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# United States

You represent the United States government and carry out the foreign policy goals of the President. You are a career diplomat, and you have worked in many countries in Asia, including China. For the last ten years, you have focused on the climate-change problem.

Of all the issues you have dealt with in your long and successful career, climate change may be the most difficult. You have your work cut out for you in the upcoming meeting with representatives of China, the global business community, and the environmental movement.

## Your goals

Your goals for the meeting are

1. Persuade the other representatives that the U.S. cannot do much to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions without hurting the U.S. economy—and indirectly, the world economy. You cannot commit to U.S. emissions lower than 1.6 billion tons/year in 2015.
2. Convince China that it must slow down its rapidly rising greenhouse-gas emissions. Unless China starts to do something soon to limit its use of coal and gasoline, it will overtake the U.S. as the biggest greenhouse gas emitter. You want China to agree to limit its carbon-dioxide emissions to 1.5 billion tons by 2015 (slightly less than twice the amount China emitted in 2000).

## The role of the U.S. in global climate change

Your biggest problem is that it is not easy to defend the current U.S. policy on climate change. The U.S. is the strongest country in the world, both economically and militarily. It also has the biggest impact on the global environment and natural resources of any country. The U.S. has about 5 percent of the world's population (290 million people out of a total global population of 6.3 billion people). But because of the size of the U.S. economy and the wealth of its people, the average American uses five times as much water for drinking, washing, and irrigation; land for food; and forests for wood products as an average Mexican, ten times as much as an average Chinese, and 30 times as much as the average person in India.



When it comes to energy use, the U.S. is also in the lead. Fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) that people use for electric power, transportation, and heating are the main source of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. People in the United States use more fossil-fuel energy than in any other country. People using fossil fuels in the U.S. put 5.4 metric tons of carbon dioxide per U.S. citizen into the atmosphere in 2000. The average for the whole world was 1.25 metric tons per person. The total U.S. emissions in 2000 were 1.53 billion tons, more than twice the 760 million tons that China, the second highest country, emitted.



### The politics of climate change in the U.S.

Climate change is a complicated political issue in America. Some areas of the country produce a lot of fossil fuel (Texas, Louisiana, and Alaska for oil; Wyoming, West Virginia, and Kentucky for coal) or run large electric power plants that use fossil fuel (many states in the Midwest and Southeast). Politicians and voters in these areas generally do not support taking action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, because it could cost jobs and profits. In other areas (the Mountain states and the Southwest, and rural areas around the country), people drive long distances and don't want to pay more for gasoline or for more fuel-efficient cars. On the other hand, on the West Coast and in the Northeast, and in big cities around the country, people don't depend a lot on fossil fuel industries for jobs, don't drive very long distances, and are more inclined to protect the environment. In these areas, people and politicians tend to support action to reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions.

The country is also divided between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats are generally more concerned about global warming and are willing to pay more to reduce that threat. Republicans generally support a strong economy and don't believe that the threat of global warming is serious enough to justify hurting the economy. Public opinion is also very divided, sometimes in confusing ways, because many Americans are not sure how serious a threat global climate change is, or how much it would cost to reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions.

Currently, with a Republican president and a Republican-led Congress, the government does not want to take any action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions that could hurt the economy. That could change if a Democrat is elected president and the Democrats win a majority in Congress, but the conflicts between the parts of the country that depend more heavily on fossil-fuel industries and those that don't are likely to continue no matter what party is in control of the government.

## What the U.S. is doing about climate change

Given the current political situation in the U.S., one of your goals is to convince the others that the U.S. can't do much to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions any time soon. You should also discuss with them some of the good things that the U.S. has done and continues to do to deal with the problem of climate change.

- Over the last 30 years, the U.S. has reduced the amount of energy needed to power the economy.
- Without any government action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, the U.S. is now more energy-efficient than it was 20 years ago. The U.S. is already becoming more energy-efficient without government regulations.
- The U.S. continues to lead the world in developing new energy technologies. Some of these technologies may eventually replace fossil fuels.
- Americans have provided strong support for research on the problem of climate change, and American scientists continue to find out new information that will help the world deal effectively with the problem.
- America's economy is strong, but **any attempt to reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions below 1.6 billion tons/year by 2015 could have a very bad impact on business profits and people's jobs.**

## Why China needs to do more

Your second goal is to get China to take action to slow the growth of its greenhouse-gas emissions. The rapid and continuing growth in China's use of coal and gasoline is the biggest long-term threat to the global climate.

- China is the world's largest user of coal for energy production.
- China gets nearly 80 percent of its fuel for electric power, industrial, and home heat from burning coal.
- Though China is becoming more energy-efficient by installing newer power plants and industrial and home boilers, its greenhouse-gas emissions will continue to grow as long as it depends so heavily on coal for electricity and heat.
- Right now, fewer than 1 in 100 people in China own a car. But the number of car owners is increasing very rapidly, and so is their use of gasoline. Ford Motor Company expects that China will be the world's biggest market for new cars over the next 10 years.
- Unless China makes significant new investments in electric power, industrial and home boilers, and public transportation, its carbon-dioxide emissions are expected to increase by 130 percent by 2015, to 1.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide.



Given the trends in China, it's essential that China make a binding commitment to slow the growth in its use of coal and require new cars to meet gasoline fuel-efficiency standards like the ones the U.S. has. You want China to agree to increase its greenhouse-gas emissions to no more than 1.5 billion tons/year in 2015.

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## Strategy for achieving your goals

You should try to convince the other representatives to agree to your goals. But you will probably need to negotiate with them and make some trade-offs in order to get an agreement that everyone can support. Here are some possibilities to try:

- Offer to help the Chinese. If China will commit to the 1.5 billion tons target for 2015, you can help China buy electric power plant technology from U.S. companies and help American car manufacturers make fuel-efficient cars in China. The U.S. government can give tax breaks and special incentives to U.S. companies to work with China. This strategy would also make the current U.S. government popular with power-plant manufacturers and automobile makers. The environmentalists should also be pleased with this strategy.
- Emphasize scientific and economic uncertainty to defend the U.S. The health of the U.S. economy is important to all the countries of the world. Given how little we know about the effects of climate change, no one should ask the U.S. or any other country to make big economic sacrifices now for an uncertain benefit sometime in the future.
- Offer a commitment to reduce U.S. carbon emissions to 1.6 billion tons/year by 2015. As far as American experts can tell, the U.S. is probably going to be able to reduce its emissions by that amount just by becoming more energy-efficient. So this is something you could commit to with little risk of harming the U.S. economy.

Good luck!