Secretary Salazar Outlines Vision for New Energy Future at UN Conference on Climate Change

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Copenhagen, Denmark – Today, US Secretary of the Interior delivered the keynote address entitled “New Energy Future: The Role of Public Lands in Clean Energy Production and Carbon Capture” at the UN Conference on Climate Change . The full text of Secretary Salazar’s remarks, as prepared for delivery, are below:

Thank you, Ambassador Fulton. It is an honor to be here today.

Four centuries ago, half a world away, my ancestors settled near the banks of the Rio Grande River, at a place they called Santa Fe – the City of Holy Faith.

Generation after generation, my family farmed and ranched the valley’s fertile soils, moving north, over time, to the ranch where I was raised in Colorado.

The American continent saw great change in those four centuries. The Pilgrims set foot at Plymouth Rock. The United States declared its independence. And the borders of a growing nation swept westward over my family’s lands.

Through all the changes my family has witnessed, some things have been constant: the waters that irrigate our crops; the snows in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains; the birds that migrate through the San Luis Valley.

My parents taught me and my seven brothers and sisters that these blessings do not come free. They taught us that we must serve as stewards of the land, water, and wildlife that sustains us, season after season.

Yet today, humankind is at risk of breaking this sacred trust. Carbon pollution is putting our world – and our way of life – in peril.

The places we love… the resources on which we rely… the peoples of the world who are most vulnerable… are all at risk if we do not act.

That is why I am so humbled, and honored, to serve as President Obama’s Secretary of the Interior.

My department oversees natural resources in the United States, including much of the vast landscapes my ancestors helped settle. We manage one-fifth of the nation’s landmass, huge expanses of ocean off our coasts, and the energy and mineral estate owned by the American people. We also uphold the federal government’s responsibilities to Indian nations.

I am here today in Copenhagen on behalf of President Obama to deliver a simple message: the United States of America understands the danger that climate change poses to our world and we are committed to confronting it. Together with our partners in

the international community, we will help build a strong, achievable, carbon reduction strategy. And we will deploy American technology, American vision, and American ingenuity for the benefit of our planet and all peoples.

As Americans, our natural resources have long been a blessing. American Indians and European settlers harvested the fruits of the earth. A strong agricultural economy grew from the continent's fertile soils. Our industry prospered from the timber and precious metals developed on frontier lands. And our treasured landscapes – from the Everglades to California's redwoods - are engines for tourism and economic growth across the country.

We are humbled by America's bounty.

We are humbled because the richness of our lands has enabled our nation – time and again - to renew itself… repower itself… and reinvent itself for new challenges and opportunities.

Now, with President Obama's leadership, another great American renewal is underway.

Over the last eleven months, President Obama has led the United States out of the darkness of a failed energy policy and into the dawn of a clean energy economy.

We are delivering this change because the U.S. can't afford to fall behind in the energy technologies that will shape this century.

We can't afford the hundreds of billions of dollars we spend each year on imported oil – or the risks our oil dependence poses to our national security.

Climate change is affecting every corner of the American continent. It's making droughts drier and longer, floods more dangerous, and hurricanes more severe.

You can see the changes in the land. The glaciers in Montana's Glacier National Park are melting so fast they're expected to disappear in the next two decades. The world's first wildlife refuge – Florida's Pelican Island, which President Teddy Roosevelt set aside in 1903 – is being consumed by rising seas.

A CEO of one of the U.S.'s biggest companies recently asked me: in light of everything we are seeing – the impacts of climate change on our planet, the drag of a failed energy policy on our economy, the security risks of our oil dependence – what reason do we have for hope?

I see many reasons for hope. I see how far the United States has come in just one year under President Obama's leadership. I see new jobs being created – and many more coming – in the clean energy sector. And I know that America's natural resources will help us rise to the challenges we face.

Teddy Roosevelt once said: "It is not what we have that will make us a great nation; it is the way in which we use it."

We are wise to remember his advice.

That's why today, the Department of the Interior's 70,000 employees – including some of the world's top scientists and land managers – are transforming how we use our resources.

As we stand up the new energy frontier and bring down our carbon emissions, America's lands and oceans can serve as clean energy producers. They can serve as carbon catchers. And they can be buffers against the impacts of a rising tide and a changing climate.

We must manage our lands and oceans for these three new functions - renewable energy production, carbon capture and storage, and climate adaptation – if we are to tackle the climate crisis.

Today, I'm pleased to report that under President Obama's leadership we are making swift progress in all three areas.

On renewable energy: the truth is - until now - America's vast deserts, plains, forests and oceans have been largely unexplored for their vast clean energy potential.

But the possibilities are immense. The National Renewable Energy Lab estimates the wind potential off the East Coast of the U.S., in the Atlantic Ocean, to be 1,000 gigawatts - greater than our national electricity demand. Turbines are already springing up to capture the wind that blows so hard across the Great Plains. We have huge solar potential in the deserts of the Southwest, including near Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Geothermal energy opportunities are bubbling up across the country. And we have great opportunities to increase hydropower production through improvements in efficiency, by adding power generation units to existing facilities, and through pumped storage.

These renewable energy resources hold great economic promise. By one estimate, if the U.S. fully pursues its potential for wind energy on land and offshore, wind can generate as much as 20 percent of our electricity by 2030 and create a quarter-million jobs in the process.

As President Obama has said: it's a win-win. Good for the environment, great for the economy.

We've been busy over the last year finding ways to develop the renewable energy potential on public lands in an environmentally responsible manner.

And I am proud of the gains we've made.

We have created the first-ever U.S. framework for offshore renewable energy development.

We have cleared out bureaucratic red tape among federal agencies that was creating unnecessary confusion for potential offshore renewable projects.

We have awarded the first-ever exploratory leases for renewable wind energy production on the Outer Continental Shelf offshore New Jersey and Delaware. And just yesterday, as I toured the Middelgrunden wind farm here in Copenhagen, I announced that in the coming months we will open the first Atlantic renewable energy office to facilitate permitting of offshore projects in coordination with states.

Onshore, we are moving quickly as well. We are opening Renewable Energy Coordination Offices in western states to help swiftly complete reviews on the most ready-to-go solar, wind, geothermal, and related transmission projects on public lands.

We have set aside 1,000 square miles of public lands in twenty-four "Solar Energy Study Areas" that the Department of the Interior is evaluating for environmentally appropriate solar energy development across the West.

And we have invested $41 million through the President's economic recovery plan to facilitate a rapid and responsible move to large-scale production of renewables on public lands.

We believe that of the solar projects and wind projects currently proposed, more than 5,300 megawatts of new capacity could be ready for construction by the end of 2010 - enough to power almost 1.6 million homes. And project construction will create over 48,000 jobs.

To get this clean power to market, we are upgrading America's transmission grid for the 21st century. We are clearing out red tape at the federal level, identifying transmission corridors that can move power from where it's produced to where it's consumed, and fast-tracking approximately 1,000 miles of new transmission projects that can get under way by the end of 2010.

Collectively, the actions we have taken in the last eleven months are opening a new frontier for renewable energy production in America. We will soon have more clean power. More investment. And more jobs.

But renewable energy is not the only way that America's public lands are helping us tackle the energy and climate challenges we face.

We are also finding the right places and the right ways to capture and store carbon on public lands.

It is well known that plants and soils drink carbon out of the air. And we know that changes to land management patterns, changes to vegetation, and deforestation can all limit the land's ability to soak up carbon. In the U.S., for example, we are losing 3 million acres a year to development – an area the size of Connecticut.

To understand the carbon impacts of these changes to the land, we need better tools to measure how much carbon is being absorbed on our landscapes, and to predict how different management practices would affect carbon absorption.

Interior's science agency, the United States Geological Survey, has been working to develop these very tools.

Today, I'm proud to announce that the USGS has completed an important first phase of work on its biological carbon sequestration assessment. In collaboration with scientists from the Department of Agriculture, they have found that plants and soils in the lower 48

states store almost 90 billion metric tons of carbon – or the equivalent of around 50 years of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions at current levels. All together, terrestrial ecosystems in the U.S. are soaking up carbon equivalent to about 30% of U.S. fossil fuel CO2 emissions.

This first phase of our scientific assessment has shown that U.S. lands are critical to the carbon equation. By restoring ecosystems, using best management practices, and protecting certain areas from development, U.S. lands can store more carbon in ways that enhance our stewardship of land and natural resources while reducing our contribution to global warming.

But the biological assessment, and the technologies behind it, will also be invaluable to nations and communities around the world that are looking for accurate carbon storage data to guide land management decisions.

USGS is hard at work on the next phases of this project, and you can expect to see more information and more tools available soon.

USGS is also working to understand our ability to capture and store carbon dioxide underground.

They are looking at geologic formations in the U.S., such as oil and gas reservoirs and saline formations, to determine how they can be used to reduce atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide globally.

Our efforts to find the right places to store carbon dioxide complement the efforts that Secretary Chu is leading at the Department of Energy. Through the Recovery Act, DOE is investing an unprecedented $2.4 billion to accelerate the commercial deployment of the technologies that will capture and sequester it. Together, Interior and Energy's initiatives will help us make smarter, cleaner use of America's energy resources – particularly coal, which is so abundant in the U.S.

Finally, in addition to producing cleaner energy and capturing carbon, we must plan for the realities of a changing climate, and protect ourselves and our world against its impacts.

In the last decade, as much of the world awoke to the dangers of climate change, the political leadership in the United State slept. Confronting the impacts of climate change simply wasn't a priority for the previous administration.

As a result, the U.S. government's adaptation strategies were disjointed.

But that, too, has changed under President Obama.

Since January, we at the Department of the Interior have built a coordinated strategy for managing the impacts of climate change on our land, water, marine, fish and wildlife, cultural heritage and tribal resources.

We recognize that effects of climate change aren't limited to any one national park, wildlife refuge, or Indian reservation – they are felt over broad landscapes. Entire wildlife corridors are changing. Shifting precipitation patterns are being felt up and down the seven-state Colorado River basin. And rising sea levels are affecting communities along all coasts.

That's why the Department of the Interior's climate change adaptation strategy is organized around landscape-scale partnerships.

Eight DOI Climate Change Response Centers will synthesize existing climate change impact data and management strategies, help resource managers put them into action on the ground, and engage the public through education initiatives.

And across the United States, we are standing up a network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives that – together with other federal agencies, local and state partners, and the public - will craft practical, landscape-level strategies for managing climate change impacts. Working with Climate Change Response Centers, the cooperatives will focus on impacts that typically extend beyond the borders of any single National Wildlife Refuge, BLM unit, or National Park, including invasive species, fire, drought, wildlife, and changing water supplies. We know that no one government or no one landowner alone can solve these problems.

We have to work beyond man-made borders and political jurisdictions.

The same is true for protected areas. The planet has around 100,000 areas - covering approximately 12 percent of the world's landmass - that protect much of our world's natural heritage. There is a growing awareness around the world that these wild lands are indispensable in the battle against the impacts of climate change. They form the backbone of our efforts to preserve the world's biodiversity and play vital roles in carbon storage, clean water, and endangered species preservation.

We can't afford to let these lands disappear. Through the use of landscape and seascape-level conservation initiatives, we will strengthen the connectivity and resiliency of our parks and protected areas and the wildlife and ecosystem services they support. These efforts will prove critical.

We have come a long way in the last year. Across America, the seeds of the clean energy economy have been sown in the soils of our lands, the minds of our engineers, and the imagination of our citizens.

They are the seeds of an American renewal that – by the end of next year – will spring to life: new solar plants under construction in the desert; new wind turbines spinning over the prairies; new tools and technologies being deployed across the world. Each new project completed and job created will propel us to the front edge of the world's most exciting and most important growth industry.

Now, there are some out there who do not share our vision for American leadership in the clean energy economy. They defend the status quo. They proclaim the path ahead is too costly…too uncertain. Some do not even accept that climate change is real. The cynics share a fear of what lies beyond the horizon.

But they are wrong. Their fear is misplaced.

For the miles we have tread in the last year allow us now to see over the horizon into a new energy frontier filled with opportunity and prosperity.

To get there, we have to keep going.

The international agreements that our nations are working toward here in Copenhagen will propel all of us forward in the clean energy

economy.

So too, will the comprehensive clean energy legislation that is moving through the United States Congress.

The House has already passed a bill. The Senate has made historic progress on its version. And President Obama and I and other members of his Cabinet are working closely to see to it that the job gets done.

Clean energy legislation will trigger a massive new investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and carbon capture and sequestration technologies. It will level the playing field for new technologies by putting a price on carbon through pollution limits. And it will send the signal to industry and the world that the United States will be a partner in tackling climate change.

We will pass this bill. We will build a clean energy future. We will establish a comprehensive international framework to tackle climate change.

I know we will do these things because I know the strength of President Obama's leadership. I know the determination of the American people. And I know that the love of children and grandchildren can inspire people to do great things together.

There is a Native American proverb that many people know that says: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."

May that lesson give us courage to forge a new future for ourselves and our planet.

For as President Obama said as he was sworn into office: "the world has changed, and we must change with it."

That is the promise he made. That is the promise we will keep.

Thank you.

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