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# THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL WARMING:

## THE NEED FOR COOPERATION & LEADERSHIP

### AN OVERVIEW OF THIS ISSUE

by Senator Jeff Bingaman\*

Global warming is an international issue that requires leadership across the globe. Despite progress that has been made at state and local levels, the United States has failed to provide any real international commitment and leadership on controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Members of Congress, Governors, NGO's and CEO's are increasingly pushing for leadership and certainty with regard to this issue.

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Everyone is familiar with the litany of possible consequences: rising sea levels, retreating glaciers, melting permafrost, more severe droughts, an increase in the intensity of storms and hurricanes, and more heat waves. The stakes are high and the risks are great. We need to begin acting against these risks while it is still relatively affordable to do so. Given the urgency of the issue and increasing acceptance from both business and the public, it is now politically feasible for the United States to implement economy-wide programs to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide which our country sends into the atmosphere.

Global warming issues are difficult, but not insurmountable. We must start by following the states' example of demonstrating the political will and resolve to work through this serious and complicated issue. Previous experiences with the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and Superfund demonstrate that as the states have moved on these issues, it is now the federal government's turn to enact policy. We can do so in a bipartisan manner that reflects the states' success, but we cannot continue to delay if we want to enact a meaningful, consistent national program. The risks associated with a changing climate clearly justify the adoption of mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

If Congress is going to manage U.S. greenhouse gas emissions effectively, it will need advice and expert analysis from the business community, the scientific community, and the legal community. There is a vast gap between what is understood about global warming by the scientific and policy community, and what is known by political leaders in the position to steer U.S. policy. We must close that gap and move our energy and industrial systems in a fundamentally different direction, or we risk pushing the planet past a tipping point.

This issue of *Sustainable Development Law & Policy* discusses many of the current issues within the climate law debate. Contributors suggest strengthening multilateral agreements, such as the Montreal Protocol, to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Within this issue the economics of climate change are explored. Information is provided about the United States taking a regional approach to fighting climate change, while other articles discuss the need to link carbon markets. Additionally, various other critical issues are explored in this publication. 

\* Senator Bingaman won election to the United States Senate in 1982, as a Senator for New Mexico. Since then, he has been active in solving real problems facing the citizens of the United States. As Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator Bingaman continues to be a leader in improving national energy policy and educating Americans about the need for action on global warming.