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Presidents Climate Commitment Panel Discussion

June 12, 2007



Chancellor G.P. "Bud" Peterson

Good morning. I am pleased to be here on behalf of the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Discussions on elevating sustainable development and our responsibility to today's citizens and our children's tomorrows are gaining momentum across the nation in corporate boardrooms, government commissions, K-12 lessons, and of course, in classrooms and student groups at colleges and universities.

The University of Colorado at Boulder's Environmental Center began to address

these issues by hosting an annual conference focused on campus sustainability in 1995. Over the last 12 years, these have grown from a campus focus to a regional event that is held each year.

CU students have a strong legacy of leadership on sustainability and climate:

- In 1970, the nation's first student operated environmental center was founded at the University of Colorado at Boulder.
- In 1976, the nation's first student-sponsored campus recycling program was founded at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The campus response to the student recycling program overwhelmed student resources for the pick-up, delivery, sorting and sale of recyclable products. Campus interest led to a student/administration partnership that continues to be successful to this day with the annual diversion of 1,600 tons from landfills. Waste diversion averages 40 percent in academic and administrative buildings, 55 percent in grounds operations and 12 percent in residence halls.
- In 1991, the nation's first student operated bus pass program was implemented at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The program, which began as a student-led initiative, was supported by a student fee approved by a vote of the student body. The program has since expanded to include bus passes for all full time faculty and staff. Faculty and staff bus passes are supported through revenues generated with the campus parking permit system. Annually, there are over three million bus rides by faculty, staff, and students using the bus pass program. The demand for costly parking structures has been carefully mitigated with this alternative transportation program during a period of campus enrollment growth. We have been able to manage campus enrollment growth from 25 to 29,000 students without adding a single structured parking space in a location where surface parking space options are severely limited.

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- In 2000, the nation's first student funded wind energy purchase occurred at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Ten percent of today's campus energy is derived from renewable resources as we explore options to increase actual renewable energy purchases.
- And this past spring, our student government unanimously passed a resolution to become the first student government in the nation to commit to climate neutrality.

The impetus for environmental change has often been initiated by our students with subsequent involvement and infrastructure support from the campus administration. The momentum from these changes will significantly alter our future. The long-term benefits to the university are substantial. Many successful student and administration partnerships have been formed over the years with many tangible actions underway that speak to our environmental stewardship. In particular:

- Our Facilities Management department and the Environmental Center partner on extensive and successful energy conservation efforts that have avoided costs of over \$2.4M in the last three years with investments of \$1.4M for energy and water conservation. Student-administration partnerships have reduced energy use over 13 percent per square foot over the last five years.
- Facilities Management and Dining and Housing Services partner with the student-run Environmental Center to operate CU Recycling, another effort that generates revenues through the sale of recycled products and reduces collection costs through the use of student labor, diverting nearly a third of CU's waste into recycled markets and saving the campus over \$200,000 annually while preserving over 18,000 trees, 16.8 million BTU's of energy, 8 million gallons of water, and over 1,600 tons of carbon emissions every year.
- Since 2001, campus potable water use has been reduced by 113M gallons or 30 percent per square foot.
- Partnerships on water conservation, alternative transportation, composting, energy outreach, and several more programs have helped lower costs, improve environmental performance, and create broad based campus and community interest and support.
- Today, the University of Colorado at Boulder purchases 10 percent of our electricity from renewable sources and we have reduced electrical consumption by 13 percent per square foot since 2001.
- The Boulder Campus generated 76 tons of hazardous waste in FY 05-06 and paid to dispose 49 tons, with the remaining 27 tons pre-treated to enable drain disposal. Hazardous waste generation has been reduced by 15 percent since 2001.
- Revisions to our campus design standards to a LEED Silver equivalent permit us to develop new capital construction projects on this campus that will be 20-25 percent more energy efficient than older campus buildings.
- We recently completed two major new building projects on the CU-Boulder campus that were funded by a student-initiated capital fee, the ATLAS building and the Wolf Law School building.

These two buildings are the first two public buildings in the state of Colorado to achieve LEED Gold certification, and two of only eight LEED Gold certified buildings in the entire state of Colorado. We also have two other major buildings that are underway for which we are seeking Gold certification, a new Business Building and a Visual Arts complex.

Despite our leadership on environmental issues, we acknowledge that much more remains to be done. I know I join the other chancellors and presidents, as well as our combined university communities, in the desire to expand our commitment to improving our overall environmental performance.

To that end, earlier this year we announced that the University of Colorado at Boulder would join other American college and university presidents and chancellors and our own student government in signing the president's climate commitment.

In so doing, we at the University of Colorado at Boulder signified our commitment to increasing our already substantial efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and with this commitment, conducting a detailed inventory of the University of Colorado at Boulder's current greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of this agreement, the Boulder campus pledged to, within two years, outline short and long-term strategies for the University of Colorado at Boulder emission reductions. We realize that meeting the PCC goal of climate neutrality—zero net greenhouse gas emissions—will require major improvements in the technology necessary to reduce the carbon emissions associated with coal-based electrical production.

But we are working on the premise that, with support from the state and federal government and a growing national and global commitment to alternative energy, these improvements in technology will come sooner rather than later, making what we do today all the more important and far-sighted.

To assist in this process, we also announced that in the next fiscal year, we will begin investing \$250,000 annually in projects to reduce campus energy consumption, particularly electrical consumption. We also pledged that investments beyond the \$250,000 per year be considered for future funding as a pressing campus priority in order to aggressively pursue options for greatly reducing the University of Colorado at Boulder's GHG emissions.

To offset our carbon output in the meantime, we committed an additional \$50,000 per year for the purchase of renewable wind energy.

Finally, we announced one more measure that I believe will lay the groundwork for even more progress toward sustainability: the establishment of the Chancellor's Committee on Energy, Environment and Sustainability (CCEES), a working group to be led by our Vice Chancellor for Administration and charged with setting sustainability goals for the campus and advising the university on all environmental matters.

In addition to drawing from a cross-section of campus constituencies, this working group marked a new sustainability partnership with the city of Boulder. Recognizing that CU's and Boulder's fortunes are tied together in moving toward sustainability we requested that the Mayor and City Manager appoint a city representative to serve as a permanent member of this committee.

President Theodore Roosevelt—who 100 years ago visited Boulder while leading efforts to establish our national park system—said, "*The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.*"

Thank you and best wishes to you all for spirited, open, and informative discussions, and thank you all again for your many contributions to sustainability.

For more information on the Presidents Climate Commitment ceremony, read the [Chronicle of Higher Education article](#).

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