

A Holistic Aspen

“W

e’ve come to the mountaintop to share some big ideas,” declared Lisa Jackson, the new Environmental Protection Agency administrator, on top of Aspen Mountain at the opening session of the Institute’s second annual Aspen Environment Forum. “There is not a moment to lose in confronting climate change; this is not an academic discussion anymore.”

The Forum—held March 25–28 in Aspen, Colorado, in partnership with the National Geographic Society—brought together the country’s top environment and energy experts to explore the intersection of energy and the environment. What they found was that the conversation quickly turned to national security and the economy. “Economic recovery must be the top priority, but avoiding or deferring action on climate change and energy security will merely set us up for future economic problems,” said David Monsma, executive director of the Aspen Institute’s Energy and Environment Program. “The opportunity now is to tackle all three issues together: economy, energy, and environment; it’s a hard tackle.”

The Aspen Environment
Forum tackles energy

proach

By Sacha Z. Scoblic ■ Photography by Michael Brands



David Stubbs/Getty Images

BIG IDEAS

“Make power that runs on rice husks. Create customers out of the world’s poor.”

—Chip Ransler, co-founder of Husk Power Systems



Kennedy

“Make textiles that harvest energy and emit light.”

—Sheila Kennedy, founding principal of Kennedy & Violich Architecture Ltd. and a founder of the MATx Portable Light Project



EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson opens the Aspen Environment Forum.

A hard tackle indeed. The key challenge, said *National Geographic* magazine editor-in-chief Chris Johns, is to find methods to power the planet at the same time as the population continues to grow and as the aggressive industrialization of the developing world continues to increase demand for cheap, plentiful energy: “We need to develop a different energy paradigm and empower developing countries to do the same.”

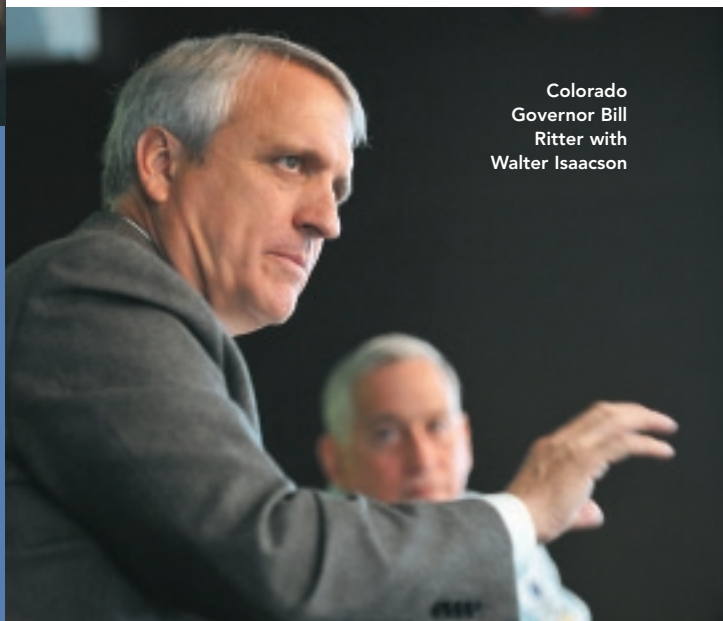
The Solution: Multiple Energy Sources

While everyone at the Forum could agree with Johns’ call for a new energy paradigm, few agreed on just what that paradigm might look like. In one heated exchange between R. James Woolsey, senior executive advisor at Booz Allen Hamilton and former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Patrick Moore, chair and chief scien-

tist at Greenspirit Strategies Ltd., the realities of national security locked horns with the promise of nuclear power.

Woolsey, a security pragmatist who sees America’s reliance on Middle Eastern oil as an ongoing threat to the homeland, is leery about the spread of nuclear energy around the globe: “The problem with nuclear power is that we don’t want more North Koreas and Irans out there.” But Moore, an ardent proponent of nuclear power, sees no alternative to a nuclear paradigm. Saying that “eighty-seven percent of the world’s energy are fossil fuels,” Moore insisted, “we cannot underestimate the problem here.” And, for Moore, the answer is not found in renewable sources: “It is imperative that nuclear power be considered politically correct to solve this problem—or we will fail.” Critical of a call for more “renewable portfolio standards” (state policies that require power companies to use certain percentages of renewable sources), Moore said, “The word energy isn’t even there.”

Still, even the biggest advocates of renewable-energy sources weren’t prepared to disagree completely with Moore. As Chuck Kutscher, principal engineer and manager of Thermal Systems Group at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, later said, “I’m not prepared to take anything off the table.” It was a sentiment echoed by many. Jane Long, associate director-at-large at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, went so far as to condemn some environmentalists and energy experts who promote



Colorado Governor Bill Ritter with Walter Isaacson

their own solutions at the expense of others, which she termed “eating your siblings.” “That has to stop,” said Long. “My answer to *Which solution should we use?* is always ‘Yes.’”

With most agreeing to keep all energy options on the table, many turned their focus to the economy. “We have to be concerned about how we supply power to people so that it is affordable,” declared Bill Ritter, governor of Colorado, who has been a fierce promoter of clean energy in his state. Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, agreed: “We have to reduce our contribution to global warming, ... but we have to recognize the impact that will have on the consumer.”

The Politics: Multiple Narratives

Of course, once the consumer is taken into consideration, a whole new set of problems must be tackled—like addressing the constituencies of coal-states, impressing the urgency of the crisis onto a broader swath of Americans, and creating bipartisan momentum on this issue in Congress. “We have turned the corner on convincing most segments of society that the economy, climate, and energy challenge must be understood



Jim Ball,
CEO of the
Evangelical
Environmental
Network

together,” said Monsma. “Special interests, though, still divide us on a political solution.” And that’s just in the United States. As Jason Grumet, founder and president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, put it, “Until we show some leadership at home, even President Obama will have trouble bringing the world together.”

The Bipartisan Policy Center reported some success getting the coal miners’ union to reexamine its stance on climate-change legislation, which they had—understandably—believed would end their livelihoods. But, by addressing the miners’ legitimate concerns without deluging them with green orthodoxy, Grumet found room for progress and convinced the unions that higher energy prices would not be the death knell they had supposed. “We have to enable people, without ever admitting they were wrong, to change course on this issue,” Grumet said. “If you want to move climate legislation, lobby.”

But others were more interested in changing Americans’ basic assumptions about climate change. Susan Joy Hassol, director of Climate Communication, says that the partisan gap on this issue is growing and that a more grassroots approach to understanding global warming is needed. Hassol eschewed targeted lobbying for a broad public education campaign that redresses the idea that science is an opinion, instead of a collection of evidence and facts. Hassol also argued for better envoys: “Al Gore, as knowledgeable as he is, is probably not the best messenger on this issue for a conservative audience.”

“You’ll have personalized energy. You’ll own the energy. Here’s my big idea: **Your home will be a power and gas station.** ... Use a photovoltaic device during the day, generate electricity, take half of it, and just split five water bottles into hydrogen and oxygen, and every house in America is taken care of.”

—Daniel Nocera, Henry Dreyfus professor of energy; director, Eni Solar Frontiers Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Jane Lubchenco,
administrator of the
National Oceanic
and Atmospheric
Administration

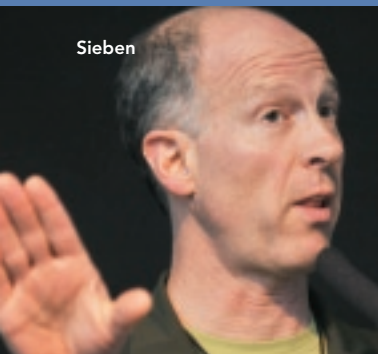


BIG IDEAS

“By 2020, rebuild the infrastructure to make it as energy efficient as possible—for all the buildings in America. We can put a lot of people to work.”

—Craig Sieben, founder and CEO, Sieben Energy Associates

Sieben



“Capture CO₂ out of the air at an industrial scale and at a price that is interesting.”

—David Keith, director, ISEEE Energy and Environmental Systems Group

To that end, Jim Ball, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network, was sanguine about bringing environmental awareness to a new audience. “Energy efficiency is a new way to love your neighbor,” Ball said. “It’s a new way to love your kids.” Hassol concurred: “If you want to take action on the environment because you want to protect God’s creation, come on into the tent.”

It was a theme that resonated with Governor Ritter as well. “We don’t know what the result would be if we actually educated the public about energy efficiency,” he said. Ritter advanced the idea that green consciousness was something that needed to “seep into the culture” in order to create change.

Unfortunately, ours is not the only culture that needs to change. After all, as ABC News Correspondent Bill Blakemore said, “The atmosphere has no borders.”

The Connections: Multiple Impacts

We live in a world brimming with new energy innovations, countries at varying levels of environmental consciousness, and a very real climate-change problem looming larger and larger. So how do we help a refugee in a developing country who



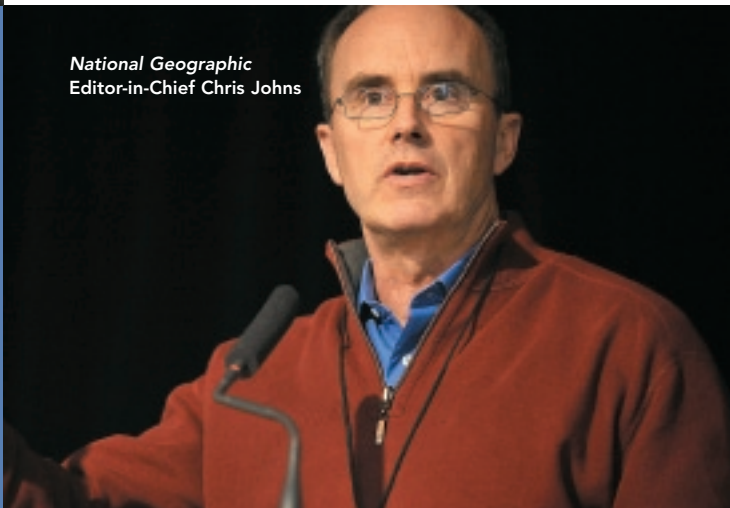
Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality

relies on coal to cook meals for her children? How do we create incentives for China to become part of the solution? How do we protect the planet without falling deeper into a recessionary spiral?

It turns out that the challenge of solving the climate crisis may also be the key to solving myriad world problems. “Where there is renewable energy, [women] can have more time to study in the evenings, to develop their businesses,” said Alcinda Antonio de Abreu, minister of Coordination and Environmental Action in Mozambique. And Jia Feng, deputy director of the Center for Environmental Education and Communications at the Ministry of Environmental Protection in China, sees the issue of the environment as a

bridge to political amity: “Change means progress; change means ideas are much more open to the world.” Meanwhile, Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, sees hope for the economy: “Economic opportunity for new jobs and industries will be part of the solution, not the problem.” And, as Governor Ritter said, “It’s easy to sell people on clean energy when there’s job creation.” Jim Ball sees the environment as a way of energizing Evangelicals to help the world’s poor. And, finally, many,

National Geographic Editor-in-Chief Chris Johns



including James Woolsey, see clean energy as a homeland security imperative.

But perhaps no one connected the dots between energy and other global and national problems better than the EPA's Lisa Jackson in the Festival's very first moments. Seamlessly linking environment and energy issues to everything from health care to national security, Administrator Jackson made connections between pollution and emergency-room visits, asthma and education, and sick days and the economy. The

good news, she said, was that the nation now has a president who understands that choosing between a green economy and a great economy is a false choice. "The EPA is back on the job for the American people," she said. With the largest budget in the EPA's decades-long history, Jackson spoke of the coming "clean-energy transition": "We have the highest budget and the highest level of expectations."

However, Jackson's most poignant moments were when she put her script aside and spoke of meeting Americans "where they are now." "Worried about the economy?" Jackson asked. It's OK. She has a clean-energy plan for that. "Worried about the environment or clean air?" No problem. Clean energy will help there, too. "Worried about national security?" Then clean energy is for you. In other words, you don't have to be an environmentalist to have high-impact conversation about energy and the environment—you just have to be open to the dialogue. ♣



Nichols

"I want to hang a 350-foot picture of a Redwood off a building in San Francisco."

—Michael Nichols, editor-at-large, *National Geographic* magazine



M.A. Sanjayan, lead scientist at the Nature Conservancy

And the winners are...

"Only at the Aspen Institute can a group come together to create a prize—and actually do it," said Lucy P. Marcus at the Aspen Institute Environment Forum where she presided over the second annual Aspen Institute Environment Awards. Marcus and four other Henry Crown Fellows started the awards in 2007 to inspire emerging environment leaders and to recognize some of the most innovative work being done in the field. "We scoured the earth for projects that are replicable, scalable, and that make you think," said Marcus, who is the CEO of Marcus Venture Consulting. The awards are given in six categories:

Visual Art and Design Award

James Balog, for his film *The Extreme Ice Survey*

Corporate Energy-Efficiency Award

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Corporate Energy Generation Award

A123Systems

The Government Award

Alberta, Canada

The Non-Governmental Organization Award

Confederation of Indian Industry for the Sohrabji Green Business Centre

Individual Thought Leadership Award

Van Jones, founder of Green for All and White House special advisor for green jobs

"Create a 'Green Bridge' idea hub, because innovative and exciting ideas happen when countries meet."

—Roland Stulz, executive director of Novatlantis