

Ken Neuman

Thank you Sally and greetings to everyone this morning.

Let me first of all begin my comments with a few thank yous. I want to thank Cornell and in particular the Global Labor Institute for its work in organizing this very important conference. I also want to thank Dave Foster who was a director with the union for many years for the great work that he has done for our union, and in particular with the Green-Blue Alliance. I also want to thank all of you for coming. It is great to see so many dedicated union and environment activists willing to debate what we can do together.

In responding to the theme of this session, “what are the top political legislative priorities and what are the goals of the Blue-Green Alliance?” I need to briefly provide an update on what is happening in Canada. As you know in 2004, Canada ratified the Kyoto accord with the unanimous support of labor at a very critical time, and with the massive support of Canadians against oil and business lobbies. Then the government party at time, the Liberals did nothing for the next three years and Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions have risen by more than 30 percent since 1990.

In 2006, national election years of Liberal corruption led to enough voter dissatisfaction to allow the rightwing Conservatives to form a minority government. The leader of the Conservatives for many many years has denied, “The time to change exists.” Despite his opposition, Canadians forced him to act. The first was Bill C-30, a Canadian Clean Air Act to address climate change and air pollution. It did neither. Everyone criticized it and opposed it.

Only the New Democratic Party had the vision and foresight to use the government minority status and the fear of another general election to force the bill into committee and through a very detailed review. The result was a majority recommendation for a hugely improved bill which now has significant climate change and air pollution targets and goals. But at the time, the government is unwilling to bring back this bill to the legislature for a vote *since* the majority now support it, and *not* the government. Instead, last week the Conservatives brought in a new set of

proposed regulations. This time setting so-called targets for emission reduction substantially below the Kyoto commitment and with the same long delays before the regulations were written. This is such a half-hearted effort that was condemned by Al Gore when he was in Toronto just last week speaking at the Green Living Conference.

Canadians want action on climate change and the environment. There are already signs that the Conservatives may be forced to bring [Bill] C-30 back because of the public pressure that's coming about. The most serious economic issue in Canada today is the devastation of our manufacturing industry and the ongoing sale of Canadian companies to huge, non-resident, multi-national corporations.

Some people including the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Green Parties are quite content with that. They are committed to doing nothing to address jobs nor the economy. We believe a country that has only a service sector is always a servant and dependant on others. To maintain the independence, our will and our environment, we need a strong Canadian manufacturing industry that is environmentally sustainable, supports communities, provides good jobs, and safe and healthy jobs as well.

Our union is committed to engaging politicians, businesses, our members and the public on this very critical economic debate, one which we will focus, on the need of transition of all sectors in the economy. Even those who see as great an environmental liability in the long run toward a sustainable future that needs hard targets to reduce emissions. The Steelworkers have embarked on a national campaign with the Canadian Labor Congress to save manufacturing jobs. Our union believes a critical manufacturing future is environmental sustainability.

To us, climate change is not just about caps or emissions and hard targets. It's also about economic transition and good jobs, which is important. We think that it's an important link, action on climate change with action on environmental issues, especially waste and pollution. It is nonsensical to believe business will make the necessary investment on energy use and then come back later to do prevention pollution. The kind of investment that is needed today at all

levels is what went into the post-World War II reconstruction. The market will never solve climate change or pollution since it is responsible for both.

At our Steelworkers National Policy Conference held in Ottawa just recently, we passed a very strong-worded resolution calling for action on climate change. The union is mandated to educate our members, lobby governments and push for action to meet tough targets and reduce emissions. We will be acting on this mandate while promoting an alternate economic agenda for Canada which supports sustainable manufacturing and job transition for workers displaced. We already are actively promoting the “right to know” and toxic use reduction.

I want to now turn briefly to the challenges of creating a Blue-Green alliance in Canada. There are some in the labor movement now in Canada who attack environmentalists and deny climate change is serious. “Job blackmail” is an old-time and has given added seriousness because of globalization. We face challenges from environmentalists who seem to not care whether we have an economy, and in particular whether our economies include manufacturing, mining and forestry. I am one who is persuaded that we must find ways to forge strategic alliances with environmental organizations.

The arguments are well made in our union’s report on the environment, “Securing Our Children’s World.” Globalization is the single greatest threat to the environment, to labor rights and to human rights. We will not solve this threat alone or against each other. We must find common ground that we can agree on today *even* if down the road there are other issues that we may not be able to agree on.

In Canada, the New Democratic Party offers the only credible political agenda for addressing the environment and jobs. The Climate Change Plan calls for investment in sustainable economy in 3.5 billion annual government expenditures which will create thousands of years of work as well as setting hard targets for reduction of emissions. However, rather than form a unified front in support for the NDP, some environmentalists have decided upon something called “strategic voting.” A strategy that so far has guaranteed that the Liberals and the Tories get alternately re-

elected and continue to do nothing and hundreds of thousands of jobs are lost and our environment continues to worsen.

This situation has become even more problematic with the emergence of the party called the “Green Party.” Originally that party was led by the Conservatives. The Greens are now led by the Liberal Government. This adds to the confusions that Canada faces. To scare the public, the Tories and the Liberals both like to say that, “the problem is that individuals won’t make sacrifices. That action on environment would destroy the economy.” Again, job blackmail. The fact that the current government has been forced twice, and now perhaps a third time to put climate change on Parliament’s agenda shows how committed individual Canadians are in Canada.

What they need, what they demand, is a real plan for economic transition and jobs to enable them to accomplish the caps and the targets. What we need in Canada today is the same vision and commitment from our leaders that brought us Medicare, Unemployment insurance and the “right” to free collective bargaining. The labor movement was in the forefront of that vision, then. We must be in the forefront now.