

PRESS BRIEFING

WITH

**JAMES L. CONNAUGHTON,
CHAIRMAN OF THE WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL
ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

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UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

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JAMES CONNAUGHTON: Great. Well, good afternoon. We are delighted at a successful conclusion to a very vigorous discussion among the leaders, representatives for the major economies. You heard the president today state his clear commitment to help advance negotiations at the upcoming U.N. meetings in Bali. And the leaders, and then through their leaders' representatives, are committed to having this major economies process be a constructive contribution to those negotiations.

We did discuss the full agenda that we outlined for you the other day. Today's session was focused on a discussion of how to advance work in the key technology areas that are of highest consequence in terms of need in reducing greenhouse gases. We discussed at length the proposals for a long-term goal on reducing greenhouse gases, and then the meeting concluded with a commitment and a strong interest in reconvening after Bali, and taking a good sense of where this process can further – and receive guidance from and further advance the effort to move these discussions forward.

You heard the president today indicate that it is by the work we do together among the major economies that we can make possible a global agreement by the end of 2009. I think that will be the – I think I'll leave it at that. And, Paula, did you want to add anything?

PAULA DOBRIANSKY: There was also during the meeting a discussion about adaptation, a number of countries of which we embraced, and welcomed that discussion. Also, right now, as I think you understand, there is a discussion going on about a summary, which would reflect basically the broad content of the discussion over the two days. And I'll leave it at that.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Let me just give a sense of next steps. We will reconvene after Bali. As indicated, the discussions will be informed by the outcomes in Bali. The group – we are going to start work together at the technical level to help prepare for the finance meeting that is being convened by Indonesia at the beginning of the Bali meeting, and then we're going to be developing an effort on technology R&D issues, which is to see if we can advance our shared effort in advancing technology and R&D in the technology-focus areas that we looked at. And then we're going to look more broadly at how we can carry forward a discussion on sector-based approaches in addition to the other elements that are being discussed in the context of the framework convention.

Finally, and more simply, there was a strong interest working with the UNFCC secretariat to help improve the measurement system, the measurement accounting system. There were some questions about the national level system as well as at the ground level, the corporate level or the project level, to continue to work to harmonize our efforts in that regard. Questions?

QUESTION: Mr. Connaughton, could you please spell out the – (off mike) – timing and layout – (off mike) – this summit – (off mike).

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Well, we have not made any decisions on that. We'll be consulting with the other parties and making sure that occurs in an appropriate schedule in relation to our ongoing discussions, and also to be sure that it is completed in time to provide a contribution for the Poland meetings next year. So that is an open question right now.

QUESTION: You mentioned – he mentioned – (off mike) – would it be possible to see this – (off mike) – as part of the G-8 summit, which has – (off mike).

MR. CONNAUGHTON: There has been no decision on that yet. Right here.

QUESTION: Is it possible we have – (off mike) – environmental – (off mike).

MR. CONNAUGHTON: It is, but I think that would consume all of the time for questions.

MS. DOBRIANSKY: If I may say this, it really – the statement does capture the points that we just made in the opening remarks here, the point about discussion about long-term goal, about adaptation, about the harmonization of emission standards, about the embracement of a meeting after Bali to draw upon the outcomes of Bali – meaning another meeting of the major economies next year – to draw upon the outcomes of Bali.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Go back to the original outline, which is long-term goal, the development of national measures among all the countries. There's a lot of discussion about the mandatory aspects of that and the binding nature of that, which is an ongoing discussion – no conclusion; this was to set the issues on the table – how to advance work in key sectors, how to come up with a broader set of discussions on financing that would be actually led and organized by finance officials which will look at the full range of public and private sets of issues and then the measurement issue. So the summary will reflect inputs from the various members on those specific points.

QUESTION: (Off mike.) Is the summary something that all parties agree to..?

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Yes, this is a chairman's summary, so it is my reflection of the discussion. I think different participants would emphasize different aspects of the summary, so this is merely my attempt to capture the sense of the meeting. But you would expect different countries to emphasize different aspects.

QUESTION: (Off mike.) Can you tell us anything more about feedback from the President's fund proposal and anything more about the financial meeting and where (that will take place) – will it be connected to Bali or –

MR. CONNAUGHTON: First of all, there was – the president's proposal generated a lot of interest and a lot of questions, as you might expect. The United Kingdom referenced the fact that they themselves have a proposal pending with the World Bank of one aspect of what we're interested in exploring, and I think all the other countries are looking forward with great interest to being contacted by Secretary Paulson, and our goal is to really develop this together. This is one that only works if we can really organize a collective effort.

On the finance ministers' meeting, the Indonesian president has invited a group of finance ministers, which will be the first time they have convened at a – on the sidelines of a U.N. climate change meeting, and we really see that actually as a historic step forward. The finance ministers have not, you know, met on this subject before, and the time is right for that to occur.

MS. DOBRIANSKY: And specifically what they have planned in this invitation – you know, you have two weeks for the Conference of Parties and Meeting of Parties meeting that take place, and it's the second week where you have the ministerial. They've planned it at the beginning of the second week to have the finance ministers, and then at the end of the week – December – I believe it is the 12th, 13th, 14th when the ministerial at Bali actually takes place. So it is right in the middle.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Let's go all the way in the back, the blue shirt.

QUESTION: (Off mike.) Are you any clearer on how you (inaudible)...pledge and review – what the Americans have been talking and the EU preference for a binding emissions cap and trade (inaudible)

MR. CONNAUGHTON: We have rolled up our sleeves and really joined that debate, and a foundation for it were the summaries of national actions, which – I don't know if you've got a copy of those yet, but we'll make those available.

What you see as a commonality in all of these national plans is almost every nation now has a portfolio of measures that include binding measures, be they regulations or other government requirements, and it is on that foundation that we can have a more comfortable discussion, and then the decision is just is the mechanics of how those commitments are carried forward beyond 2012. Right now, it is the EU, and Canada, and in large part the United States, that have defined post-2012 agendas. Most of the other countries are still in the process of developing their own positions on post-2012 agendas. So that will take some time to evolve over this year.

We hope this process will be a catalyst for all of the countries, including our own, and then pulling together what each of us thinks we can reasonably achieve in the midterm as we contribute towards this long-term goal. So it took more shape, but this is not a decision meeting. This was a meeting to identify the substantive areas on which we want to focus as we go forward.

All the way in the back?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) – of the sense of the range and targets that you talked about – targets – I can repeat that. Would you please give us a sense of the range of targets you spoke about?

MR. CONNAUGHTON: We primarily focused on the Japanese proposal, which was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent below current levels by 2050. The European Union identified their view of the scientific foundation for that level of ambition. And then others set forth questions about the technological feasibility of achieving that level of ambition and its implications for both developed countries and developing countries. And so, information was exchanged on the various technology pathways that would be necessary to achieve a goal of that type. And we are going to actually be providing and sharing further information with respect to that.

Claude Mandil made a presentation yesterday where he highlighted what will be coming out – along with Tanaka, the new head of the International Energy Agency. They have highlighted the enormous challenge of achieving a goal of that ambition in terms of our current technology path. And so, a centerpiece of our discussion was what can we do to significantly affect the curve of our current technology path? And this is an enormous challenge and will be a very rich discussion.

MS. DOBRIANSKY: In fact, if I may just add, there was a very robust discussion today on the issue of a long-term goal in which presentations, in fact, were made, and there was a very active discussion. Japan, the EU, and also Canada gave their comments. And there was quite a bit of give and take on this issue.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Yes, further specifics, the EU has suggested a 1990 baseline, and Japan's is a current levels baseline, sort of generally stated. There were also other ideas for how to express complementary objectives or alternative objectives. But those were in a freeform conversation. They were not specific proposals. But we will look forward to thinking through those.

Some ideas related to technology objectives. And it was also very important for the developing countries that any objective be stated in relation to human development objectives. So we are looking at three components – an emission piece, a technology piece, and a human development piece. Those would be the three themes that emerge from that discussion. It will be very interesting as we go forward to see how that takes shape.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) – Did you decide when we will have this goal ready for us?

MR. CONNAUGHTON: As you heard the president's speech today, our objective is to reach consensus, if we can, by the time the leaders convene next year. There is a bit of a challenge because the proposal is for a global goal. And that obviously involves the input and the insight and information from all the countries in this process. So we are not in a position to conclude that point; we are in a position to provide a detailed contribution on that point for ultimate negotiation in the framework convention. This is not something that the major economies would negotiate on their own. It's something that we will help inform a broader U.N. negotiation on that point.

MS. HELLMER: We have time for one more question.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: One more. All the way on the end here.

QUESTION: Thanks, Jim. I just had a single question. Is the U.S. 100 percent opposed to hard caps? And if not, which caps is the U.S. open to, or what kind of caps?

MR. CONNAUGHTON: The United States has supported strong mandatory measures to help reduce greenhouse gases. The president has set very strong targets in relation to alternative fuels, in relation to vehicle fuel economy, and in relation to a whole new series of appliance standards where we are now on track and working aggressively to complete them all, which is a process that years ago had been delayed. But the new assistant secretary at DOE has cracked the whip and they are cranking them out.

Our states, with assistance from the Department of Energy, have designed strong renewable power standards. And those have been standards that we have supported at the state level. They are just like the one President Bush put in place when he was governor

of Texas. And our view is that's a very good and appropriate function for states to decide. And then, we are working right now with localities in helping them design new building codes, which is uniquely within their authority to see if we can come up with a model standard for building codes. And they're looking at something as aggressive as 30 percent for new building efficiency and retrofit efficiency. So we have been very supportive of specific targets and outcomes on a sector-by-sector basis, state, and federal basis.

Okay? Thank you all very much. And look forward to further follow-up as things go on.

(END)