

News Release
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Public Issues Summit on Responses to Global Warming

On Tuesday evening, April 29, a Public Issues Summit on Responses to Global Warming was held at The College of New Jersey. Approximately 100 citizens from around central New Jersey attended to discuss different approaches to responding to the issue.

The evening kicked off with a keynote address by New Jersey Assemblyman John F. McKeon (Democrat, district 27), chairman of the assembly’s environment and solid waste committee. But most of the evening was devoted to deliberation among the participants who were seated in 8 groups with each group facilitated by a moderator. The participants looked at three distinctly different approaches to solutions, alternatively focusing on free enterprise, government regulation, and new public/private partnerships in research and education before developing responses of their own.

The summit was sponsored by the Leadership in Public Affairs (LPA) program and the President’s Climate Commitment Committee at TCNJ. “This is the seventh year we have held the summit series,” reports Dr. William J. Ball, director of the LPA program and chair of TCNJ’s Political Science Department. “We had a really diverse group here tonight. People came from all over the region and ranged in age from 15 to senior citizens. There was a great mix of community residents, students and academics, builders, local government officials, and professional planners.”

As they arrived, participants in the summit were surveyed on their knowledge about the issue and their support for the three initial approaches. The results of this initial survey follow.

% of participants responding:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I consider myself to be knowledgeable about the issues to be discussed at this forum.	25	39	26	8	0
When it comes to responding to global warming we should rely primarily on free enterprise.	2	11	40	24	24
When it comes to responding to global warming we should rely primarily on government regulation.	5	35	33	24	3
When it comes to responding to global warming we should rely primarily on education and new public/private partnerships.	24	44	22	8	2

After discussing the initial approaches participants worked in their groups to develop specific responses that a majority in each group could agree on. The most common responses developed include:

- Integrated solutions that include individual citizens, government, and the free market. Regulations should come from the bottom up and incentives should come from the top (federal) down.
- Launch a public campaign to raise awareness, including person-to-person advocacy, publicizing lists of green or eco-friendly companies, educating the public about the true costs of goods and services, and motivating people by making *green* cool.
- Education is key. Teach our children to think critically and learn to prioritize between needs and wants. Develop K-12 curriculum requirements on sustainability (including the science of climate change and environmental ethics).
- Motivate individual everyday action (e.g., use more energy efficient lightbulbs).
- Government should regulate corporate use of energy; use litigation against government and businesses for pollution and other irresponsible practices. Reduce the power of the corporate lobby over sustainability policy making and planning.
- Increase emphasis on centralization and planning for smart growth, thereby reducing the need for driving and other inefficient business and life practices. Governments should invest in mass transit and provide financial incentives for public to choose mass transit private cars. Penalties should be imposed on automobile inefficiencies (“pollute more, pay more”).
- Increase use of solar and nuclear energy (e.g., solar panels on schools, retrofitting older buildings, eliminate government subsidies of oil companies) by providing incentives for their use (e.g, government tax incentives for saving energy).
- Encourage government partnership with industry to provide tools for individuals, communities, and corporations to identify the impact of their behavior on global warming (i.e., measuring energy consumption). For example, a display in cars that indicates Carbon Dioxide emission. Individuals, communities, and corporations should receive timely feedback on the positive impact of their energy-efficient behavior to provide reinforcement and increased motivation.
- Encourage all levels of government and other public institutions should set an example for efficient energy use (e.g., using recycled paper, using fuel-efficient cars).
- Prioritize global warming as an emergent international issue. United Nations should act as a broker for international cooperation needed as global warming is a problem for all. Subsidize research and development on solutions to reducing carbon emissions. Learn from other countries’ solutions (e.g., tankless hot water systems, hotel keys that control electricity).

During the final phase of the program each participant identified next steps they would like to pursue in responding to global warming on an individual level. “What we have accomplished here tonight,” Dr. Ball commented, “is the beginning of a public judgment on responding to the problem. This was not a process driven by experts or by only one ideological or partisan group. Rather, it was a true community effort. But it is also just the beginning. We plan to continue working with the people who came tonight to facilitate the move from discussion to local action on the issue. We are not trying to advance any particular answer but rather to build a stronger sense of public ownership of the problem in this region and a stronger sense of shared civic community in doing something about it.”