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US Plans to Emphasize Climate Change Adaptation at Upcoming Conference

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U.S. climate experts are preparing for a United Nations conference on global climate change, set to begin Monday in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

U.S. Senior Climate Negotiator Harlan Watson, who will be at the conference, says two issues will dominate the meeting, the ability of various countries to adapt to changing weather and the effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of a series of briefings on environmental issues in Washington this week, Mr. Watson told reporters that the United States is eager to discuss adaptation. Adaptation measures would include helping countries develop plans for coastal management, water resources and agriculture, in order to adjust to the impact of climate change.

President Bush's 2005 budget calls for almost \$230 million for climate change-related international assistance programs.

Mr. Watson explains it is important for countries to prepare for floods, droughts, and other weather disasters.

"The United States is blessed enough to have a rather robust adaptive capacity so there's obviously much interest, particularly in developing countries, also in strengthening their adaptive capacities to adjust to either climate change itself or climate variability," said Mr. Watson.

But Mr. Watson says the United States is not inclined to get involved in discussions about greenhouse gas reduction beyond the Kyoto Protocol's 2012

end-date.

The United States, as well as Australia, refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which imposes limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Watson believes next week's conference members will set the stage in Buenos Aires for negotiations about future commitments to emissions reduction, but there will be no such talks for now.

"That is an area which we do not think is going to be particularly helpful. We quite frankly think it's not advisable to move forward yet for a variety of reasons," he noted.

Mr. Watson reiterated that the United States has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol because it would have a negative impact on the nation's economy and because developing nations are not obligated to reduce their emissions.

President Bush has instead called for voluntary cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and increased spending on climate change research.

The United States has been criticized for not ratifying the protocol, but the climate negotiator says U.S. environmental efforts should not be scorned by other nations.

"I challenge them to match us," he said. "As they say, we spend more on science and technology than anyone else in the world by far."

He adds that the United States has spent roughly \$23 billion on climate change science since 1990, more than the rest of the world combined.

President Bush's 2005 budget calls for almost \$6 billion for climate change programs and tax incentives for saving energy. The United States is also the largest funder of activities under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is marking its tenth anniversary at Monday's conference.

Mr. Watson adds that significant progress has been made toward the president's commitment to reduce rate of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 18 percent by 2012. He says that would be the equivalent of taking 70 million cars off U.S. highways.