

# “Environmental Challenges in the 21st Century”

**June 21st, 2012, Save the Children Headquarters, Westport, CT**  
Event Report

Carolyn Miles, President, Save the Children, opened the program. After her welcome, she acknowledged that “the issue of climate change has a great impact on the world’s poor children.” It is hoped that this is a good starting point for integrating sustainability into Save the Children’s work all over the world.



**From left to right: Peter Yazbak (Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Jim Himes), Roma Stibravy (President, NGO Sustainability, Inc.), Carolyn Miles (President, Save the Children), and Daniel Esty (Connecticut Commissioner for Energy and Environment).  
Photo by Tim Ong.**

Roma Stibravy, President of NGO Sustainability, Inc., kick-started our event with her introductory statement:

“While we are sitting and dreaming here, world leaders along with their representatives and a vast number of civil society members are gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the Earth Summit, working on the way forward in dealing with the environment.

As we are all aware, we are consuming resources faster than the Earth can regenerate them, and producing more waste and pollution than the earth can absorb. There is scientific consensus that Planet Earth is rapidly approaching its boundaries of a healthy and safe environment for human habitation as we know it.

The Rio Summit is trying to reimagine our socio-economic systems, and the way in which they should work in harmony with nature in order to maintain a liveable planet. The UN has also declared 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, promoting renewable energy. This requires a rethinking of our use of fossil fuels.

NGO Sustainability hosts programs at the United Nations with speakers who are implementing the latest ideas and technologies dealing with sustainability, data gathering, water and energy. We also do frequent mailings to our members and friends of current articles concerning sustainability and renewable energy.

In terms of program implementation, at the request of the President of Liberia we are launching a small-scale solar energy project there funded by the UN Global Environment Facility (GEF)/Small Grants Program (SGP), based on work I did with the President when she was head of the African Bureau of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the 1990s.

However, at today's meeting we are "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally" in hosting our outstanding Connecticut Commissioner for Energy and the Environment. You may have all read the recent American Lung Association's State of the Air 2012 report in which all of the counties in Connecticut measured received failing grades for air quality. Fairfield County ranked as the 24th most polluted county in the nation. This situation was attributed partly to its proximity to pollution-heavy New York City and the plentiful traffic on Interstate I-95. The report also deemed the New York-Newark (NJ)-Bridgeport metro area as the 15th most polluted in the country.

Surprisingly, given this information, there is a struggle now to close the coal burning power plant in Bridgeport. Hopefully, the health of the residents of Fairfield County will prevail and both the Bridgeport and Norwalk coal power plants will be shut down simultaneously. This is something the residents of the County and the State can do, given enough pressure on the State legislature and the Governor.

At the federal level there is good news in this regard, as the Environmental Protection Agency proposed tightening standards governing fine particles, commonly known as soot. If these standards prevail the coal plants in Connecticut might in any case have to shut down. As to cost, EPA says the health benefits will greatly outweigh the costs—every dollar spent on pollution control will result in a least \$30 in health related savings.

Also, the Connecticut Fund for the Environment is organizing hearings to deal with rising water levels along our shoreline for Fairfield County on July 22nd, 6:00PM, Penfield Pavilion, 323 Fairfield Beach Road, Fairfield.

You are all welcome to work with us in not only preserving the beauty of Fairfield County but also the health of its population. You have our email address and website, and there are membership brochures around.

We should, in addition, acknowledge that the Governor recently put forth his goal of making Connecticut first in energy efficiency in his new integrated resource plan, which I hope we will hear more about. This goal is aimed to reduce energy use by 2.1% per year.

The Report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability<sup>1</sup> outlined recommendations for empowering people to make sustainable choices, working towards a sustainable economy, and strengthening institutional governance. The Panel concludes with a call for action and looks to the Secretary-General to implement the recommendations that fall within his authority. Ultimately, the Panel's greatest aspiration is to see the report serve as a source of inspiration for people all around the planet. The combination of inspiration, ideas, and actions, are instrumental in achieving sustainable development for us all."

Before introducing our main speaker, the Connecticut Commissioner for Energy and Environment, Dan Esty, Roma Stibravy handed the floor to Peter Yazbak.

Peter Yazbak, Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Jim Himes, spoke on behalf of the Congressman, and began by saying,

## **“We need to drive and sometimes force a national conversation on sustainable development, renewable energy, and gender equality.”**

He praised organizations like NGO Sustainability, which help to revive the conversation when these topics in Congress get stale.

For detailed information on the recommendations made: <http://www.un.org/gsp/report/>

Mr. Yazbak deals with many SMEs who are looking to relocate to Bridgeport, where there are massive industrial factories that have been abandoned for several decades on parcels of land called Brown Fields. As it stands, there exist many regulations that private investors will have to go through to develop those sites, because they do not know what industrial waste lies buried there. Commissioner Esty made a commitment to streamline that process, so that private companies can utilize these sites. Mr. Yazbak thanked Commissioner Esty for making Connecticut one of the more green and business-friendly states.



From left to right: Peter Yazbak (Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Jim Himes), Roma Stibravy (President, NGO Sustainability, Inc.), and Daniel Esty (Connecticut Commissioner for Energy and Environment). Photo by Tim Ong.

### **Energy Transformations**

Echoing Congressman Himes’ thoughts, Mr. Yazbak said that we cannot afford to wait to reform our nation’s energy policy, as the demand for energy is growing constantly. He warned that we risk following, not leading, the transformation of our energy economy. “For the sake of our environment, our national security, and our way of life, we should take responsibility for our own energy future and commit to an energy policy that strengthens the production of clean, safe, renewable, and reliable American-made energy, as well as work towards energy independence in economic growth,” affirmed Mr. Yazbak.

Mr. Yazbak remarked that Congress is not inclined to invest more in the kinds of clean energy technologies, sustainable communities and green jobs that will power our economic engine of the 21st Century. Given the

partisan nature of politics in Washington D.C. today, allies of the causes of sustainability and of renewable energy in Congress are trying to keep status-quo baselines from being cut. Though discouraging on the national level, there has been some headway and momentum in Fairfield County on creating more sustainable communities. In Stamford, the Harbor Point Project and the South End Redevelopment continues at great pace. In Norwalk, the Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency have partnered with developers to implement a sustainable communities planning grant, also supported by Congressman Himes. The objective is to revitalize Washington Village, which is the oldest public housing in Norwalk. There are plans to transition this development into a sustainable, walkable community that will be integrated into the public transportation network. In conclusion, Mr. Yazbak reaffirmed that “Congressman Himes continues to look forward to working with groups like NGO Sustainability and their partners in DEEP and the Governor’s Office to get support for sustainable projects and drive the discussion on getting into a renewable and clean energy economy.”

Mr. Yazbak’s remarks set the stage for Connecticut Commissioner for Energy and Environment, Dan Esty’s, speech.

An Auspicious Moment “We are at a watershed moment in this country when it comes to energy and environmental protection and commitment (or lack thereof) to sustainability,” said Commissioner Esty. He highlighted that in Presidential debates over the last 3 decades, energy and environmental issues have garnered little attention. He also pointed to several calls in political debates for the end of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy.

**“We have had a very hostile dialogue when it comes to energy and environment, and a lot of heated political rhetoric.”**

Commissioner Esty remarked that we in the public domain have an obligation to rethink how we pursue our environmental and energy agenda, affirming that we should re-gear our approach for the 21st Century.

### **Malloy/Connecticut Model for Sustainability**

In stressing the need to integrate Energy and Environment into a single department, Commissioner Esty iterated that a third “E” has to be part of the conversation – Economy. He expounded on this by saying that we have to think of our energy and environmental agenda in the context of economic implications, and provide some assurance that how we pursue energy and environment will be supportive of economic growth, jobs, and prosperity. This is especially true in times like these when people are very nervous about their economic prospects and the future. “We in Connecticut are advancing, with the Governor’s leadership, to a new approach for both energy and the environment,” said Commissioner Esty.

Placing energy and environment into the context of the economy, Commissioner Esty believes that progress depends on changing our perspective towards the business world. For most of the last 40 years, the environmental community in particular, and environmental law, have seen business as the problem and have been very hostile to the business community. The goal of environmental law has been to hold a big stick over the business community and to beat businesses regularly for their short-comings.

**“The key to progress going forward is a structure of environmental law and policy focused on driving innovation.”**

Commissioner Esty stressed the need to engage the business world, which is what the state of Connecticut is trying to do. Innovation means technology development, but also goes beyond that – it encompasses the systems for environmental protection and energy, the policy framework of incentives, and how we finance the movement to cleaner technologies and cleaner energy. He called for a shift away from the old regulation system

called “Command & Control”, in which the Government dictated exactly what businesses could do, and instead harness market forces with the use of economic incentives to engage our business community in developing these new technologies.



Roma Stibravy discussing the future of renewable energy for Connecticut with Commissioner Esty. Photo by Tim Ong.

## Turning a Corner

Commissioner Esty urged the audience and, by extension, the nation, to tap into innovation and creativity. He asserted that we need to “play to the strength of a nation that has always been very good about promoting innovation, engaging entrepreneurs, and really spurring on the creative spirits that exist all across this country – not only in the big companies, but also in our small companies.” Commissioner Esty called for shifting the model of environmental protection, which means lightening the burden of regulation. This does not entail lowering standards, but lightening how that process of regulation plays out, in terms of how much time, effort and money it takes to conform.

Exemplifying this lightening, Commissioner Esty said that the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is going through a “lean” process. This is a technique which involves taking apart the process, and pulling out the pieces that are not value-added. This thins down and lightens how the system work, speeding it up to work better and more efficiently. The state of Connecticut is doing this particularly in their permitting programs, trying to ensure that it is administratively much easier for businesses that have to get permits. Efforts are already underway in the Brown Fields Program, not just in Bridgeport but in cities and towns across the state.

“They have these older industrial facilities that no one wants to touch because if you buy it or try to put up a new factory, you own the old liability problems of hazardous waste that’s been there and chemicals that were dumped outside, and inherit all kinds of pollution problems. We’re trying to change the liability rules and the economic incentives and make sure that a new player coming in gets credit for the clean-up of the immediate



problems, not having to bear risks and liabilities of uncertain proportions beyond the perimeter of the property,” said Commissioner Esty. He went on to stress the value of reusing and recycling existing infrastructure, as opposed to going out in an open green field and building a new factory. On the energy front, Connecticut is doing something similar, centered on innovation as a critical starting point. The Commissioner stressed that we don’t just simply want clean energy, but also cheaper and more reliable energy.

## **“Cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable electricity and energy.”**

Economically, it doesn’t make sense to have clean energy at, for instance, 3 times the price of existing grid-scale electricity. Thus, a set of economic incentives need to be put in place to drive down the cost of electricity and energy so that we can get the long-term crossing of renewable energy coming under the cost of burning fossil fuels. Connecticut is focused on driving that innovation process to bring down cost and be on a sustainable energy track.

Historically, the focus on energy policy has been through subsidies to preferred companies and industries. However, the track record here is not good. Commissioner Esty cited the example of \$500 million given to Solyndra versus the \$30 billion that the Government placed on corn-based ethanol as the alternative energy future. Three units of fossil fuel input are needed to produce 4 units of corn-based ethanol, translating into very little energy gain. In addition, this drives up the price of everything that contains corn, from tortillas to corn-fed chicken. Again, the Commissioner emphasized a shift from subsidies to a model that creates a level-playing field and supports the financing of entrepreneurial activity in many different directions. Commissioner Esty asserts that he wants a “technology race”.

Commissioner Esty proposed a platform of incentives available to any technology, calling these incentives “technology neutral”. Focusing on the economic side of things, he remarked that we should drive companies to deploy their technologies in Connecticut, and support them in a way that brings down cost by running competitions and harnessing market forces. In aiding the “technology race”, Commissioner Esty said that we need to ensure that the Government provides basic economic support for the research and development that spins out economic opportunities.

### **Energy efficiency**

The state of Connecticut is creating energy efficiency programs for every category of electricity consumer. The Lead by Example Program was created to fund energy efficiency in all of Connecticut’s state buildings. At the same time, a program is being launched for homes across the state. The Residential Rate Payer is not just for houses, but for apartments, condos, and senior living centers. Multi-unit dwellings are some of the least efficient because it is always complicated who’s paying the bill and whether they get the benefit of an investment in efficiency.

### **Question & Answer**

On how Finland is meeting its EU obligations and also its own legal structure, Vesa Koivisto of BaseN remarked that the goal of information is crucial. He expressed interest in how Connecticut is driving the awareness of rate payers in their own energy consumption, and enabling them to understand the effects of their actions in terms of energy usage and efficiency gains.

Commissioner Esty responded by highlighting that recently the Governor was in Stamford to launch a new marketing campaign around the theme of Energize Connecticut, which encourages people to invest in their own smart energy strategies. An important part of the equation is the awareness that there are options. However, circumstances differ house to house. The next challenge, as expressed by the Commissioner, is how to get individual houses the necessary information about their own energy use. Another possibility is to invest more in

software companies, which are developing techniques to analyze a home's energy use for efficiency gains. The Commissioner mentioned that the best way to use this information gap is still being worked out.

Vesa cited good experience with Smart Meters that provide hourly consumption data for the consumer, which can be accessed easily from a website.

Commissioner Esty supported this by saying that getting information into consumers' hands is the first step towards behavioral change. At present, there is no policy framework that rewards this. The next step would thus be to create incentives to reduce energy consumption and invest in efficiency.

Roma Stibravy cited the Rockefeller Center ice-making facilities, in which ice is made during the night in large tanks in the basement, and then used for the ice rink during the day, which results in considerable cost-savings.

Commissioner Esty talked about the concept of peak-load shaving, which aims to take down the spikes that occur on the hottest days, usually 10-15 days of the summer (largely for air-conditioning). Investment in a smart grid could allow us to shave the peaks and shut down old power plants which run on fossil fuels and pollute the environment. However, the challenge is that the legislature is wary of this.

Ben Michaels of Clean Air-Cool Planet raised the issue of energy storage to reduce peak at times when there is less demand.

Commissioner Esty remarked that there are lots of challenges to cost-effective energy storage. The ability to move to a renewable energy future is stymied by the lack of good storage. "We will never get to a fully built out wind-power or solar-power future unless we can solve the storage problem, because the intermittency of those technologies is overwhelming," said Commissioner Esty. He again affirmed that we need to move towards a cleaner, cheaper, and a more reliable energy future, stressing the importance of treating this as an entire package, and integrate it with a more economically rigorous approach that addresses the other dimensions of our energy problem.

Vesa made a point that the energy system is currently very much consumption-driven. With good information and technology, he thinks that we can shift that balance and also impact the demand. He remarked that this is already being done in some scale with Demand Response (DR) programs.

Commissioner Esty supported the idea of having a smart grid. With information technology, it shouldn't be very hard to reduce the energy load of many buildings, which would be integral to shaving the peak loads.

Timothy Ong of NGO Sustainability pointed to the issue of economic incentives and disincentives, and asked how the state could best determine the optimal amount of tax to charge.

The Commissioner responded by saying that the first big hurdle is that it is politically impossible to talk about making people pay for the harms they cause. Responding to the optimal amount of tax, he said that analysis would allow us to determine the amount to charge based on the amount of harm caused. The first step would be to come up with a reasonable estimate, and then drive information into the market place to refine the amount of tax charged.

Commissioner Esty concluded the event by reaffirming his ideas about innovation and energy efficiency, and thanking everyone who attended.