

About this video



As Congress debates climate and energy policy, what steps should be taken to improve efforts for sustainable development? During today's OnPoint, John Dernbach, a professor at Widener University School of Law and the editor of the Environmental Law Institute's new book "Agenda for a Sustainable America," makes recommendations for how local, state and federal governments can craft policy to improve sustainability and curb energy use. He explains why he believes the business community is far from a consensus on the meaning of corporate social responsibility and discusses opportunities for growth.

 [watch video](#)  [email video](#)

Transcript

Monica Trauzzi: Welcome to the show. I'm Monica Trauzzi. Joining me today is John Dernbach, editor of the Environmental Law Institute's new book, "Agenda for a Sustainable America." John, it's great to have you on the show.

John Dernbach: So glad to be here, thank you.

Monica Trauzzi: John, this new book takes a look at the U.S. sector by sector, making recommendations on how our society can become more sustainable and some of the nation's leading experts weigh in, in this book, talking about the U.S.'s push for sustainability. Can this be taken as a blueprint for the Obama administration?

John Dernbach: Well, yeah, actually it could be. The idea we had in putting the book together was not just to assess progress over the last several years, but also to make recommendations for the next five to 10 years. And the book was written, by and large, and completed in 2008, before the election was decided. But we all understood that the more than 100 recommendations that are contained in the book could be used as a blueprint for the new administration, whichever administration it turned out to be.

Monica Trauzzi: So, let's talk specifically about some of the issues the book tackles. Cap and trade is front and center in the House right now and in the book you cite the tendency of government to set overly modest pollution reduction goals. Are the steps that are being taken by the House in the Waxman-Markey bill going to put the U.S. on the right track towards a sustainable future or are those goals too low?

John Dernbach: Well, I think the basic goal of the Waxman-Markey bill is about right and I do think we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a considerable amount by the year 2050 and the Waxman-Markey bill would do just that. One other thing is a lot of us have been looking for in the Waxman-Markey bill is using energy efficiency to the greatest extent possible from a sustainability point of view. The energy we don't use is the cheapest energy of all and there's lots and lots of job creation opportunities with energy efficiency and there's a lot of that in the Waxman-Markey bill. So I think without getting into the details on the Waxman-Markey legislation, it's a very good step in the right direction.

Monica Trauzzi: What certainty though do we have that a cap and trade is the best approach to reducing carbon dioxide emissions?

John Dernbach: Well, the cap and trade approach is an approach that we know best from the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990 where we reduced sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants. It's also a path that we've employed on the Kyoto Protocol and is being seriously discussed at the international level. I think what a number of us would be interested in seeing is a combination of cap and trade with other measures,

particularly those for energy efficiency, renewable energy, but particularly energy efficiency. I think it's not likely that cap and trade by itself is going to get the job done. But, again, the Waxman-Markey legislation contains a great number of provisions related to energy efficiency and I think those taken together put us along way in the right direction.

Monica Trauzzi: Much of the debate behind cap and trade has involved the business community because some sectors are going to be more effected than others by the legislation. And in the book you say that the business community is still far from consensus on the meaning of sustainability and corporate/social responsibility. I want you to explain that, because many companies have taken significant steps clean up their operations. So what are some of the core issues and ways that the business community can grow to become more sustainable?

John Dernbach: Well, as a starting point the assessment contained in the book looked at 28 different sectors and one of the overviews that we made in the book is which sectors seem to have made the most progress in recent years? And we picked out six; one of those was the business community. There are significant elements in the business community that are pushing ahead on sustainability and are being pretty vocal about it and they're pretty prominent, GE and Wal-Mart would be among them. That's not to say that everyone in the business community is in the same place, but a lot of the work that the business community has done working with the triple bottom line has involved working with stakeholders, public reporting, creation of goals and indicators and that kind of thing. And I think the progress of the best companies is really quite impressive.

Monica Trauzzi: And is that the kind of consensus that you're looking for? I mean when you say consensus what do you mean?

John Dernbach: Well, I don't know that there's actually a consensus among the business community about a lot of these issues, but I think what you see is an emerging consensus or perhaps what you might call an overlapping consensus with somewhat different points of view. For somewhat different reasons, a lot of people in the business community are arriving at the conclusion that what is called the triple bottom line, environmental protection, economic development and job creation or equity, is a good way not just to do business, but to do business in the kind of world that we're going to be living in. I mean the two key facts, two very important facts about sustainability, when you think about it, is that the global population is probably going to wind up being two or three billion more by the year 2050 than it is now. And the economy is probably going to be, not withstanding the recent setbacks, something like three to five times larger in terms of GDP than it is at the present time. And so what we're looking at is a world in which more and more people want more and more things and you have a growing economy. And I think the resource constraints of that are becoming increasingly evident to the business community and the desire to do things more efficiently, to work with communities better and all the rest is something that more and more businesses see more and more clearly.

Monica Trauzzi: State and local governments have, in many cases, led the way in implementing sustainable practices and pushing this idea of being greener and cleaner. Is the federal government engaging these local governments enough?

John Dernbach: Right now the short answer is probably no. For the last number of years local governments have been, many of them, very, very prominent on sustainable development. And the reality is that the connections between economic development, quality of life, and job creation are much more evident often at the local level than they are at the state or national level. And many, many municipalities have gotten really engaged on sustainability, including Chicago and New York and many, many others. Now, you see, I think, with the stimulus legislation more of an effort to work with communities and to engage communities on a variety of issues related to sustainability. You see in the stimulus legislation something that we haven't seen very often, which is the federal government taking the view that environmental protection is a tool for economic development and job creation. And we haven't seen a lot of that at the national level in quite a long time and I'm hopeful that that's the first of many steps that we'll see of the federal government working to be more support of the local and state sustainability efforts.

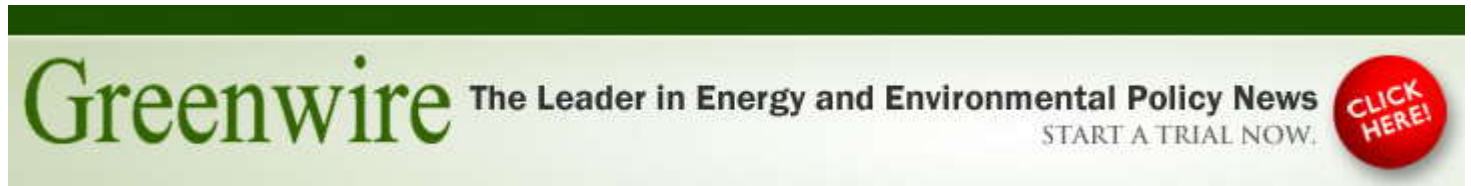
Monica Trauzzi: OK, we are going to end it right there on that note. Thank you for coming on the show.


John Dernbach: Well, thank you so much.

Monica Trauzzi: And thanks for watching. We'll see you back here tomorrow.

[End of Audio]

Advertisement



Greenwire The Leader in Energy and Environmental Policy News
START A TRIAL NOW. 

[Return to the top of the page.](#)

[E&E Home](#) [About](#) [Start a Trial](#) [Get E-mail Alerts](#) [Advertise](#) [Staff Directory](#) [Reports](#) [Public Site](#) [RSS](#)



ClimateWire

**ENVIRONMENT
& ENERGY DAILY**

Greenwire

 **Land Letter**

E&ENEWS PM

E&ETV

The Premier Information Source for Professionals Who Track Environmental and Energy Policy.

© 1996-2009 E&E Publishing, LLC [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#)