

I am Mary Wood, faculty director of the ENR program, and it is my great pleasure to welcome you all here, and to provide an introduction to today's program. I want to thank the Morse Center for Law and Politics, and particularly its Director, Margaret Hallock, for co-sponsoring this event with the ENR Law Program. This event is part of a two-year Morse Center theme of inquiry on Climate Ethics, and Equity. As part of that theme, we wanted this program to have a clear focus on youth, and our responsibility towards them. I am delighted to see so many youth in this audience.

Our distinguished speaker today is Dr. James Hansen, who is widely regarded as the world's leading climate scientist. Dr. Hansen has been aptly called the Paul Revere of global warming because he, more than any other scientist, he has brought the urgency of climate crisis to public attention. In 1988, he testified before Congress on global warming on behalf of his agency, NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. During that summer, many parts of the nation were beset by disaster brought on by an extraordinary heat wave. The American West had the driest summer on record, Yellowstone National Park was devastated by wildfire, crops withered, and the Department of Agriculture declared an emergency in over 40% of the nation's counties. The southeastern United States was so

parched that the Mississippi River was too low for barges to make their way through the channel.

The spewing of carbon pollution into the atmosphere had been going on since the Industrial Revolution, but Dr. Hansen crystallized the problem in that 1988 testimony when he said, “The Earth is warmer . . . than at any time in the history of instrumental measurements. There is only a one percent chance of an accidental warming of this magnitude . . . *The greenhouse effect has been detected, and it is changing our climate now.*”

Over twenty years have passed since that testimony. The predicted fires, floods, hurricanes, droughts and heat waves are now devastating regions across the world. In Dr. Hansen’s words, the planet is now in “imminent peril.” The consequences to children and youth here in this room today, and across the world, are unthinkable. Nothing could strike more at the heart of the Morse Center’s theme of climate equity, than thinking of the future that our children will have to face if we do nothing, or if we do something that is not enough.

And yet, at all levels of government, this problem is being either ignored or inadequately addressed. Proposed legislation came to a crashing demise in Congress this summer. President Obama is uninterested. International negotiations in Copenhagen ended in deadlock. I am uplifted

to see so many young people here carrying climate signs. To the children here, I want to tell you that democracy takes many forms, and we must never forget that one of the most cherished rights of Americans is the right to demonstrate peaceably. Indeed, no major movement in the history of the United States has happened without street democracy. Dr. Hansen has stood with young people across this county in their climate protests, and has even gotten himself arrested several times, to demonstrate the urgency of climate change. He is, in my mind, a true climate hero.

Dr. Hansen has published this book, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, which is a must read for all citizens. In this book he not only talks about the science, but also about the role of the courts, noting that they are less beholden than the political branches are, to the fossil fuel industry. It is appropriate here in the law school to emphasize the role of the courts. We have, in this country, only three branches of government – just three. Two of these branches have turned against the citizens, so corrupted by fossil fuel influence and money that they are pushing this planet towards runaway heating. As Dr. Hansen writes in his book, the judicial branch may well be the last hope. And being the custodians of justice in this country, courts have the obligation to act, in the context of

appropriate claims brought before them, to fashion meaningful remedies to protect the climate system, which is the basis for all human survival. But in approaching the courts, or the political branches, we all need to know how much carbon reduction to achieve to return the atmosphere to safe equilibrium. And that question of how much reduction can be answered only by science, not politics. We are so fortunate to have Dr. Hansen with us today to help answer that question.

And since today's program focuses on the ethical obligations towards youth, we wanted to also bring you the voice of the youth. We have with us Alec Loorz, who will say a few preliminary remarks before Dr. Hansen. Alec is a high school student and climate youth leader in California. Just three years ago, when he was 13, Alec launched the group Kids v. Global Warming to bring the voice of youth to the political leaders and citizens of this country. Since then he has catalyzed hundreds of thousands of young people world wide. What I so admire about Alec, and what gives me much hope, is that he not only is making clear, informed, logical demands on government, but he is also making clear the need for all of us to change our lifestyles. The fact is, we cannot live a present life marked by gross overconsumption, waste, and pollution, and yet hope to leave any world for our own children to survive in, even a couple or a few decades from now.

This is so important for parents to hear, from the mouths of their own children, because the high carbon parenting that we see everywhere today is, for the most part, done out of misguided love for our own children. So to see youth not only demand of us a future in which they can survive, but to also ask us to actually live as if the future matters – to fundamentally change our lifestyles, to not say one thing and do quite another, to actually walk the walk if we talk the talk – is a key step in the cultural revolution that must take place if the human species is to have any hope of continuing society on this glorious planet Earth.

And so I give you two people who are my climate heroes, and I hope that by listening to Alec, and then Dr. Hansen, you will leave understanding in your hearts and minds that this is not some distant, remote issue for the great-great -grandchildren to worry about. The last window of opportunity is closing on our watch.

I give you Alec Loorz, followed by Dr. Hansen.

Ending:

I want to thank Dr. Hansen and Alec Loorz for their compelling remarks today. To conclude the program, I will leave you with a brief thought. It is often said that throughout history "ordinary people have considered it their responsibility to do something extraordinary." Fate has

delivered all of us into this pivotal moment on Earth. This time we live in calls us all to do something extraordinary – to save our planet. We did not live 100 years ago, when it was too early to even imagine the collapse upon us, and we will not be here 100 years from now when it will be too late to save what we still can. We can only claim our moment. I hope you leave here today and claim this moment for the youth of this world. As Terry Tempest Williams says, *The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time.*”