



WRITTEN TESTIMONY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE
BY RABBI MOTI RIEBER, DIRECTOR, KANSAS INTERFAITH POWER & LIGHT

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee -

My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am the director of Kansas Interfaith Power & Light, a statewide organization that has as its mission *“to engage faith communities in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. We believe the threat of global climate change calls us to action.”* We have over 40 member-congregations throughout Kansas, and are part of a national organization, also called Interfaith Power & Light, which engages 14,000 congregations in 39 states in action, education and advocacy about global climate change from a faith perspective.

As people of faith, the members of Kansas IPL believe that we are tasked by God to be faithful stewards of Creation. There are many texts that speak to this point, but none better than Genesis 2:18, in which God tasks humanity with “tilling and tending” (or “working and guarding”) the Earth. Yes, we have the capacity to do with the Earth what we will, but we must remember that we are not the owners, but rather than stewards of Creation, and that we are tasked by God to manage it responsibly for God and for subsequent generations.

I want to make four main points:

- 1) Climate change is happening.
- 2) It is largely caused by human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels and the consequent addition of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.
- 3) It is already affecting and will continue to affect human beings, both here in the United States and around the world.
- 4) There are steps we can take to both mitigate it (stop more climate change from occurring) and to adapt to it (address the climate change that is already in the pipeline).

2012 saw record high temperatures (the ten hottest years on record have all occurred since 1998, and we have now had 37 consecutive *years* of temperatures above the 20th century average); drought throughout Midwest and Plains states, including Kansas; extensive wildfires; sea-level rise; record summer melt of both the Arctic Sea ice and the Greenland ice sheet; large-scale extreme weather events, especially Superstorm Sandy on the east coast (at an estimated cost of \$70 billion). In fact, events of the past year are a fulfillment of the predictions that climate scientists have made over the past 20 years.

As we are already seeing, the effects of climate change in Kansas will include changes in rainfall patterns, impacting water availability, particularly in the western part of the state, and with significant impacts on agriculture. When plants are in bloom earlier but the insects aren't there yet, or when the insects come and the birds aren't back yet, the impacts on Kansas' environment and economy will be significant.

Throughout the world, the impacts of climate change will be even more significant: species extinctions; flooding and drought, both impacting fresh-water availability; so-called “disease vector shifts” - diseases moving northward to areas that aren't habituated or prepared for them. Massive population shifts will destabilize large areas of the globe, which is why the US national security apparatus considers global climate change one of the primary national security challenges facing the country in the 21st century.

As people of faith, we are also concerned about the impacts that climate change will have on people, both at home and around the world. After all, many Americans will simply be able to turn up the air conditioning when it gets too hot. But people elsewhere in the world don't always have that opportunity.

I understand that there are some people, including a small number of scientists, who believe that human activity does not contribute to climate change. I disagree with this position and I think the science does as well, but I have no intention of demeaning or insulting anyone. I will say two things:

First, somewhere between 95 and 98% of climate scientists believe that climate change is substantially caused by human activity. As former US Representative, and current Executive Director of The Energy and Enterprise Initiative, Bob Inglis says, if you took your children to 100 doctors and 95 of them said you have to act now, and the other 5 said, we're not sure, maybe you should wait, chances are you'd act now.

And second, are skeptics really sure there is absolutely no human contribution to climate change? Let's say for the sake of argument that the contribution isn't as much as scientists say, but is only 50% or 25% or 10%. Even if we are contributing but 10% to potential global disaster, don't we have a moral obligation to do something about it? Many churches spend a lot of money on what they call mission work in the developing world – healthcare, education, Nothing But Nets. It is these very people who stand to suffer most from the devastating impacts of global climate change – who have the least responsibility for the problem and the least ability to withstand it. How can we stand idly by while we do such damage to people around the world, and to ourselves and to our descendants here at home?

The good news is that the policies that address climate change – clean energy generation, the development of a truly first-rate transmission system, efficiency upgrades on our building stock, more fuel-efficient cars, etc. - will have important benefits aside from their impact on carbon pollution. The transition to a cleaner-energy system will require years of engineering, planning and building – all of which mean jobs. Kansas is in a great position to take advantage of its abundant wind and solar resources and its transmission potential by virtue of its strategic geographic location. In addition, such actions will also clean up our air and water, having positive health impacts and driving down the societal costs of healthcare.

In conclusion, I believe it is time to stop fighting the ideological battles of the past, and time to start taking the steps that will help Kansas be a competitor in the clean energy economy. We need to do this for Kansas jobs, for Kansas' environment, and for the sake of the health and well-being of people all around the world, and including coming generations of our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for your attention.