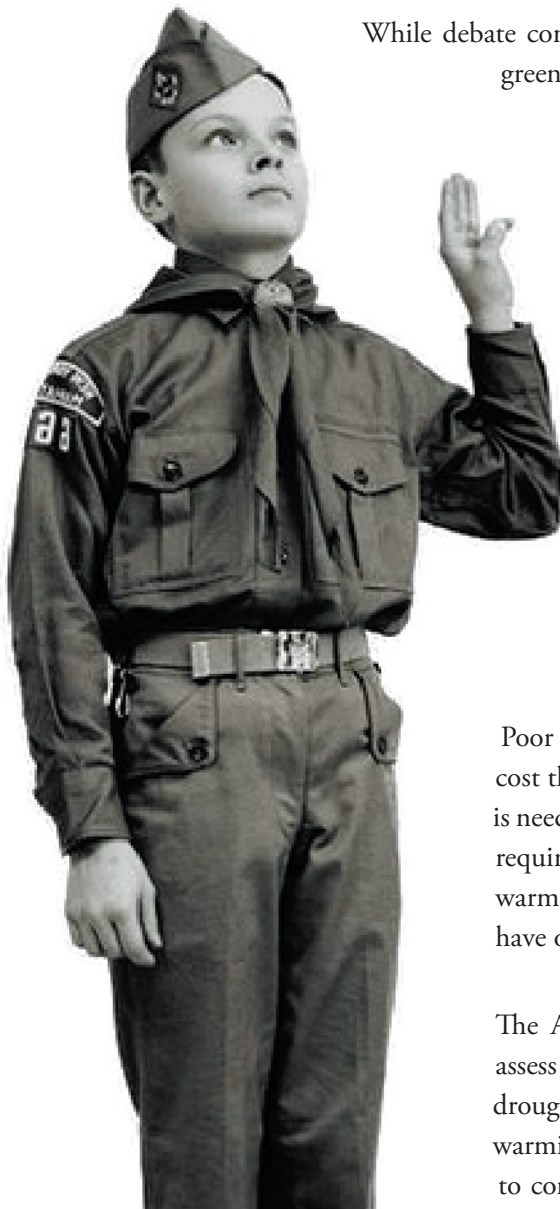
The North Atlantic’s “conveyor belt” that brings warm water to the Northern Hemisphere has slowed down by 30 percent. Surface ocean temperatures are getting warmer, which will make hurricanes more intense. Drought and the encroachment of disease and pests threaten food production. A Pentagon study recently found that global warming could directly harm our national security by exacerbating regional and national conflicts, triggering future wars over resources like water.

It is essential that the U.S. curb the release of harmful global warming emissions, but we have now reached another point as well. We must begin to prepare for the increasing threat of disasters driven by global warming, even as we grapple with the policy debate over how to manage carbon emissions.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, amid one of the most devastating hurricane seasons on record (2005 was the most expensive year for covered disaster claims in the history of the insurance industry), public debate must finally shift from arguing the science about whether global warming is manmade to preparing for the impact

that climate change will have on the safety and security of our economy and society. The policy debate must address the real and immediate risks imposed on Americans, the vulnerability of our communities, and the potential dangers of inaction.

Hurricane Katrina, regardless of its cause, was a vivid reminder of the human and economic costs that America and other nations can expect from more severe storm incidents in a world increasingly faced with climate disruption. In the face of high risk and high costs emergencies, the sensible path is to improve our readiness and prepare our response. Without such preparation, America will be caught off guard yet again in the face of staggering and foreseeable human tragedies.



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While debate continues over appropriate responses to curbing the release of greenhouse gasses, it has become essential that Americans prepare for the anticipated risks and real impacts of global change in order to reduce our exposure to increasing economic costs and a growing toll of human suffering. In the presence of uncertain but high-risk events, preparation and insurance are the appropriate responses for policy makers and citizens.

A policy that prepares Americans for increasingly severe natural disasters should focus on improved planning, investments in information on risk and vulnerability, and better incentives for building new infrastructure that increases the resilience and preparedness of communities. We learned from Hurricane Katrina the consequences of not adequately preparing for disasters.

Poor preparation in the face of mounting evidence of vulnerability cost the country billions of dollars and many innocent lives. What is needed today is a national Global Warming Preparedness Act that requires every federal agency to report on and prepare for global warming disasters, including the effect that foreign disasters could have on America's national security.

The Act should mandate that every state and local government assess its vulnerability to more intense hurricanes, water shortages, drought and wild fires, rising sea levels, and other potential global warming impacts that could affect the United States in the decades to come. The act also should provide the resources to get the job done.

Congress should order the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to coordinate a national Global Warming Preparedness Plan in partnership with state-level emergency management agencies. These agencies should anticipate emergency management needs. States could create their own Global Warming Preparedness legislation as well.

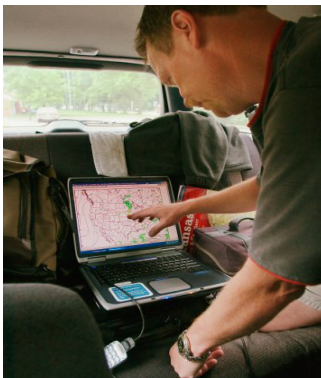
In all of these efforts we should integrally involve the public in making our nation more prepared. Public input is critical. Not only would that improve the plans, it would also help ensure that the plans are followed in the moment of need—something that will make us all safer.

Finally, preparedness demands a Global Warming Disclosure Act that requires property owners and publicly traded corporations to disclose to potential buyers and investors the risks to their property and businesses from global warming. Such requirements would ensure that government and business work together responsibly to make a safer, more prosperous, and more resilient society that faces squarely the real risks to our economy and to the communities we call home.

Global Warming Preparedness: The Plan

1. **Map vulnerabilities via a National Global Warming Community Impact Assessment.** The federal government should invest in a solid foundation of information for decision makers and establish a national program to assist states and localities in undertaking formal assessment and disclosure of climate risk and potential regional impacts.

The government and non-governmental organizations have undertaken a number of important studies, exposing the risks and vulnerabilities of key regions of the country and key sectors of the U.S. economy to potential impacts from global climate change. This research from the U.S. Global Change Research Program, the Environmental Protection Agency, NASA, USDA, USGS, and other agencies as well as the NGO and scientific communities would represent a sound basis from which to build the information infrastructure necessary for federal, state, and



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local planners to assess risk and vulnerability. Like earthquake or flood mapping, vulnerability to severe natural disaster as a result of climate change is a critical public function that should be assessed as part of any plan for preserving and enhancing public safety.

2. Develop state-level global warming preparedness plans.



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Using the information assembled through the National Community Impact Assessment, state and regional planning agencies in conjunction with FEMA should develop improved management plans for preparedness in the event of natural disasters exacerbated by global warming, ranging from large scale coastal erosion to drought, fires, severe storm events, and disruptions to municipal water and energy supplies from the loss of snow pack. These plans should outline both emergency responses and long-term strategies and should identify information technology, institutional supports, and planning tools needed to facilitate timely action in the event of a disaster.

3. Create a State-by-State Disaster Resilience Index.

To spur competition and innovation among states to protect their citizens and the nation's economy and environment, information on vulnerabilities collected through community impact assessments should be paired with assessment of dedicated resources for planning and response to natural and manmade disasters, in order to rank the states with respect to their level of vulnerability and

resilience to disasters. These rankings should be updated on a yearly basis, and will serve to focus attention on changing threats and planning needs.

4. Set financial disclosure requirements for documented threats. Global warming hazards should be incorporated into public disclosure requirements on environmental risks and liabilities for property owners and managers of publicly traded companies, similar to requirements governing flood plains and earthquake zones. A national protocol of Global Warming Threat Levels could be established for various potential impacts arising from global change.

5. Establish a national fund for critical infrastructure investment. Building on the example of the National Highway Trust Fund, a dedicated resource should be established to meet new and growing threats to homeland security at both the national and community levels from climate change. This fund would

support enhanced levee construction and wetland restoration, emergency transportation and evacuation planning, investments in critical transportation infrastructure, improved flood mapping, distributed energy infrastructure, and resources for improved drought response and land management practices. This fund also should address first-responder and homeland security infrastructure needs. As our nation bears the costs of increased risks to our security and economic stability, we must share those costs equitably across society to enhance the common good, not pass on the expense as a burdensome, unfunded mandate to the states.

6. Build smart microgrids for emergency energy security. To reduce costs and improve system reliability and reaction times in the event of blackouts and service disruptions from natural disasters, it is essential to invest in smart and secure microgrids. These would include on-site generation of renewable electricity sources that can withstand interruptions in flows of natural gas and electricity while continuing to ensure critical services like traffic signals, pumping stations, emergency response services, and other critical energy needs. During the largest blackout in U.S. history in August 2003, 50 million people went without power at an estimated total regional cost of \$8 billion dollars. A modest investment in distributed renewable energy generation throughout the regional electrical grid could have prevented the cascading blackouts and protected citizens and ratepayers. Distributed energy generation and a smarter electrical grid will dramatically improve the security of the national energy infrastructure, reduce costs, and improve recovery times in the event of disaster.

Global Warming Preparedness Advertising Campaign

As part of our research into the Global Warming Preparedness Strategic Initiative, we have developed some possible concepts for an advertising campaign. Included are some of the ads that are currently in development.



YOU WOULDN'T WALK INTO A HURRICANE WITH JUST AN UMBRELLA

IT'S TIME TO PREPARE FOR GLOBAL WARMING.

When the next natural disaster strikes, we won't be able to plead ignorance. Sandbags, cellphones, and good intentions alone won't get us through. What we need is a plan.

A recent Pentagon study found that global warming could directly impact our future national security. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the most expensive year for covered insurance claims in history, public debate must shift from questioning basic science to reducing the potential impact that climate change can have on our collective safety and security. We must squarely address the consequences of inaction. The sensible

path is to improve our readiness and prepare for our response. Without such preparation, America will be caught off guard yet again in the face of staggering and foreseeable human tragedies.

What's needed today is a national Global Warming Preparedness Act that requires every federal agency to report on and prepare for global warming disasters. The Global Warming Preparedness Act will mandate that every state and local government assess its vulnerability to more intense hurricanes, water shortages, drought and wild fires, rising sea levels and other catastrophic impacts that could affect the United States in the decades to come.



**WE'VE SPENT 20 YEARS DEBATING
THE CAUSES OF GLOBAL WARMING.**

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An aerial, high-angle photograph of a massive hurricane swirling over the ocean. The eye of the storm is a bright, circular center, surrounded by dense, white, and grey clouds that spiral outwards. The surrounding ocean is a deep, dark blue. In the upper left corner, a small portion of a landmass is visible, showing green and brown terrain. The overall scene is dramatic and powerful, emphasizing the scale and intensity of the natural disaster.

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WE PREPARE FOR FIRES, FLOODS AND EARTHQUAKES. ISN'T IT TIME WE PREPARED FOR GLOBAL WARMING?

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**FACING GLOBAL WARMING
BEGINS WITH COMMON SENSE.
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