America's Climate Choices Summit
National Academy of Sciences – Washington, DC
Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
March 30, 2009
As delivered

Congressman Mollohan, President Cicerone, Chancellor Carnesale, distinguished colleagues and friends, good morning! I've been on this stage numerous times over the years, as a proud member of the National Academy of Sciences, but this is the first time I've been here in an official governmental capacity. So, it gives me great pleasure to be here on my 7th day on the job to give my first public address in my new role as Administrator of NOAA, the sponsoring agency for *America's Climate Choices*.

Let me begin by expressing our collective, deep appreciation to Congressman Mollohan for his foresight and wisdom in calling for this study. Congressman, your initiative launches a much-needed national effort to frame the necessary steps and strategies to respond to the urgent challenge of global climate change -- an effort that recognizes the key role of science in informing our choices.

I also wish to thank you, Congressman, for your tireless efforts to ensure that through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, NOAA is able to play a key role in helping stimulate the economy, provide jobs, and deliver key data and information about the climate system to the American public.

I thank the National Academies and the Committee on *America's Climate Choices* for organizing what will undoubtedly be a productive and important summit. The great conversations and discussions during the next two days will lay the groundwork for the Academy's study on the National Response to Climate Change.

This study builds upon a distinguished history of timely and relevant assessments of the science of climate change provided by the National Academies. Starting with the 1979 report entitled *Carbon Dioxide and Climate: A Scientific Assessment,* these studies chronicle our rapidly evolving understanding of the climate system, the role of human actions in perturbing the natural dynamics, the consequences of this disruption and the options for addressing the challenges.

As a participant in the Woods Hole workshop that informed the 1979 study, and a member of both the 1991 study: *Policy Implications of Greenhouse Warming,* and the most recent study, *Ecological Impacts of Climate Change*, I have witnessed the extent to which our understanding has grown dramatically, in large part because of a robust climate change research program.

Many of the authors of the numerous landmark Academy studies of climate change are in the room today, and I thank each of you for your significant contributions to our science and understanding.

In particular, I wish to recognize Dr. Cicerone, a gifted scientist, an articulate champion of science and leader of the Academy, and a judicious chair of the 2001 Academy study entitled *Climate Change Science: An Analysis of Some Key Questions.*

America's Climate Choices continues in this strong tradition. Much is at stake and the Nation needs your guidance.

I congratulate the Academy and the Committee's leadership for selecting an exceptionally distinguished list of chairs, co-chairs and panel members representing an array of experience and expertise. You, the members of the study, have the opportunity and responsibility to help the Nation understand:

1. What can be done to limit the magnitude of future climate change?
2. What can be done to adapt to the impacts of climate change?
3. What can be done to better understand climate change and its interactions with human and ecological systems? and
4. What can be done to inform effective decisions and actions related to climate change?

This summit will provide an opportunity for you to interact with leaders who care and have thought deeply about the challenges, whose knowledge and ideas will be invaluable and who seek your input. The dialogue should be rich and engaging.

Fortunately, the committee will also have the benefit of a new unified synthesis entitled *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*, an integrated assessment from the US Climate Change Science Program to be released this spring.

That assessment presents the latest compelling evidence that climate changes are noticeable in the United States including increased temperatures, rising sea level, and changes in patterns of precipitation. It concludes that widespread impact of these changes is underway and is expected to increase, leading to adverse effects on human health, ecosystems, and industries like transportation and agriculture.

Yesterday's choices have inadvertently brought about today's climate disruption. Today's choices will determine the pace and severity of the consequences for tomorrow's world.

Adaptation strategies are urgently needed, but must be complemented with significant reductions in emissions.

This Administration is committed to responding to the climate challenge --first by reasserting the U.S. as a leader on climate change. We are eager to get an international agreement in Copenhagen this year. Also, we are working with developing nations to deal with global climate change.

On the home front, the administration has committed to aggressive investments in clean, renewable sources of energy: wind power and solar power; advanced biofuels, cleaner coal, and fuel-efficient cars and trucks that can be built here in America. And going forward, we'll work with Congress to pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution. Because that's how we'll create jobs, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and preserve our planet for our children and grandchildren.

Scientific data, information and knowledge are all needed to guide these choices. This study will provide some of the critically important information and will lay the groundwork for priorities for additional knowledge, data and information services. Climate information at the regional scale could be particularly valuable to a wide variety of stakeholders and users.

Toward that end, I am working to establish a National Climate Service led by NOAA that can serve as the honest broker of climate change-related information needed for effective decision-making by industry, government, and civil society. To accomplish this, NOAA will build upon its broad range of capabilities, integrate across its organization and create innovative partnerships with other agencies, institutions and the private sector. We welcome your suggestions about how to make a National Climate Service maximally useful.

As you frame your discussions of the next two days and the coming months, I ask you to be mindful of three points that are often missing from climate change discussions:

(1) For far too long, the critical role of oceans in the climate system and the impacts of climate change on ocean ecosystems and the services they provide to people have been underappreciated and understudied. Climate change's equally evil twin, ocean acidification, is only beginning to be recognized as the serious problem it is. As you wrestle with the climate

challenges in this Summit and during the course of the study, do ensure that ocean ecosystems are at the table.

(2) Climate change co-occurs with other environmental changes and they must be considered holistically. Excellent guidance about the intersection can be found in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

(3) Because human prosperity and well-being depend ultimately on the planet's ecosystems, 'adaptation' must include not only adapting our built environment and crops, but also creating the conditions that will enable as much biodiversity to adapt as possible.

We look forward to the results of this study to help provide advice on integrating information, assessing various impacts, and developing strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change. I am encouraged by the Academy's work to develop this study and I thank Congress Mollohan for his leadership in this effort.

Let me close with the following thoughts: Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime. It will permeate every aspect of our lives. What we choose to do about it now will define us for generations to come. The

magnitude of the challenge brings to mind the eloquent words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who when writing about another great challenge spoke of 'the urgency of now'. In his book, "Where Do We Go From Here, Chaos or Community," (1967) Dr. King said:

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The 'tide in the affairs of humanity' does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.' There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. 'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...' We still have a choice today… This may be humankind's last chance to choose…."

The time has come for the Nation to act. Thank you for informing and guiding the choices that will define our future.