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### **BOB DOPPELT: Global warming will force costly adaptations**

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While federal action is stalled in the United States, many other nations are racing against time to build their capacity to withstand the devastating consequences of global warming.

Urgency is especially high in countries near the equator and in the Pacific region, where extreme droughts, floods and other effects of a changing climate are already common. But every nation must prepare, because none will be spared.

That was the take-away message from a meeting I recently attended in Washington, D.C., hosted by the Global Adaptation Institute.

It was a bit of a shock to enter the prestigious Metropolitan Club, located next to the White House, and see many current and former heads of state, ranging from Spain to El Salvador. Executives from the World Bank and private firms such as PepsiCo, The Reinsurance Association of America, the New Jersey utility PSE&G and many others also filled the room.

Just as startling was the first presentation. Ian Noble, a former lead scientist at the World Bank who is now with the adaptation institute, said it is now almost certain that in the coming decades average global temperatures will increase by about 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels, and possibly much higher.

The warmer it gets, the greater the effects. That is not a scare tactic, Noble said. It is reality. Every nation must come to grips with the implications.

The costs of warming are already high. Almost 80 percent of the world's major cities have reported changes in temperatures, precipitation, sea level or natural hazards that can be attributed to global warming. Over the past five years, natural disasters have cost more than \$800 billion worldwide.

As temperatures rise, Noble said, the costs of droughts, floods, mounting illnesses and diseases, collapsing food systems and other climate impacts will climb dramatically, severely stressing many governments' ability to protect people and property.

Noble emphasized that reducing emissions to limit warming must be a top priority. Climate scientists call this "mitigation."

But mitigation is not enough. Equally urgent is the need for every nation to increase its

capacity to withstand and adapt to the impacts.

Preparations won't be cheap. The World Bank projects that the costs of adapting to a significantly warmer climate will be \$75 billion to \$100 billion annually. In some cases, it won't even be possible.

With that sobering backdrop, a series of panels began. One of the most interesting focused on adaptation within the private sector. Two business executives reported that, although many large firms now try to cut emissions, few have begun to prepare for global warming.

Costs are one factor. Publicly held companies are required to emphasize quarterly profits. Preparing for global warming often requires upfront investments that reduce short-term profits.

But other speakers pointed out that the definition of a decent return will change as temperatures rise. From damage to their facilities because of extreme weather to disruptions to their supply chains, distribution systems and markets, no company will escape the effects of global warming.

To remain successful, every firm must prepare and adapt.

A talk by insurance executives also was enlightening. Twelve separate billion-dollar weather- and climate-related disasters occurred last year in the United States, resulting in a record \$52 billion in damages. Insurance companies will pay more than \$32 billion to help rebuild homes and businesses. If that becomes a pattern, the industry will face significant risks.

A consistent theme was that, although there are costs, preparing for climate impacts also can generate benefits. Reducing emissions can increase efficiency and cut operating costs. Adaptation also can lead to new products, services and jobs.

The speaker from PSE&G, for example, said climate change poses significant risks to the company. But it also offers an extraordinary opportunity for new investments and growth as the utility finds new ways to provide low-carbon energy to its customers.

After returning home, I contacted Matt McCrae, who coordinates Eugene's Climate and Energy Action Plan, to check on the city's adaptation efforts.

A number of projects are in development, McCrae said, including a stormwater retrofit and increased tree plantings. A vulnerability assessment also is being planned to help put future adaptation activities in priority order.

But McCrae also said that the mitigation projects are coming together much faster than adaptation efforts, in part because reducing emissions often saves money, while endeavors such as stormwater retrofits require new funds.

That's one reason why emissions must be slashed rapidly. Reducing global warming is vastly cheaper than trying to adapt to it. But some significant warming is now inevitable. The message from world leaders is that everyone must get prepared.

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