

Effective Action on Climate Change: Responsible, Radical, and Relentless

Presentation by
Ross C. Anderson
Executive Director, High Road for Human Rights
Power Shift 2009
Washington, D.C.
February 27, 2009

These past several years, we have been a nation of sheep.

But we're here to transform this into a nation of power-shifting bulldogs!

Because we're *not* going to take it any more. We're not, through silence and complacency, going to be part of the problem.

We *have* the solutions. And we're going to do whatever it takes to achieve them.

Consider what our nation's culture of obedience has wrought.

We allowed ourselves to be lied into an illegal, immoral, devastating war.

We sat back while a president and Congress buried us in historic debt, which you – the young people of our nation – and your children will have to pay off.

We even sat back and permitted people to officially sanction the kidnapping, disappearance, and torture of people in the name of *our* country!

And, in the face of impending irreversible, catastrophic climate change, we have allowed a president, the Congress, government regulators, state legislatures, our governors, and most of our municipal elected officials, to dither, delay and become distracted.

We're here to say, "No more dithering. No more delay. And no more distractions."

Of course, elected officials have failed in their jobs.

Of course, they have displayed appalling ignorance.

Of course, they should – and must – be held accountable.

But let *us* not just be finger-pointers – unless we point our fingers back at ourselves and commit to decisive action.

Let *us* take up the torch of responsibility. Let *us* recognize it is *our* job.

We won't see sufficient measures to combat climate change without us pushing, and pushing, and pushing. It will be really tough and it will take sacrifices, but let us let it be known that we *are* up to the task!

If anyone thinks the job was done when we elected a new president, they need to think again. Don't forget, this president was the man who, in accepting his party's nomination, touted the virtues of clean coal.

For the sake of those who don't know it yet, let us raise our voices here loudly enough that they will hear us: "No coal is clean coal."

We know that if we don't stop the burning of coal, our earth will be an inhospitable place – eventually largely uninhabitable.

Will we offer our children the cop-out that "Yeah, it's really tragic, but our elected officials didn't do their jobs"?

Or will we be able to tell them, "Yes, *we* reversed the trend toward cataclysmic climate change because *we the people* finally stopped blaming others and took up the charge ourselves."

Don't think the job will get done by an occasional demonstration, an occasional march, or an occasional meeting with your representatives.

We need to push, every single day, with a unified message – as if it's a matter of life and death – because it *is* a matter of life and death!

We cannot prevent irreversible, catastrophic climate change if we don't stop burning coal.

From this day hence, let every city council member, every mayor, every state legislator, every Governor, every representative in Congress, and our President know that they will *never* be re-elected, they will *never* have our support, if they don't do all it takes to end reliance on coal.

Those who push coal, those who accommodate coal, are making war against young people and the next generation. They are destroying species. They are destroying our atmosphere and rendering our world inhospitable to life. *They* are the enemy – creating a far greater threat to peace and security than all the terrorists in the world combined. If we don't fight them to a degree that corresponds to the harm they are causing, then *we* are complicit.

The moral imperative is clear: *We must* radically and urgently alter our course. Half-measures like those proposed by the administration thus far, are, in the long run, equivalent to doing nothing at all. If we're not going to quickly achieve reductions in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide, then any measures are simply pretense and p.r.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, we weren't content with half measures – manufacturing a few more tanks and bombers, but basically continuing with business-as-usual. The people of our nation made enormous sacrifices and pulled out all the stops, defeating the forces of fascist world domination.

After the world learned about the destruction of the ozone layer, we weren't content with simply continuing with the use of chlorofluorocarbons and business as usual. We met the challenge, through collaboration, creativity, and commitment.

Now, more than ever, we cannot be content with years-long experiments with cap-and-trade programs, which will allow coal burning utilities to buy the right to continue to pour billions of tons of carbon dioxide, as well as mercury and other toxic pollutants, into the atmosphere. We must demand an end to business as usual. We must demand – we must act to achieve – an end to the burning of coal. *Period.* That must

begin with an immediate moratorium on the construction of new coal-burning power plants – and a phased-in elimination of those currently in operation.

Getting beyond half-measures – taking sufficient steps in sufficient time – will occur *only* if we do *our* job.

If we can retool our manufacturing capacity and pull the nation together to fight a world war, we are certainly capable, with effective leadership and tenacious citizen activism, to radically retool and dedicate ourselves to saving our world through a commitment to renewable sources of energy, mass transit, clean cars, rewarding green jobs, and the preservation of the world's forests.

No more dithering. No more delay. And no more distractions. You who are here are in the vanguard of a new day. A safer, healthier, sustainable new day!

By accepting the charge, you have a great responsibility, and also a remarkable opportunity. Let each of us honor that responsibility and opportunity by carrying the torch back home and creating the pressure for real change – responsibly, radically, and relentlessly!