

Focusing our Nation

“We are in a time where critical decisions need to be made on global warming, which means today’s leaders and the youth who will inherit the crisis need serious education on the issue. Focus The Nation is our country’s foremost model to create that level of education and interaction with law makers.” James Speth — Dean, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

Why did over 1700 campus communities around the U.S. organize to focus the nation this week? According to leading scientists around the world, we have a window of *only a few years* to significantly reduce emissions if we are to avoid “dangerous” (read civilization-threatening), human-influenced climate change. In light of this, I was alarmed this week to read the Pew Research Center’s report that only 12% of Republicans and 47% of Democrats believe that global warming is a top priority. The issues of the environment and energy had only slightly stronger showings, with an average of about half of those polled considering them to be top issues.

So what was it that we are most concerned about? Republicans placed greatest importance on terrorism, at 86%, followed by the economy, immigration, and the military. Democrats placed greatest importance on healthcare, at 81%, followed by the economy, jobs, and terrorism.

I am reminded of Bono’s words to an international gathering of world relief organizations lately regarding climate change: "All your work... will be undone if you don't focus on this." I am wondering if we, as a nation, are listening to our experts: the reports coming from our security think tanks, which identify climate change as a top security threat, or the research which identifies climate change as a top reason for failing nations and resulting extremism, including terrorism; the economists’ and insurers’ estimates of the cost of NOT addressing climate change; the reports on the effects of heat, drought and flood on crops – for both food and biofuels; the stresses of increased tropical diseases on the health system, and the yet-to-be-fully-understood impacts of widespread extinctions and loss of drying forests to disease and fire. Are we considering the waves of immigrants that will occur when sea levels rise, rivers dry up, and governments start to unravel? There has never been an issue with greater potential impact than climate change, one that threatens to undo so much of the good that has been accomplished in the last century; and it’s already beginning to happen. As a nation, we are throwing money and lives at terrorism, immigration, healthcare and the economy, but these are increasingly symptoms. We need to focus on treating the disease.

We as individuals, states, cities, businesses and institutions have taken on the challenge to reduce emissions, but we all run into a roadblock when it comes to needed changes in the physical and economic infrastructure of our country. Mayors have asked for the changes, Governors are suing for them, major blue-chip companies have organized to ask for them. Changes at this level require strong action by the federal government: tax incentives, a cap and trade system or carbon tax, changes in building codes, changes in our energy infrastructure, changes in our transportation infrastructure, careful consideration of our food production and distribution, and a willingness to enter into international agreements regarding emission limits. Our nation needs the federal government to focus.

So what can we do? We can get educated on the issues, and contact our senators and representatives. The Focus the Nation website offers a number of webcasts of varying length, which can be viewed at any time, to engage both students and politicians in a discussion of the issues. Or you can skip the videos and go straight to the list of solutions on their web page. It's not too late to register your vote on what you think the most effective solutions to climate change might be – voting on the website will close on Feb. 12th - the results will be delivered to senators and representatives on Feb. 18th. It's a fantastic real-life science or social studies lesson, and a way for all citizens to be involved. Or please consider contacting our representatives in the federal government directly to ask for the changes that we need to significantly lower emissions - we need to be louder than the special interest groups. It really can't afford to wait; we risk undoing progress on the issues we most care about. Democrats and Republicans alike: it's time to focus.

"What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment." Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Check it Out:

Focus the Nation “2% Solution” webcast and voting: <http://www.focusthenation.org/>

Architecture2030 “Face It” webcast: <http://www.architecture2030.org/faceit/index.php>

For the younger K-12 crowd, here's a short video from the Portage Montessori sixth grade: <http://www.portagemontessori.com/movie.html>

Contact your Senators: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Contact your Representatives: <https://forms.house.gov/wyr/welcome.shtml>

Dr. Pachauri's speeches, and IPCC reports: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

Influential book on climate change solutions: Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization, by Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute