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National Governance: Still Stumbling Toward Sustainability

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Editor's Summary

The time has come for the U.S. government to improve national governance for sustainable development. To further this effort, the federal government must work to integrate sustainability into its national strategic processes by requiring agencies to achieve sustainable development; develop a set of indicators to measure activities, impacts, and trends quantitatively; and engage both the public and private sectors to help address sustainability threats. Furthermore, Congress should establish an Office of Sustainability Assessment, staffed by professionals from a range of disciplines, to advise it on sustainable development matters.

Much of what is required for national governance for sustainable development is also required for good governance in general: effective governmental institutions and national laws, a favorable investment climate, public access to information, informed and sciencebased decisionmaking, public participation in governmental decisionmaking, and access to justice. National governance for sustainability, however, also requires at least three more elements, which are the topics of this article:

- a legally grounded national-level strategic process;
- sustainable development indicators to measure progress;
- public engagement and education on sustainability.

Since 2002, U.S. progress on all three fronts has been modest at best.

The United States has made some progress toward greater strategic efforts and interagency coordination concerning the environment since 2002, and has developed a more sophisticated system of environmental reporting. But the effort has been overshadowed by the federal government's preoccupation with antiterrorism and the war in Iraq, ideological and partisan divisions in our national political life, and the government's inability or unwillingness to address climate change—perhaps the most urgent and obvious of all sustainability issues. The national government was stumbling toward sustainability in 2002 (borrowing from the title of this article's predecessor volume), and it is still stumbling. To move ahead, the federal government must formally integrate sustainable development into its existing strategic efforts, develop a set of sustainable development indicators, and support and encourage efforts by the private sector and the public on behalf of sustainability.

I. National Strategic Process

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the United States and other countries agreed that nations should take "immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005."[1] The United States has made some progress toward strategic thinking since 2002. But the federal government still has no overall national strategy for sustainable development, and is a long way from employing the strategic analysis and decisionmaking required for sustainable development. Nor is there an effective legal framework for ensuring agency adherence to sustainability principles.

Asustainability strategy is a "navigation tool for identifying priority sustainability issues, prioritizing objectives, and coordinating the development and use of a mix of policy initiatives

1. World Summit on Sustainable Development, Plan of Implementation, U.N.Doc. A/CONF.199/20 & A/CONF.199/20/Corr.1, ¶ 162(b) (2002).

to meet national goals."[2] It is directed at the achievement of specified goals or objectives; it is a process, not merely a document; it reflects the priorities and circumstances of the country that produces it; and it requires a governmental coordinating or implementing body to make sure it is properly carried out.[3]

Some progress toward strategic thinking has occurred under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), which obligates federal agencies to develop and implement multiyear strategic plans. These plans are to include a mission statement, goals and objectives for major agency activities, a description of how those goals and objectives will be achieved, and an evaluation method that measures achievement of those goals and objectives.[4] The GPRA also requires each agency, as part of its annual budget submission, to prepare and submit to the Office of Management and Budget a performance plan that is consistent with its strategic plan.[5] In addition, the act requires agencies to publish a report after each fiscal year comparing the agency's performance goals for that fiscal year with what was actually achieved, evaluating successes in achieving goals, and, where performance goals were not met, explaining why.[6]

According to a 2004 evaluation of GPRA by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the act has "established a solid foundation of results-oriented performance planning, measurement, and reporting" for the federal government.[7] The GAO also concluded that GPRA has created a closer connection between agency objectives and the budget process, and provided a basis for reviewing agency objectives, activities, and results.[8] Environmental and sustainable development goals are contained in some but not all agency strategic plans. The strategic goals of 15 federal agencies (the 14 cabinet departments and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)), as reflected in their current GPRA strategic plans, are set out in Table 1. Six agencies (EPA plus the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Interior, and Transportation) identify environmental or natural resources protection, environmental stewardship, or environmental responsibility as a strategic goal, and one plan (the joint strategy of the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development) expressly identifies the advancement of sustainable development as a strategic goal. These are ahead of the other nine agencies, but even they have a long way to go. Although many agencies have points of contact for sustainability, considerable variation exists in the extent to which environmental matters are integrated into economic and investment decisions.[9] For example, there continue to be significant and environmentally damaging subsidies for highways, fossil fuels, agriculture, and marine fishing.[10] On balance, interagency coordination concerning the environment is uneven at best.[11]

The Office of Federal Environmental Executive (OFEE), which was created to promote "sustainable environmental stewardship throughout the federal government,"[12] is improving agency coordination on some issues. Its primary responsibility is to implement an executive order, "Strengthening Federal Environmental, Energy, and Transportation Management," issued by President George W. Bush in January 2007.[13] The executive order requires, among other things, that federal agencies reduce their energy intensity (energy consumption per dollar expended) by 30 percent by fiscal year 2015, ensure that new buildings and major renovations of existing buildings conform to federal guidelines for high-performance green buildings, and acquire goods and services that are energy-efficient, water-efficient, and, in the case of office paper, contain 30 percent post-consumer recycled content. The order also requires agencies to use environmental management systems and to set up procedures for reporting and review on its implementation.[14] This coordination, however, is limited to these issues; it does not begin to approach the integrated analysis and decisionmaking across social, economic, environmental, and security spheres that are required for sustainable development.

Some interagency strategies have been prepared and adopted on specific issues that are relevant to sustainable development, although each has been done more or less independently of the others. These include:

- A 2001 national energy policy, prepared by a group of federal officials headed by Vice President Richard B. Cheney, which asserts that the energy crisis is caused by a "fundamental imbalance between supply and demand."[15]
- A 2003 climate change research strategy,[16] which focuses on research "conducted, sponsored, or applied" by 13 U.S. government agencies over the next 10 years, and

2. Int'l Inst. for Sustainable Dev. et al., National Strategies for Sustainable Development: Challenges, Approaches, and Innovations in Strategic and Co-ordinated Action 41 (2004), *available at* http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2004/measure_nat_strategies_sd.pdf [hereinafter National Strategies for Sustainable Development].
3. John C. Dernbach, *National Governance*, *in* Stumbling Toward Sustainability 723, 724-27 (John C. Dernbach ed., 2002).
4. 5 U.S.C. §306(a).
5. 5 U.S.C. §306(c).
6. 31 U.S.C. §11 16.
7. U.S. Gov't Accountability Office (GAO), Results-Oriented Government: GPRA Has Established a Solid Foundation for Greater Results 6-7 (2004).
8. *Id.* at 100.
9. Organisation for Econ. Co-operation & Dev. (OECD), Environmental Performance Reviews: United States 25, 130 (2005).
10. *Id.* at 132-35.
11. *Id.* at 147.
12. Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, http://ofee.gov/sustain/sustainability.asp (last modified Oct. 23, 2007).
13. *Id.*
14. Exec. Order No. 13423, Strengthening Federal Environmental, Energy, and Transportation Management, 72 Fed. Reg. 3919 (Jan. 26, 2007).
15. Nat'l Energy Pol'y Dev. Group, National Energy Policy viii (2001), *available at* http://www.whitehouse.gov/energy/National-Energy-Policy.pdf. The United States has described this policy as a "long-term, comprehensive strategy that provides reliable and affordable energy, while accelerating the protection and improvement of the environment." *See also* United States of America, Country Profile 11 (2002), *available at* www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/wssd/usa.pdf (prepared for World Summit on Sustainable Development).
16. Climate Change Science Program and the Subcommittee on Global Change Research, Strategic Plan for the U.S. Climate Change Science Program(2003), http://www.climatescience.gov/Library/stratplan2003/final/ccspstratplan2003-all.pdf.

which was peer-reviewed in both draft and final form by the National Research Council.[17]

- A national security strategy issued in 2002 in which President Bush identifies "a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise."[18] The strategy was revised and reissued in 2006.[19] The revised strategy, like the 2002 strategy, is primarily directed at national defense and the war against terrorism, but it places greater emphasis on fostering economic growth, democracy, and development in other countries.

Such strategies are important, but they do not appear to reflect the kind of integrated understanding or analysis that is necessary to sustain the country's well-being. The revised national security strategy, for instance, recites the government's position on climate change but does not contain or reflect any analysis of the likely effect of climate change on American security. By contrast, the Military Advisory Board, composed of 11 retired admirals and generals, concluded in April 2007 that "climate change poses a serious threat to America's national security" by exacerbating threats and tensions around the world.[20] Nor is climate change the only probable serious environmentally related threat to American well-being and security. A variety of other threats exist, including loss of biodiversity and the dramatic breakdowns in regional ecosystems due to multiple stresses, leading to resource scarcity and violent conflicts. There does not appear to be any current systematic inventory, ranking, or analysis of these threats.[21]

II. Sustainable Development Indicators

The federal government has moved toward adopting environmental indicators since 2002, but not sustainable development indicators. Indicators, which quantitatively measure various human activities and natural events, have "enhanced collaboration to address public issues, provided tools to encourage progress, helped inform decisionmaking and improve research, and increased public knowledge about key economic, environmental, and social and cultural issues."[22] Sustainable development indicators also shed light on the relationships among various trends, enable decisions to be based on integrated data, and provide a data platform for moving toward sustainability.[23]

In 2003, EPA published for comment its Draft Report on the Environment, which it described as "its first-ever national picture of the U.S. environment."[24] (The 2003 report was not finalized.) EPA has now finalized its 2007 Report on the Environment. The report includes a public document that is intended to communicate information and trends in an understandable way,[25] a technical document that provides scientific and technical background, and an interactive website.[26] Like its 2003 predecessor, the 2007 report describes environmental and human health trends and identifies major knowledge gaps. It states, for example, that the amount of developed land in the United States increased at twice the rate of population growth between 1982 and 2002, but it is difficult to track more specific trends because of the differences among agencies in how land use data is collected.[27] Unlike the 2003 draft, the 2007 report addresses climate change, including U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, warming trends, and carbon storage in forests.[28]

An interactive, Web-based set of key social, economic, and environmental indicators is being developed by State of the USA (SUSA), a nonprofit organization advised by the National Academy of Sciences, which itself has published several major reports on environmental indicators.[29] SUSA's "mission" is "to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the country's most pressing issues" by providing Americans with "a new tool to help them assess where our nation is moving forward and where it has stalled."[30] SUSA will not set national goals or assess progress in meeting them; rather, it aspires to "provide shared, reliable and usable facts to fuel more focused public debate."[31]

Comparative assessments based on common indicators do not put the United States in a position of global leadership on sustainability. A 2008 assessment of environmental performance, published by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University, ranked the

17. *Id.* at 1; Nat'l Research Council, Planning Climate and Global Change Research: A Review of the Draft U.S. Climate Change Program Strategic Plan (2003); Nat'l Research Council, Planning Climate and Global Change Research: A Review of the Final U.S. Climate Change Program Strategic Plan (2004).
18. George W. Bush, The National Security Strategy of the United States (2002), http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf (introductory message by President George W. Bush).
19. The National Security Strategy of the United States (2006), http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf.
20. Military Advisory Bd., National Security and the Threat of Climate Change 6-7 (2007), *available at* http://securityandclimate.cna.Org/report/National%20Security%20and%20the%20Threat%20of%20Climate%20Change.pdf.
21. William C. Clark, *America's National Interests in Promoting a Transition Toward Sustainability, in* U.S. Policy and the Global Environment: Memos to the President 183, 189-96 (2000).
22. U.S. GAO, Informing Our Nation: Improving How to Understand and Assess the USA's Position and Progress 14 (2004), *available at* http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d051.pdf.
23. Board on Sustainable Dev., Nat'l Research Council, Our Common Journey: A Transition Toward Sustainability 258-65 (1999).
24. U.S. EPA, Draft Report on the Environment 2003, at 1 (2003) [hereinafter Draft Report]; U.S. EPA, Draft Report on the Environment 2003, Technical Document (2003) [hereinafter Technical Document].
25. U.S. EPA, 2007 Report on the Environment: Highlights of National Trends (2007), *available at* http://www.epa.gov/indicators/docs/roe-hd-draft-08-2007.pdf [hereinafter Highlights of National Trends].
26. U.S. EPA, Report on the Environment: Science Report (last visited Aug. 8, 2007).
27. *Id.* at 20.
28. *See, e.g.,* Highlights of National Trends, *supra* note 25, at 8, 31-32.
29. State of the USA, Inc., The State of the USA, http://www.state oftheusa.org/index.asp (last visited June 3, 2008). The National Academy of Sciences has produced several reports on indicators. *See, e.g.,* Nat'l Research Council, Ecological Indicators for the Nation (2000); Nat'l Research Council, Nature's Numbers: Expanding the National Economic Accounts to Include the Environment (William D. Nordhaus & Edward C. Kokkelenberg eds., 1999).
30. State of the USA, *supra* note 29.
31. *Id.* at 2, 4.

United States 39th of 149 countries.[32] Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway were the top ranking countries, and the United States was bracketed by Argentina (no. 38) and Taiwan (no. 40).[33] index focuses on two objectives: "reducing environmental stresses to human health" and "promoting ecosystem vitality and sound natural resource management."[34] While the United States ranked very high on environmental health, it received a very low ranking on ecosystem vitality because of its climate change and air pollution policies.[35] And according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the "pollution, energy, water and material intensities" of the U.S. economy continue to be high compared to other developed countries.[36]

III. Public Engagement and Education

While there has been a serious effort to engage the public on behalf of the nation's antiterrorism effort, there has been no comparable effort to engage the public to address the variety of other sustainability threats we face. According to the Rio Declaration, nations are to "facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation" in sustainable development efforts "by making information widely available."[37] Public participation provides the basis for the development of a consensus on key issues, introduces new perspectives and information to the decisionmaking process, and provides the basis for public and stakeholder "ownership" of a strategy that will enable it to succeed.[38] Public education is important not only to build a greater sense of personal responsibility but also to achieve the kind of public understanding of, and debate about, sustainable development that is necessary in a democratic society.

The Bush Administration has downplayed the risks of problems other than terrorism, especially climate change (until recently). In 2001, for instance, President Bush asked the National Academy of Sciences for an assessment of climate change science. The request was consistent with the Academy's historic role; it was chartered by Congress in 1863 to advise the federal government on science and technology matters.[39] The report described current and projected warming trends, linked warming to increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and described serious risks to the United States, but included appropriate qualifications on issues where the science is less certain. Instead of reading the report for what it said, the federal government used the report ideologically. For instance, EPA used the report as authority for the proposition that scientific uncertainties were too great to justify regulation of greenhouse gases from motor vehicles.[40] In its 2007 decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the Supreme Court remanded that ruling back to EPA, citing the 2001 report for the serious risks that it actually described.[41]

The national strategies created in recent years were developed with different degrees of public or peer review. The Bush Administration's energy policy was developed behind closed doors, while the climate change research strategy was publicly peer reviewed. The lack of public review for the energy policy has damaged its credibility and effectiveness. The President's Council on Sustainable Development, formed during the Clinton Administration, can be criticized for generating little public interest and little governmental follow-up on its recommendations.[42] But it did represent *some* effort to reach out to the public.

Another approach to public engagement and education occurs when government fosters or engages in collaborative relationships with market and community actors.[43] Such approaches are consistent with the view reflected in Agenda 21 that it is important to engage all relevant public and private stakeholders in the work of sustainable development. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the United States played a major role in encouraging the use of partnerships between government and private-sector actors to help meet sustainable development objectives.[44] A number of such partnerships have grown in importance in recent years, including Energy Star®, a government-industry partnership for energy efficiency involving more than 12,000 public and private entities, that is "designed to promote energy-efficient products to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."[45] Energy Star is a voluntary labeling program for more than 50 product categories; products that meet specified efficiency criteria are allowed to publicly display the Energy Star label. On the other hand, the Bush Administration has more or less abandoned the practice of working collaboratively with states on environmental matters, including (but not limited to) climate change.[46] Nor has the federal government engaged in any large-scale effort to collaboratively engage the business community or state or local governments on sustainable development in general.

32. Yale Ctr. for Envtl L. & Pol'y, Yale U. & Ctr. for Int'l Earth Sci. Info. Network, Columbia U., 2008 Environmental Performance Index 10 (2008), *available at* www.yale.edu/epi/files/2008EPI_Text.pdf.
33. *Id.*
34. *Id.* at 8.
35. *Id.* at 24 & 31.
36. OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: United States, *supra* note 9, at 26.
37. U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Principle 10, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/5/Rev.1, 31 I.L.M. 874 (1992), *available at* http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=78&ArticleID=1163.
38. OECD, Strategies for Sustainable Development: Practical Guidance for Development Co-operation 29-35 (2001).
39. Nat'l Research Council, Climate Change Science: An Analysis of Some Key Questions Preface (2001).
40. *See, e.g.,* 68 Fed. Reg. 52922, 52931 (Sept. 8, 2003) (2001 National Research Council report shows scientific uncertainties too great to justify regulation of greenhouse gases from motor vehicles).
41. 549 U.S. 497 (2007).
42. The first and best known of these reports is President's Council on Sustainable Dev., Sustainable America: A New Consensus for Prosperity, Opportunity, and a Healthy Environment for the Future (1996), *available at* http://clinton2.nara.gov/PCSD/Publications/TF_Reports/amer-top.html. For criticisms of the President's Council on Sustainable Development, see OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: United States, *supra* note 9, at 241; Dernbach, *supra* note 3, at 730-39.
43. Maria Carmen Lemos & Arun Agrawal, *Environmental Governance,* 31 Ann. Rev. Env't & Res. 297, 309-12 (2006).
44. *See* Iana B. Andova & Marc A. Levy, *Franchising Global Governance: Making Sense of the Johannesburg Type II Partnerships, in* Yearbook of International Co-operation on Environment and Development 19 (Olav Schram Stokke & Øystein B. Thommessen eds., 2003/2004).
45. U.S. EPA, Energy Star, History of Energy Star, *available at* http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=about.ab_history (last visited June 3, 2008).
46. Barry Rabe, *Environmental Policy and the Bush Era: The Collision Between the Administrative Presidency and State Experimentation,* 37 Publius 413 (2007).

IV. Recommendations for the Next Decade

A. Congress Should Amend GPRA to Require Each Agency's Strategic Plan, and the Annual Reports on its Implementation, to be Explicitly Directed Toward Achieving Sustainable Development, and to Direct Each Agency to Cooperate With Others Toward That End

Canada provides a useful model from which to learn. The Canadian Auditor General Act authorizes the auditor general not only to audit the books of government agencies and report what is found, but also to report when "satisfactory procedures have not been established to measure and report the effectiveness of programs, where such procedures could appropriately and reasonably be implemented."[47]

Under 1995 amendments to the act, each major department in the Canadian government is required to prepare a sustainable development strategy and update the strategy every three years. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, a newly created office that reports directly to the auditor general, is to monitor and report on departmental progress toward sustainable development.[48] To be sure, Canada is experiencing challenges implementing this act; in October 2007 the commissioner issued a report strongly criticizing the national government's implementation of the act.[49] Still, the legal obligation to work toward sustainable development, coupled with a public accountability mechanism like that provided by the commissioner (in the United States, perhaps the GAO), would raise the profile of sustainability in agencies' GPRA planning and budgeting.

More broadly, and perhaps in the longer term, the federal government should consider a single strategic plan that both synthesizes various agency plans and identifies key sustainability issues and challenges. The United States needs to conduct, on an ongoing basis, an analysis of actual or potential threats (including environmental threats) to its interests and prioritize them accordingly.[50] That analysis also needs to be integrated into agency strategies under GPRA as well as multiagency strategies. As the Military Advisory Board recommended, the "national security consequences of climate change should be fully integrated into national security and national defense strategies."[51] This single strategic plan would need to be developed in a way that considered the views of all stakeholders, including Congress and the public, and then implemented in a way that integrates those strategies into the actual decisions of the federal government.[52] In recommending changes to improve GPRA in 2004, GAO stated:

> If fully developed, a government wide strategic plan can potentially provide a cohesive perspective on the long-term goals of the federal government and provide a much needed basis for fully integrating, rather than merely coordinating, a wide array of federal activities. Successful strategic planning requires the involvement of key stakeholders. Thus, it could serve as a mechanism for building consensus. Further, it could provide a vehicle for the President to articulate long-term goals and a road map for achieving them.[53]

This effort would need to be managed by an appropriate government entity. One option is an entity within the executive branch, under the control of the president, that would, among other things, consider the various reports agencies issue under GPRA. The OFEE's authority is too limited for that job, although the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) might be able to perform it. The CEQ is located in the executive office of the president; it has statutory responsibility "to develop and recommend to the President national policies to foster and promote the improvement of environmental quality to meet the conservation, social, economic, health, and other requirements and goals of the Nation."[54] Although the statute was adopted in 1969, the language is much in keeping with sustainable development. A second option is for Congress to create an independent commission, governed by a board appointed over staggered terms so that it would have some independence from any president. Such a commission would ostensibly be more objective in its assessments, and could be a useful counterweight to political partisanship on environmental matters.

B. The Federal Government Should Develop Sustainable Development Indicators That Cover the Environmental, Social, Economic, and Security Aspects of National Life

While the SUSA project would be an important supplement to this work, federal national indicators could more readily be tied to national and agency strategic plans and goals. In 2004, GAO recommended consideration of a comprehensive set of national indicators:

> They would add a key dimension to how we inform ourselves. We now have many diverse and extensive bodies of information on issues of limited focus (e.g., health care). But we could use comprehensive key indicator systems on a broader array of critical issues to help generate a broader perspective, clarify problems and opportunities, identify gaps in what we

47. Auditor General Act, R.S.C., ch. A-17 (1985) (Can.).
48. Amendments to the Auditor General Act, 1995 S.C., ch. 43 (Can.).
49. Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development—October 2007, Ch. 1—Sustainable Development Strategies (2007), *available at* http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/domino/reports.nsf/html/c20071001c_e.html/$file/c20071001c_e.pdf.
50. Clark, *supra* note 21, at 196.
51. Military Advisory Bd., *supra* note 20, at 7.
52. Alfred Ho, GPRA *After a Decade: Lessons From the Government Performance and Results Act and Related Federal Reforms,* 30 Pub. Performance & Mgmt. Rev. 307, 310 (2007).
53. U.S. GAO, Results-Oriented Government, *supra* note 7, at 104-05.
54. 42 U.S.C. §4342.

know, set priorities, test effective solutions, and track progress towards achieving results.[55]

C. Congress Should Establish an Office of Sustainability Assessment to Advise it on Matters Relating to Sustainable Development

Such an office would be staffed with professionals from a variety of disciplines, which would increase the capacity of Congress to understand and address the great variety of sustainability challenges and opportunities that the country faces (including but not limited to environmental sustainability).

D. To Fully Integrate Environmental Objectives With Social, Economic, and Security Objectives, the United States Needs to Make Greater Use of Legal and Policy Tools That Send Appropriate Economic Signals

The federal government should, for example, make greater use of environmentally related taxes in a variety of contexts. The government should also reduce or eliminate environmentally damaging subsidies.[56]

E. The National Government Should Lead, Support, and Encourage Sustainable Development Efforts by Individuals, Nongovernmental Organizations, and Corporations, and Reestablish and Reinvigorate its Collaborative Relationship With State and Local Governments

Too much work is needed on too many fronts for the federal government to do it alone. Growing public interest in and awareness of sustainable development provide reason to believe that substantial segments of the public and affected interests would respond positively.

F. The United States Needs to Consider the Possibility That Significant Changes in Governance are Needed to Put the Country on a Sustainable Course

The prior recommendations, and those contained in the rest of this volume, may (or may not) be enough to put the United States on a direct and rapid course toward sustainability.We are faced with a variety of challenges to sustainability—climate change, the budget deficit, health care, and Social Security—that often seem politically intractable. A major obstacle, though certainly not the only one, is the challenge that two-, four-, and six-year election cycles pose to solving problems that will take decades to solve.[57] In response, the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress at New York University, and other organizations, including the Brookings Institution and the RAND Corporation, have initiated a project examining the ability of Congress to address long-term problems such as climate change, with the aim of developing strategies to make Congress more responsive.[58] Similarly, the president or Congress should consider establishing a National Commission for a Sustainable America to evaluate and make recommendations on changes in national governance, including both Congress and the executive branch, that may be needed to address these issues.

V. Conclusion

In *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*, Barbara Tuchman recounts the many times in history when governments pursued policies that were contrary to their own interests.[59] "Mental standstill or stagnation—the maintenance intact by rulers and policy-makers of the ideas they started with—is fertile ground for folly," she writes.[60] Sustainable development recasts the role of the environment in human affairs—from something that can be degraded in the pursuit of achieving security, economic, and social goals to something that must be protected and restored to achieve those goals. Sustainable development is profoundly in the national interest, and will better equip us to address the dangers and challenges of coming decades. And if these dangers and challenges are great, so are the opportunities.

55. U.S. GAO, Informing Our Nation, *supra* note 22, at 2 (letter from David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States, to Senator Sam Brownback).
56. OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: United States, *supra* note 9, at 26.
57. "It's hard to convince an elected official to alienate existing constituencies in order to make the world better in 15 years." John M. Broder, *Sweeping Energy Bill Will Get Its Day in House*, N.Y. Times, Aug. 3, 2007, at A17 (quoting Jason S. Grumet, executive director of the National Commission on Energy Policy).
58. *See, e.g.,* Barry Rabe, Can Congress Govern the Climate? (2007), *available at* www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2007/0423climatechange_rabe.pdf.
59. Barbara W. Tuchman, The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam (1984).
60. *Id.* at 383.

Table 1: Federal Agency Strategic Goals in Current GPRA Plans

Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development	1) Achieve peace and security; 2) Advance sustainable development and global interests; 3) Promote international understanding; 4) Strengthen diplomatic and program capabilities.[1]
Environmental Protection Agency	1) Clean air and global climate change; 2) Clean and safe water; 3) Land preservation and restoration; 4) Healthy communities and ecosystems; 5) Compliance and environmental stewardship.[2]
Department of the Interior	1) Resource protection; 2) Resource use; 3) Recreation; 4) Serving communities.[3]
Department of Commerce	1) Maximize U.S. competitiveness and enable economic growth for American industries, workers, and consumers; 2) Promote U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness; 3) Promote environmental stewardship.[4]
Department of Transportation	1) Safety; 2) Mobility; 3) Global connectivity; 4) Environmental stewardship; 5) Security; 6) Organizational excellence.[5]
Department of Homeland Security	1) Awareness; 2) Prevention; 3) Protection; 4) Response; 5) Recovery; 6) Service; 7) Organizational excellence.[6]
Department of Education	1) Create a culture of achievement; 2) Improve student achievement; 3) Develop safe schools and strong character; 4) Transform education into an evidence-based field; 5) Enhance the quality of and access to postsecondary and adult education; 6) Establish management excellence.[7]
Department of Health and Human Services	1) Reduce the major threats to the health and well-being of Americans; 2) Enhance the ability of the nation's health care system to effectively respond to bioterrorism and other public health challenges; 3) Increase the percentage of the nation's children and adults who have access to health care services, and expand consumer choices; 4) Enhance the capacity and productivity of the nation's health science research enterprise; 5) Improve the quality of health care services; 6) Improve the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, and communities, especially those most in need; 7) Improve the stability and healthy development of our nation's children and youth; 8) Achieve excellence in management practices.[8]
Department of the Treasury	1) Promote prosperous U.S. and world economies; 2) Promote stable U.S. and world economies; 3) Preserve the integrity of financial systems; 4) Manage the U.S. government's finances effectively; 5) Ensure professionalism, excellence, integrity, and accountability in the management and conduct of the Department of the Treasury.[9]
Department of Justice	1) Prevent terrorism and promote the nation's security; 2) Prevent crime, enforce federal laws, and represent the rights and interests of the people; 3) Ensure the fair and efficient administration of justice.[10]
Department of Agriculture	1) Enhance international competitiveness of American agriculture; 2) Enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of rural and farm economies; 3) Support increased economic opportunities and improved quality of life in rural America; 4) Enhance protection and safety of the nation's agriculture and food supply; 5) Improve the nation's nutrition and health; 6) Protect and enhance the nation's natural resource base and environment.[11]
Department of Defense	1) Fighting the long war; 2) Operationalizing the national defense strategy; 3) Reorienting capabilities and forces; 4) Reshaping the defense enterprise; 5) Developing a 21st century total force; 6) Achieving unity of effort.[12]
Department of Energy	1) Energy security; 2) Nuclear security; 3) Scientific discovery and innovation; 4) Environmental responsibility; 5) Management excellence.[13]
Department of Housing and Urban Development	1) Increase homeownership opportunities; 2) Promote decent affordable housing; 3) Strengthen communities; 4) Ensure equal opportunity in housing; 5) Embrace high standards of ethics, management, and accountability; 6) Promote participation of faith-based and community organizations.[14]
Department of Veterans Affairs	1) Restore capability of veterans with disabilities; 2) Ensure a smooth transition from active service; 3) Honor and serve veterans; 4) Contribute to the public health, emergency management, and socio-economic well-being.[15]

Table Endnotes

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