



## Jewish Community Priorities for Climate and Energy Policy

The organized Jewish community is united in its belief that climate change is occurring and in its deep concern that the quality of life and the earth we inhabit are in danger. We affirm our responsibility to address this planetary crisis in our personal and communal lives by supporting appropriate legislation. To this end, **The Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life ("COEJL")** adopts the following climate and energy policy priorities. These priorities represent a working consensus of the organized Jewish community and have been endorsed by B'nai B'rith International; Central Conference of American Rabbis; Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.; Jewish Council for Public Affairs; the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation; Jewish War Veterans; National Council of Jewish Women; The Rabbinical Assembly; The Union for Reform Judaism; and Women's League for Conservative Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

### Promote Domestic Energy Security

According to the US Department of Energy, the United States imported nearly 170-million barrels of oil from OPEC nations in April 2008. With oil selling at record highs, this dependence facilitated an \$18 billion transfer of wealth from American consumers to a cartel that includes some of the most dangerous regimes in the world. This importation undermines national security. The Jewish community strongly supports specific domestic policies that reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Such policies include measures to increase fuel economy and encourage use of alternative energy sources, such as solar and wind energy (either through tax incentives or by mandating additional production from renewable electricity). In particular, the Jewish community supports a Renewable Electricity Standard requiring that at least 15% of our domestic electricity production come from renewable sources by 2020. Such a standard would help develop a distributed energy infrastructure to simultaneously reduce US dependence on foreign oil and protect the existing electricity transport infrastructure from attack. Israel has shown tremendous leadership in the area of renewable energy development. The Jewish community supports policies that facilitate collaboration between the United States and Israel in the government, nonprofit, and academic sectors for the mutual benefit of both nations. The Jewish community also supports the continued exploration and investment in biofuels, with appropriate global warming performance standards.

While the Jewish community supports domestic energy security, it should not be achieved at the expense of the environment. Consequently, the Jewish community supports policies that take the environmental impact into consideration. In particular, the Jewish community does not support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or reliance on liquid coal or tar sands.

### Need for Aggressive Action

Our tradition teaches that Adam and Eve were asked "to till and to tend" the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:15). We believe humans remain a partner in Creation. We fulfill this mandate by practicing "*Tikkun Olam*," literally, repairing the world. Climate change threatens to irreparably alter the Earth. Carbon dioxide concentrations are higher than they have been in more than half-a-million years. Since the advent of the industrial revolution, carbon dioxide levels have risen 30 percent. At the same time, global temperature has increased by more than 1 degree Fahrenheit in the last century. These changes are expected to result in more forest fires, severe floods, soil erosion, droughts, sea-level rise, an increased frequency of severe storms, and pest and pathogen outbreaks. The Jewish community supports aggressive climate change legislation to reduce these impacts. Such legislation should aim to reduce carbon concentrations by 80% by 2050, with significant interim reductions.

### Support for Short-Term Emission Reductions

Jewish tradition teaches us to protect the Earth for future generations. (*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah*, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that past and future anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions will continue to contribute to warming and sea-level rise for more than a millennium. Consequently, any delay in adopting federal climate change legislation will have repercussions for future generations. Moreover, the cost of needed reductions will increase exponentially absent immediate action. To prevent and respond to these intergenerational impacts, the Jewish community supports policies that require short-term emissions reductions in accordance with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Such reductions should reduce carbon emissions by 25-40% by the year 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Endorsing organizations have made climate and energy key legislative priorities and agree in principle with the overall spirit of the document, but have not necessarily adopted each of these policy proposals as their own.

## Prudence Is Paramount

Jewish tradition recognizes the virtue of prudence. We are taught that the builder of a house must place a fence around its roof to prevent someone from falling off of it.

(Deuteronomy 22:8) Thus, we are instructed to remove a possible danger that could cause fatal harm to another – even where the danger is not imminent or certain.

Likewise, the Jewish community believes we must take measures to address global warming absent perfect information. While the precise threats climate change presents to human life are not certain, we recognize that climate change places human life and all creation at risk. Therefore, the Jewish community supports policies that proactively address climate change by reducing emissions to avoid its potentially catastrophic effects. This means supporting legislation that prevents global temperature from exceeding 2 degrees Celsius by limiting concentrations of heat-trapping gases in accordance with scientific principles. Failure to act in the near term will create undue expense in the future by increasing the eventual cost of reductions.

## Need for U.S. Leadership

Our tradition teaches: "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it." (Pirkei Avot 2:16) While a global response to climate change is necessary, failure to secure an international commitment does not absolve the United States from taking critical first steps. Strong and decisive leadership will set an important model for other nations. America is committed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – regardless of the actions of other nations. The same principles must guide our response to climate change. Accordingly, the United States need not wait for China, India and other nations to join an international agreement before taking action. Rather, the United States should lead by example and create technologies to facilitate the global transition to a low-carbon economy. US leadership is particularly appropriate because the United States produces a disproportionate share of global emissions; while the United States constitutes 5% of the world's population, it emits 25% of its greenhouse gases. At the same time, China, India and other developing nations should be urged to reduce emissions as fast as possible, because US efforts to address climate change will be ineffective without global participation.

## Addressing the Needs of the Poor

Jewish tradition is founded on the principles of justice. The Torah teaches of the importance of pursuing justice (Deuteronomy 16:20) and includes a detailed program to ensure the equitable distribution of resources (Exodus 22:24-26; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deuteronomy 23:20-1, 24:6,10-13,17). Both climate change itself and policies taken to address it present a disproportionate burden on the poor. Domestically, rising energy and gas prices will unduly burden those with inelastic incomes. Vulnerable nations will have the least capacity to cope with the

devastating impacts of extreme weather events, rise in sea level, drought, disruption of water and food supplies, impacts on health, and the destruction of natural resources. The Jewish commitment to justice demands that we support policies that address these inequities both in the United States and abroad. Domestically, federal policy should provide financial assistance to vulnerable populations (for increased heating and cooling costs, weatherization, and the purchase of energy-efficient appliances) and support employment training and opportunities in an emerging "green" economy. Internationally, the United States should provide funds to help vulnerable populations adapt to climate change. The United States should also look to transfer appropriate technology (e.g., drought-resistant crops, renewable energy technologies) and resources to mitigate and avoid the effects of climate change abroad.

## Obligation to Avoid Unnecessary Waste

Jewish law prohibits wasteful consumption. We are taught that, even in times of war, one is not to destroy the trees of our enemies. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20) Because the Earth belongs to God, consuming in a wasteful manner damages Creation and violates our mandate to use Creation only for our legitimate need. Because of this prohibition, the Jewish community supports policies that encourage energy conservation in our homes, communities, and government institutions. Such policies include incentives to develop efficient technologies, tax credits to encourage the purchase of such technologies, energy standards for new buildings and appliances, heightened fuel economy standards, and provisions for public transit. While tax incentives and credits help reduce the cost of converting to renewable electricity, the Jewish community also embraces a Renewable Electricity Standard ("RES") to expedite the transition to a green economy. Such a mandate would require that at least 15% of our domestic electricity production be from renewable sources by 2020.

## Market Mechanisms Are Desirable

The Jewish community believes that a balance between regulatory and market approaches is achievable and desirable. By establishing a firm cap on emissions, federal climate change legislation will create needed price signals to encourage emission reductions. At the same time, the regulatory flexibility associated with a cap and trade policy allows for technological innovation and emission reductions at the lowest possible cost.

## Flexibility Is Critical

Our tradition recognizes that human beings are fallible. (Proverbs 24:16). While the Jewish community believes that it is imperative that the United States takes immediate aggressive action to respond to climate change, we recognize that such measures are unlikely to be sufficient. Federal climate legislation must allow for periodic assessment and revision to accommodate emerging science and human error.