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Interview by Michael Rothenborg
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Business Must Drive Climate Crisis Solution

Green jobs that have already been created in the U.S. must persuade skeptics in the Senate that it pays to be climate-friendly, expert says.

It is the business world that has to restart the climate fight after the politicians disappointed at COP15 in Copenhagen. That goes for both the U.S. and globally says the American expert in climate politics and CEO of Christensen Global Strategies, Aimée Christensen, who among others also advise U.S. President Barack Obama.

“And really it will have to be the business sector that will have to convince the skeptics in the U.S. Senate to vote for the President’s climate legislation,” she notes.

Aimée Christensen whose great-great-grandfather was Danish, is in Copenhagen to talk to business leaders, NGO’s and the Climate Ministry. She hopes to further more global cooperation between businesses on the climate issue. “Scandinavia, and especially Denmark, is very strong on wind and other clean-tech, and there are good win-win possibilities in joint ventures and partnerships with U.S. businesses,” she says.

Christensen has worked with climate policy since she, as a young NGO member, introduced Al Gore at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, where the first UN Convention in the climate field was adopted. The Stanford-educated lawyer has worked for the U.S. Secretary for Energy and the World Bank. She is a member of the U.S. Council for Sustainable Energy and a co-founder of Clean Economy Network that assembled 250 businesses in October in Washington, D.C. in an effort to get Obama’s climate legislation passed.

“It’s necessary with a market and a price on CO2 now so that businesses can develop long-term strategies and strengthen their competitiveness.”

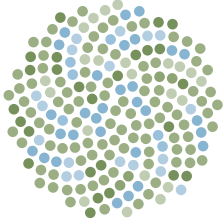
But why ask for more costs in the middle of a crisis?

“Because this is the way out of the crisis for the U.S. We had a lot of green growth in the 1990’s but under President Bush many clean-tech businesses were bought by more farsighted companies in countries like Germany and Spain and the jobs disappeared out of the country. We run risk of losing green jobs again.”

At the election in Massachusetts last week, Obama lost his super majority in the Senate. Are there Senators who understand all this?

“Not yet, unfortunately. But it is all about lobbying and informing opponents, republicans and Democrats. And there is no other way. It is the future for the U.S. economy – and for U.S. leadership – that is at stake.”

But doesn’t that require that the politicians are more perceptive than they usually are?



“No, for these are shovel ready jobs. Basic Electric just created 200 jobs in its Prairie Wind project in South Dakota. The wind mill industry in the U.S. now employs almost as many as the coal industry does and an added benefit is that most clean-tech jobs are created in the old rust belt in the states where jobs in production have been lost abroad for decades. The Spanish windmill company Gamesa has just started production in a former steel mill in Pennsylvania. And the old automobile state Indiana have started on electric and hybrid cars.”

But if jobs are increases at the present time, there is no need for climate legislation? Why can't Obama make do with energy legislation as that would be easier to get through the Senate?

“Because we have to have clarity regarding the long-term approach and be sure that a price is put on CO2. If this doesn't occur, energy suppliers and finance funds will not invest in clean tech. These are the people with the money. The banks don't have any money. It will only be possible to put a price on CO2 through climate legislation. In addition to that, the reductions that could result from voluntary measures in the energy law would be even further from that which science demands (25-40 percent reductions in rich countries by 2020 in relation to the 1990 figure. Ed.).

But would it be possible to make do with legislation at state level?

“One of my clients, a business executive, has to travel from state to state to enable him to offer homeowners the opportunity of having solar panels installed. It takes far too long to get things through in all 50 states.”

While talking about the passage of time, would it ever have occurred to you in your wildest dreams when you introduced Al Gore in Rio back in 1992, that we today in 2010 still would not have beaten increases in CO2?

“No. But back then, I still had not moved to Washington.”