

# CHAPTER 29

## Governor of California



**Edmund G. Brown Jr.**

It is a privilege to participate in one of the crucial steps in the process of making the turn to a climate-sustainable world, which is to call attention to the catastrophic health impacts of climate change. Much has been said about California, and that is appropriate because California, in fact, has been doing quite a lot.

But before I write about that, I want to mention the Pontifical Academy of Sciences meeting held in November of 2017: *Health of People, Health of Planet and Our Responsibility – Climate Change, Air Pollution and Health*. This book on climate and health resulted from that meeting. It really was all said right there and very clearly in the document which was prepared in connection with the meeting. The same is true of the declaration which resulted from that meeting, reproduced in this book. The declaration, which I signed along with astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, several mayors, Nobel laureates, and prominent faith leaders, fully captures the essence of what we are up against and what we need to do.

The Pontifical Academy meeting and this book that resulted from it are uniquely important. Of course, there are the annual conferences of the parties and many other meetings around the world dealing with climate change, but until the religious sensibility is engaged, until religious leaders from every part of the globe and from every denomination take up the challenge, we are not going to move aside the huge rock of indifference, complacency, and inertia. So I want to pay my respect for everything that the Pontifical Academy has already put in place, and will put in place, to further this cause.

The connection of health to climate change is central because climate change is an abstraction. Very few people can actually grasp it—or certainly be moved by it—but the air pollution from carbon emissions is visible and affects people directly. They get that. At the Vatican meeting, people were asking me: Why California? You might add, why is China getting so aggressive all of a sudden? It is called pollution.

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It is the impact. It is the experience of the health effects of very serious air pollution. California had perhaps the worst air pollution, which was called smog, and this smog affected people in a very important part of America: Los Angeles, California. And that smog then led to the creation of the California Air Resources Board during the governorship of Ronald Reagan and the presidency of Richard Nixon. But it was the problem that created the solution, and the pollution in Shanghai and Beijing have created a more heightened and ambitious response on the part of China—different from just a few years ago.

So I believe the authors of this book and the World Health Organization itself are right on track in focusing on health and disease, on what air pollution is doing to people. And of course, there is the element of injustice that the people who have done the least to cause the injury are the ones who suffer the most. It is all laid out in this book. We know what the world faces, and going forward, we are going to find the pathway to awaken people, to get done what needs to be done.

So, in the declaration, you lay out four points. First, we have got to get to carbon zero by 2040 or 2045. That is number one. Secondly, we get there in the most expeditious and efficient way by getting rid of short-lived climate pollutants. We do that and we will gain a few more years to get to zero carbon. Thirdly, after we get to zero, which hopefully comes sooner rather than later, then we have to extract a tremendous amount of carbon from the environment itself. So that is an utterly daunting undertaking, and we are not going to get there with just science and technology. Tragically, there is no technical fix adequate to the challenge we face. That is why in the declaration there is a call for transformation, which is both the most important and the most difficult.

I know about the idea of transformation because I entered the Jesuit seminary in the world of 1956, pre-Vatican II. We spoke Latin, we were told we had embarked on the practice of perfection. We meditated, we underwent self-discipline, we mortified ourselves. We tried our best, and I can tell you, I did not achieve perfection. I was not transformed. In fact, some of my bad habits, which I will not reveal, are the same today as they were when I entered the Jesuit seminary when Pius XII was pope. So it is a word that is easy to use but a state that is profoundly difficult to achieve.

The image that comes to my mind is Saul of Tarsus, riding to Damascus and being thrown off his horse. A lot of powerful people have to get thrown off their horse—the horse of affluence, the horse of power, the horse of inertia. So we do need an illumination. Taking a slightly different metaphor, we could use a 12-step program because our task cannot be achieved by mere self-will.

There is a power greater than ourselves, and in understanding that, and in orienting ourselves to that greater power, we will find the power to get done what we need to do. So much of this is technical fixes, but the big fix is really not a fix, it is a transformation. It is a reorientation, a paradigm shift. That transformation—or the context of that transformation—is best captured in the words of Pope Francis that are placed right on the early pages of this document. And I want to quote just these few words: “Seeing the mysterious network of relations between things.” So it is the network of things—the connection, the connectivity.

In connection with the Vatican, I could mention the term “mystical body”—the Mystical Body of Christ. Everyone is part of the body whatever, wherever, and whoever you are. It is a connectivity. The biosphere is connected, there is not a separation. We can never be separated from, we are always connected to. We are a part and so our individualistic assumptions that we are going to conquer nature, we are going to become the greatest power on Earth, become the greatest church, the greatest university, the greatest politician, that all is a delusional binary framework. In point of fact, we live in nature, that mysterious network of connections. Our very being is embedded in and dependent on other beings; the network is the interactions that sustain life.

We solve one problem yet create another one unless we reach an understanding about our relationship to nature, to creation. How are we going to do that? Not merely by “cost–benefit” analysis and not just with “evidence-based.” We do not want a no-evidence-based approach, we do not want superstition, we do not want ignorance, but we cannot rely on data and evidence alone.

Ultimately, it gets down to something like belief or faith. In the approach to Zen practice, three aspects are relevant here: great doubt, great faith, and great commitment.

If you want to be enlightened, you need great doubt, you need great faith, and you need great commitment. If we want to get the job done, we have to have great doubt. Doubt about what we are doing, where we are, to stand back and see clearly. But that is not enough. We need faith, faith to move forward, faith to take action based on insufficient evidence. But faith is useless without works, so you have to have commitment. You have to do things. It is that three-part approach that we have to have. It is true of all of life, but it is profoundly true with respect to the challenge before us. We first have to see what it is—and it is not a technical fix. It’s a transformation of the relationship of human beings to all the mysterious network of things.

But let me say something concretely, because it is not only this larger idea of our place in the world and in creation, but also concrete steps. In California, we have done seven things that are replicable and could be used throughout the world.

First, we have a clear commitment to promoting zero-emission vehicles. We have a commitment not only to zero-emission vehicles but also to reducing the emissions of fossil fuel cars. In that respect, the car companies and the federal government are all increasing the pressure on California to change the regime that we have and the standards that are now in place. But we will resist that, politically and in the courts.

As part of the transportation challenge, we also have to deal with land use and how people live together, and, in fact, our whole relationship to things, to packaging, to moving stuff around. All that is tied in.

I was in Vladivostok recently for an East Asian economic conference, and we heard speeches by the presidents of Russia, Mongolia, and South Korea and the prime minister of Japan, and they talked about trade and building pipelines and bridges and all sorts of things, but not one word was mentioned about climate change. Yet to talk of trade and not talk about the carbon impacts misses a fundamental point. It indicates to me that in the highest circles, people still do not get it. At least they do not get it at the level that we have to get it if we are really to get to

carbon neutrality and stabilize our climate. So it is not just a light rinse, but we need a total, I might say brainwashing. We need to wash our brains out and see a very different kind of world.

The second thing we have in California is energy efficiency, including building and appliance standards. We are doing that, we have the strictest rules in the United States—I would say probably in the Western hemisphere. That can be done, it is just making better buildings. There is a problem, of course; it costs money, it is complicated. Our building code, which was relatively short in length, is now very, very long. So it is not a free good here. Everything we do has a price and requires a tremendous overcoming of inertia.

Third, we have a low-carbon fuel standard. It is what the oil companies have defeated in the state of Washington. They fight it here in California as well. So far, we have it. But this is real combat, and to maintain any real standard that bites means you are going to have fierce opposition.

Fourth, we have our cap-and-trade program that was recently extended to 2030. This program, begun under Governor Schwarzenegger, puts a price on carbon and generates billions of dollars for climate-related investments.

Fifth, we have a renewable portfolio standard. We are now about 30% renewable electricity, not counting hydro or nuclear. The San Diego electric utility is over 40% renewable electricity. I can remember just a few years ago the private utilities—and the public ones as well—said they could not get to 20% renewable electricity by 2020. Soon they are going to be at 50%, so we are making it. And by the way, the utilities, from being major opponents of what I am talking about, are now major cheerleaders, and they are very much engaged in expanding the electrification of the California economy. In fact, there is now competition between renewable electricity and oil, between the conventional vehicle and the zero-emission vehicle. The role of utilities, charging stations, and other businesses makes it all possible.

Sixth, we are cutting short-term pollutants such as methane, black carbon, and chlorofluorocarbons, which will see more rapid reductions in the warming over the next 20–30 years. If the whole world follows California's super pollutants bill (SB1383), the rate of warming over the next 25 years can be cut by half.

Seventh, California and Baden-Württemberg have started the Under2 Coalition to keep global warming under 2 °C. That initial partnership has now grown to over 200 states and regions throughout the world.

America itself is very much in line with the Paris goals—the American people are, as are cities, corporations, nonprofits, and universities. The American people are more than their government. I can tell you that the majority of Americans are very much in support of serious climate action, following the Paris accords.

The federal government put out a report in November 2017, a report mandated by federal law, that laid out very clearly the human causation behind global warming and all the dangers. In the United States we do not have just a top-down structure. There are many elements in our federal system. We are a “country of laws, not men,” as stated by U.S. President Adams, and we have states, we have cities, we have a very vibrant private sector, we have a vibrant civil society.

In many respects, if you try to measure President Trump’s contribution, I would have to say that his attempted withdrawal from Paris has actually put the matter much more at the forefront. It is now more salient, because of the contrast between what he is saying, what the laws of America allow, and what other states are doing. So I would say over time, given the commitments that we saw at the 2017 Vatican meeting and that we are seeing all around the world, the Trump factor is very small, very small indeed.

But that is nothing to cheer about because if it was only Trump that was our problem, we would have it solved. But that is not the only problem. The problem is us, it is our whole way of life, it is our comfort, it is the greed, it is the indulgence, it is the very pattern of modern civilization. It is the inertia. And that is why the transformative solutions have to be present alongside, and informing, all the technical points and the political agreements that we make.

Let me conclude by saying that there is nothing more important than mobilizing the religious and theological spirit, but even more important than that is the prophetic spirit. It was not a pope who did the work of St. Francis. I recall being at the Vatican when Mother Teresa opened up one of her homes, right in the Vatican, and all the important people, the Italian politicians were there in the Piazza and the pope walked by, and no one paid much attention. Then this little woman in blue and white walked by, and all eyes turned to Mother Teresa.

So the power here is prophecy, the power here is faith, and that is what the Pontifical Academy is supposed to be about. So let us be about it—the technical, the scientific, the political—but never let us forget that our challenge is transformation, transformation in the profoundest way possible.

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