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We represent the leadership of over 1.4 million scientists in over 150 scientific disciplines.

The acceleration of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from human activity is increasingly leading to harmful climate change and ocean acidification. Societies must act urgently to reduce these emissions to protect the life-sustaining biophysical systems of the Earth. As noted by DoE Secretary Steven Chu in his April 28, 2010 testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, the necessary transition: "will require nothing short of a new industrial revolution." We agree with this assessment of the scale of response needed. We need to work aggressively to conserve energy and increase the efficiency of energy use, and we need rapidly to develop less polluting energy systems. Objective science has a critical role to play, and we urge that the nation fully use and incorporate the best available science in designing and implementing the energy and environmental policies necessary to guide the revolution.

America should move ahead quickly to develop a comprehensive energy policy to greatly reduce our GHG emissions. We urge that any potential approach be first evaluated in terms of the net benefits on environmental integrity, including a full analysis of GHG emissions, recognized by the Supreme Court as air pollutants, as well as other environmental concerns. The analysis of GHG emissions should include indirect land use effects and emissions of methane and nitrous oxide as well as carbon dioxide. No policy should be implemented without a full understanding of the consequences on the environment. Uncertainties will remain, which points to the necessity of also having the ability to reverse a policy action if unintended consequences are discovered.

Some energy bridges that are currently encouraged in the transition away from GHG-emitting fossil energy systems have received inadequate scientific analysis before implementation, and these may have greater GHG emissions and environmental costs than often appreciated. We find that their environmental impact studies and EPA determinations necessary to proceed are absent or inadequate. These include the production of ethanol from corn, where recent, more inclusive research concludes this is a poor option. As scientists we are concerned about the impact of the ethanol scale-up on water supply and quality, land use, GHG emissions, and net energy gain. In 2007, the nation used 27% of its corn harvest to produce 1.3% of total liquid fuels. One unintended result is greater nutrient flows down the Mississippi River, aggravating the ecological disaster underway in the Gulf of Mexico. Other biomass feedstocks produce more energy from less land, with less environmental harm. A recent report from the National Academy of Sciences lists many topics that deserve further scientific scrutiny before the nation further expands the role of ethanol as a fuel.

The production of natural gas (methane) from shales represents a major new domestic energy resource that can reduce reliance on imported crude oil. However, the development of methane from shale formations is another example where policy has preceded adequate scientific study. Economic recovery of methane from shales requires the drilling of long-reach horizontal wells and the high-pressure injection of millions of gallons of water with chemical additives to release the gas through a process called hydrofracking. Despite the utilization of millions of gallons of water and the flow back to the surface of these injected fluids, hydrofracking is exempted from the Clean Water Act. Exploitation of the Marcellus Shale Formation in the Appalachian basin, recognized as the largest shale-gas reserve in the U.S., could occur across a five-state region. Prior, thorough science-based studies are required to evaluate the impact of massive shale development on rural land uses, water supply and quality, and full-life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions.

Sincerely,