

## Comments from COP-10

Monday, December 13, 2004 – 6:00 pm (Buenos Aires)

Yesterday provided a welcome respite from the “blue streak week” of the last several days. While chaotic, they were enormously productive days. Following a delightful evening in the company of Drs. R. K. Pachuri and James Hansen (two who would occupy spots on anyone’s list of the top ten climate scientists) – having joined them to speak at an event hosted by the Environmental Section of the New York Academy of Sciences – I took the overnight flight from JFK to Buenos Aires, arriving sleepless mid-day Friday with about 30 hours before going on-stage with NESCAUM’s “side event” at the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

After taking up residence at the Apart Recoleta Hotel, the same spot where Art Williams and I stayed during COP-4 in 1998 while representing STAPPA/ALAPCO, I managed to get over the COP-10 venue, secure my credentials, and scope out logistics and progress at the nearly half-over COP. The sense in the halls was “flatter” than I anticipated, this being the first COP following Russia’s ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, which will allow it to come into force. Apparently there was some hoopla at the opening ceremonies on December 6<sup>th</sup>, but any initial levity has been largely erased by at least three factors reminding participants that progress toward implementing a global climate response will continue to be slow. Indeed, a new UNFCCC retrospective available at COP-10 called “The First Ten Years” is a bittersweet reminder of both the substantial progress has been achieved (e.g., in convening and reaching international climate agreements) as well as how little has been achieved in terms of reducing emissions.

The first factor is COP-10’s emphasis on adaptation. Since climate change is already impacting vulnerable populations around the globe, this emphasis is probably appropriate, but it also seems to reflect mounting recognition that we aren’t getting very far very fast in terms of mitigation. Compared to earlier COPs, the prevailing attitude in Buenos Aires is less “We can do it!” and more “Now what are we going to do?” The elevation of adaptation is probably felt most profoundly by the international environmental community, as a few of its members have equated focusing on adaptation to conceding on mitigation.

This changing attitude is closely related to the second factor, the continuing – arguably exacerbating – conflict between the U.S. position on climate change and that of the rest of the world. The increased tension was evident to me right off the bat Friday when, at a Swedish side event, Harlan Watson (head of the US delegation) spoke alongside delegation members from China and Sweden. Each offered their predictable party lines (i.e., U.S.: Do technology R&D and don’t hurt the economy. China: Account for historical emissions and focus on technology transfer. Sweden: An effective climate response is going to require everyone’s concerted action.). But during the Q&A period, Watson quickly grew testy. When asked for my opinion by the Swedish delegation after the event, I suggested that the U.S. seemed almost aggressively defensive. This sense was

confirmed soon after, when I learned that the U.S. delegation had taken to calling its offices “the Bunker!”

The third factor relates to process issues. Delegates are having “in-session” workshops to consider how the organization (and operation) of the intergovernmental process can be improved, particularly with respect to generating more substance and less process. This is a timely consideration given that Kyoto’s entry into force will generate even more work, such as the need to have parallel future meetings of signatories and non-signatories (termed “Meetings of the Parties” vs. “Conferences of the Parties” in diplo-speak). Participants are also starting to wrestle with recognition that Kyoto is silent on what happens after 2012, in the “second commitment period.”

Also contributing to the negative tone have been a couple of small but telling events. In seven COPs, I’ve witnessed lots of over-the-top grandstanding, but never any dirty tricks. Here, for the first time, someone produced and distributed a counterfeit document on World Wildlife Fund letterhead. Environmental NGOs once spoofed a U.S. offering called “*Taking Action*” by patterning a piece after it labeled “*Faking Action*,” but they indicated ownership of it.

Second, the U.S. delegation traditionally includes not only the executive branch officials doing the negotiating at COPs, but also whatever senators, representatives, or their staffs wish to attend. As a result, a “co-delegation” of the Administration’s opponents (mostly R’s in Clinton’s days; mostly D’s today) has always come along. As you might imagine, briefings by negotiators of “the delegation” has thus been a delicate balancing act. Apparently the delicate niceties have now ceased, however, as the co-delegation has been told that it will not have computer access through the delegation, and are prohibited from some of the delegation’s office areas. Small matters in the overall scheme of things, certainly, but no less telling about the change in tone. Delegation briefings with environmental NGOs have also been scaled back from 4-5 per week at past COPs to once per week at COP-10.

Lest these somber notes suggest that there’s only bad news in Buenos Aires, there is also great news to report! First and foremost, the NESCAUM side event could not have come off better. I was initially worried about having an even later Saturday slot this year (6:00-8:00 pm), but the room nevertheless filled for the event, with about 100 attendees. Even more remarkable, a majority stayed through not only the presentations, but the entire Q&A period (about 45 minutes), ending well after 8:00 pm.

I started off the event with some discussion of why the states were acting, and followed with a recitation of state and regional climate initiatives, from RPSs, LEV adoption, and mandatory reporting through RGGI, RGGR, and Pavley. After me came three National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) players. Fred Butler from New Jersey showed attendees that RGGI is being pushed by energy as well as environmental agencies. David Hadley of Indiana, an IGCC expert, said that the U.S.’s need for new power was a historic opportunity to build clean generation. Noting that as many as 102 new coal plants are under discussion, he indicated that clean power

advocates must to get their views “on the record” in utility commission proceedings because commissioners’ deliberations are constrained to using only that information. Andrew Spahn of NARUC briefly described the newly issued National Commission on Energy Policy (NCEP) report “Ending the Energy Stalemate,” and Massachusetts State Rep. James Marzilli closed with a high-road political overview regarding state climate action.

Indicative of the interest that the rest of the world is showing concerning climate actions being taken by U.S. states, the NESCAUM event received front-page coverage in the COP publication that reports on side events this morning. This was obviously delightful news, notwithstanding the fact that the reporter put David Hadley’s face with Fred Butler’s name! The publication is available on the web at <http://www.iisd.ca/climate/cop10/enbots/pdf/enbots1506e.pdf>

As an aside, the same issue illustrates how effectively the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) has targeted its participants. (NESCCAF is staffing ICCT with the support of the Hewlett Foundation). Page 2 carries a story (and photo) of ICCT participant Suani Coelho from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Page 3 has a story with Fernando Tudela of Mexico’s Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, a colleague of ICCT participants Adrian Fernandez and Sergio Sanchez. Adrian is here at COP-10 as well, and joined us at the NESCAUM side event.

The other magnificent news is that regional action to address climate change appears to be catching on elsewhere around the world. Two new regional efforts have arisen, joining the New England Governors-Eastern Canadian Premiers, the nine RGGI states, and the West Coast Governors Global Warming Initiative. One is an effort being launched from the Tuscany region of Italy seeking to expand EU trading to other sectors (including transportation) and to smaller sources through aggregation. The second effort came out of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and seeks to establish a network of regional governments for sustainable development.

Friends in the increasingly frozen north can reasonably envy Buenos Aires’ delightful weather, but take solace in the fact that we see altogether too little of it. Reflecting on the unfortunate realities of the day, we’re also reminded as we leave the COP-10 venue to take off our badges, lest we mark ourselves as targets for trouble.

Best regards,  
-- Ken Colburn