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REMARKS BY
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BEFORE THE
RESPONSE STRATEGIES WORKING GROUP
INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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Thank you Fred Bernthal, Professor Bolin, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to join you this morning, however briefly, and to welcome you to the Department of State. You are the first official group that I've had the pleasure of welcoming to the Department.

I would also like to welcome Bill Reilly, who is here with us this morning -- President of the World Wildlife Fund and the Conservation Foundation. Bill has let President Bush talk him into becoming the nominee for the post of Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and it's my fervent hope, Bill, that nothing you hear at this conference this morning will cause you to change your mind.

The truth is, though, as I don't need to tell those of you who are here, we face some very difficult problems. It is also true, though, that we now recognize them to be problems, and in my experience in government that is at least half of the battle.

Some months ago President Bush said, "We face the prospect of being trapped on a boat that we have irreparably damaged -- not by the cataclysm of war, but by the slow neglect of a vessel we believed to be impervious to our abuse."

The establishment of the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change and this meeting of the Panel's Response Strategies Working Group, I think, shows beyond a doubt that this is a transnational issue. We are all in the same boat. And as I put it in my testimony to the Senate recently, "The tides and the winds can spread environmental damages to continents and hemispheres far removed from the immediate disasters."

So, if I may borrow a phrase from the environmentalists, the political ecology is now ripe for action. We know that we need to act, and we also know that we need to act together. That is what this meeting is all about.

But I would take it even a step further. One of the big advantages of being Secretary of State is that because I am not a scientist, I am, therefore, not called upon to assess the evidence, especially on global climate change. Yet it is also clear, I think, that we face more than simply a scientific problem. It is also a diplomatic problem of when and how we take action. And here, if I might, I would like to make four points.

The first is that we can probably not afford to wait until all of the uncertainties have been resolved before we do act. Time will not make the problem go away.

The second is that while scientists refine the state of our knowledge, we should focus immediately on prudent steps that are already justified on grounds other than climate change. These include reducing CFC emissions, greater energy efficiency and reforestation.

The third is that whatever global solutions to global climate change are considered, they should be as specific and cost-effective as they can possibly be.

The fourth is that those solutions will be most effective if they transcend the great fault line of our times, the need to reconcile the transcendent requirements for both economic development and a safe environment.

Without in any way downgrading the difficulty of the task, I would conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by noting that progress generally results when common interests are joined to a common understanding. This meeting and others like it will play a crucial role in moving us all toward that common understanding of what we must do to protect and to preserve our environment.

Thank you very much for having me this morning, and Godspeed.

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