



Published on Thursday, December 11, 2003 by the [New York Times](#)

## White House Attacked for Letting States Lead on Climate

by Andrew C. Revkin and Jennifer 8. Lee

Several times at the talks now going on in Milan over a global warming treaty, Bush administration officials have portrayed states' actions to curb heat-trapping gases as evidence of American resolve.

But in this country, officials in many of those same states are strongly criticizing the administration's statements, saying their efforts are no substitute for federal action.

The focus of the criticism is a speech in Milan last Thursday by Dr. Harlan L. Watson, the administration's chief climate negotiator. Listing a variety of initiatives begun by states and communities, he said they were like "laboratories where new and creative ideas and methods can be applied and shared with others and inform federal policy - a truly bottom-up approach to addressing global climate change."

But in Washington State, Gov. Gary Locke, a Democrat, said the administration was using state initiatives as cover for its own inaction.

"The states are taking action for one simple reason - because the federal government is not," Mr. Locke said. "For the White House to say it is looking for leadership from the states is just an excuse to delay and procrastinate. We are limited in what the states can do. We need a national policy to address global warming."

Administration officials and some industry groups say that Mr. Watson had it just right - that having the states take the lead is in the best federalist tradition.

Still, even some groups often critical of environmental regulations said the speech would cause trouble for the administration at home.

"It's not surprising that the administration, when it goes in front of an international body like this, is going to brag about all the initiatives undertaken on global warming at the state level," said Jerry Taylor, director of natural resources studies for the libertarian Cato Institute. "What's the alternative? To go and say we're taking no significant steps and don't intend to in the near future?"

The text of the speech is online at [www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/rm/2003/26894.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/rm/2003/26894.htm).

Some Republican governors are distancing themselves from the administration's Milan position without directly criticizing it.

"They have not yet taken climate change on as a real issue and developed policies," a senior aide to one such governor, George E. Pataki of New York, said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "We are going to keep pushing them."

Mr. Pataki has led an effort to institute a 2005 regional cap for heat-trapping emissions for states from Maryland to Maine, and is pursuing New York legislation similar to California's new law

requiring curbs in such emissions from cars. Mr. Pataki also supports a federal limit on emissions of carbon dioxide, the dominant heat-trapping gas, from power plants as part of a broader cleanup of the plants.

The Bush administration opposes mandatory limits on the gases and state efforts to curtail such emissions from cars. None of Mr. Pataki's proposals involving mandatory curbs were among the projects described by Dr. Watson, who focused on voluntary plans like inventories of the gases.

Erin M. Crotty, Mr. Pataki's environment commissioner, declined yesterday to discuss the Bush administration's position. "I'll just say from our perspective New York will continue to be a leader," she said.

The Milan meeting, which ends Friday, is intended to gauge countries' progress under the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change, and to hash out details of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an amendment to the original pact requiring cuts in gas emissions by industrialized countries.

The 1992 treaty calls for voluntary action to avoid "dangerous" human interference with the climate. President Bush has said he intends to adhere to that treaty, but has rejected the Kyoto pact because it does not apply to China and other developing countries and because he says it could hurt the nation's economy. Last week, Russia also indicated that it would reject the treaty.

The American delegation in Milan has faced withering criticism throughout the meeting. for its position on the Kyoto treaty, and American officials said that Dr. Watson's comments were intended to illustrate that the country was doing things now to deal with warming.

"We're continually getting criticized that we're not doing anything practically at any level except pie-in-the-sky far-out research stuff which won't have any near-term impact," an American representative at the meeting said.

In a telephone interview, Dr. Watson said his statement was meant to reflect that "there is a broad effort going on in the United States on many levels to address global climate change."

Dr. Watson, a physicist, heads a National Security Council committee on climate policy and has participated in international climate talks for more than a decade.

Among domestic climate initiatives described by Mr. Watson in Milan were programs in 13 states requiring utilities to produce increasing amounts of power using nonpolluting sources like the wind and sun. President Bush signed one such program into law as governor of Texas.

But yesterday, environmental groups pointed out that the administration had successfully sought to exclude similar federal standards from its energy bill, which fell short of passage last month.

Many officials and private groups working on climate policy argue that scattered state and local actions are not an effective way to deal with gases, like carbon dioxide, that flow every time a fossil fuel is burned, stay aloft for up to a century, and drift throughout the atmosphere. A dozen states and three cities recently filed suit against the administration in an effort to compel it to regulate greenhouse gases.

"Nobody wants a situation where there are 50 different states dealing with climate on their own," said Joel Levin, the vice president for business development of the California Climate Action Registry. This nonprofit group, created under state legislation, enlists companies to tally and register their emissions of greenhouse gases, a prelude to cutting emissions and getting credit for the change.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

###