

## **BOB DOPPELT: Petition targets climate change as moral issue**

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*For The Register-Guard*

Published: **Wednesday**, Nov 30, 2011 05:00AM

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Early this month the International Energy Agency issued a dire warning: Unless big changes are made, we are headed for irreversible climate change within five years. The IEA's World Energy Outlook concluded that delaying emission reductions puts the world on a path that is irreversible, and likely catastrophic.

Last week the U.N.-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the most comprehensive assessment yet of the effects of climate change on extreme weather events. The IPCC said that climate change will create more ferocious windstorms, deluges, floods, droughts and heat waves. Some regions of the world will be hit harder than others, and some areas will likely become increasingly marginal as places to live.

Despite these dire admonitions, our nation has failed to meaningfully address climate change.

Today in Washington, D.C., I will join a diverse group of people involved with the National Climate Ethics Campaign ([www.climateethicscampaign.org](http://www.climateethicscampaign.org)) to release a statement to Congress and the president declaring that our nation has a moral obligation to aggressively respond to global warming. More than 900 current and former elected officials — as well as representatives from the business, labor, youth, faith, conservation, academic, racial justice and health communities from almost every state — signed the statement.

The group involved with the national climate ethics campaign came together to declare that the individual, organizational and collective decisions we make now about how to respond to climate change must be based on our nation's long-held moral principles.

One fundamental principle is that it is wrong to unjustifiably cause human suffering or death. Our legal system emphasizes this tenet. Yet our nation is ignoring this basic moral principle by failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the last century, the United States has been the world's largest overall contributor to climate change, generating about 30 percent of the total energy-related carbon dioxide emissions that are destabilizing the climate. Today, we continue to produce far more emissions yearly than any nation except China, and our emissions per person are roughly five times the international average.

The energy that generated these emissions powered the growth of our economy and did tremendous good. But now, unless we rapidly reduce our carbon pollution, the resulting natural disasters will cause suffering and death for millions of people here and abroad every

year.

Even if the costs are high, we must help to avert one of the worst violations of human rights the world has ever seen by acknowledging our current and historic contribution to the climate crisis and significantly reducing our emissions.

The climate ethics campaign will also emphasize that we have a moral responsibility to honor the principles of justice and equity, by protecting others — particularly those who contributed little to the problem. This includes people in less developed regions of the world, as well as low-income and working-class people, communities of color, women and children in the United States, and future generations everywhere.

Finally, the group will declare that we have a moral obligation to reduce our emissions to protect other species and the natural environment. Natural ecosystems provide everything that makes life possible, from water and food to the air itself. To disrupt the climate that is the cornerstone of all life on Earth is morally wrong. For Americans from the faith community, global warming pollution is a violation of God's gift of creation.

The people and organizations involved with the National Climate Ethics Campaign call on everyone in the country to act on their moral principles now by rapidly and significantly reducing carbon pollution; by preparing for the consequences of climate change; and by demanding public policies that support those goals. We must also ensure a just transition that spreads the investments in solutions and the benefits of new approaches equitably, provides adequate resources for workers and communities adversely affected by the shift, and ensures that everyone has a say in how those decisions are made.

Acting on our moral principles will enhance, not diminish, our quality of life by creating millions of good jobs in clean energy fields, supporting healthy families, and building vibrant communities. This makes our moral imperative not only the right thing to do, but the wise thing to do.

The IEA and IPCC have made it clear that our legacy will be determined by what we do now and in the next few years. The need for action is urgent, and the benefits great. The clock is ticking. We must promptly and aggressively address climate change.

Bob Doppelt is executive director of The Resource Innovation Group, which is affiliated with the Center for Sustainable Communities at Willamette University, where he is a senior fellow.