

CLIMATE NEWS

From Sheldon Whitehouse, Barbara Boxer, Jeff Merkley, and Brian Schatz
DPCC Meeting | October 22, 2015 | Issue 112

California Public Pensions to Divest From Coal



Gov. Jerry Brown recently signed legislation forcing California's pension systems, the two largest public funds in the country, to divest from coal companies. The measure, SB 185 by state Senate leader Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), requires the funds to sell their holdings in companies that derive at least half of their revenue from mining coal used to generate electricity. The deadline for divestment is July 1, 2017, and new investments will be prohibited. The new law will affect \$58 million held by the California Public Employees' Retirement System and \$6.7 million in the California State Teachers Retirement System. The funds are responsible for providing benefits to more than 2.5 million current and retired employees. De León pitched the measure as a way to emphasize more secure, environmentally friendly investments. "Coal is a losing bet for California retirees and it's also incredibly harmful to our health and the health of our environment," he said in a statement. The University of California has already taken similar steps. Last month, it sold off its \$200 million in investments in coal and oil sands companies. ([LA Times](#))

Food Giants Align for Meaningful Climate Action

At a recent Capitol Hill briefing, a Republican, a Democrat and several major food corporations put their support behind action on climate change. Representatives from Mars, General Mills, Unilever, Ben & Jerry's, and Nestle called for strong government action on climate. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY) hosted the event with the sustainable business group Ceres. Gibson said he's "optimistic about the future" and about finding ways to "open up conversation" on climate. "Certainly there will be areas where we disagree, but that's not as important as the areas where we agree," he said. The food companies said climate change poses a risk to their ability to do business. "We fundamentally rely on Mother Nature to provide the ingredients for the food we serve," said Kim Nelson, senior vice president for external relations at General Mills. "If left unaddressed, climate change represents a variety of risks to our company and to our planet." Nelson said the company relies on cocoa grown in West Africa and almonds grown in California, two regions afflicted by climate-change-driven drought. The five companies, along with Kellogg, Stonyfield Farm, New Belgium Brewing, Danone and Clif Bar, also signed onto a letter arguing that "now is the time to meaningfully address the reality of climate change." ([Huffington Post](#))

Scientists Declare Urgent Mission to Study West Antarctica

Scientists say they've identified a key glacier that could pose the single most immediate threat to the world's coastlines — and are pushing for an urgent new effort to study it. The Thwaites Glacier along the Amundsen Sea is both vast and vulnerable, because its ocean base is exposed to warm water. If it starts collapsing, there may be no end to the process. Thwaites is also well over 2 kilometers thick in places. And while it is not synonymous with West Antarctica as a whole — which has been estimated to contain just under 11 feet of total potential sea level rise — it could blaze the path toward a larger retreat. The scientists are backed by a recent report by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, concluding that the National Science should make research on Antarctica's sea level implications its top priority, with a particular emphasis on West Antarctica. Glaciers throughout West Antarctica have been retreating rapidly at their subsea bases and losing ice. The cause is not warming air temperatures, but rather warmer ocean waters. The water is also quite salty and dense, so it travels to the lowest accessible point of the submerged glacier— the so-called grounding line — and then, it starts a process of rapid melting the glacier from below. ([Washington Post](#))

Warming Oceans May Threaten Krill, A Cornerstone of the Antarctic

Dr. So Kawaguchi peered into the jars of cold water holding harvested krill eggs. None were hatching. The CO₂ he pumped into the icy seawater killed the eggs. His research has led to dire predictions on how global carbon emissions will significantly reduce the hatch rates of Antarctic krill over the next 100 years. Krill are one of the most abundant animal species on earth and a cornerstone of the Antarctic ecosystem. "Higher levels of CO₂ in the water mean greater levels of ocean acidification," said Dr. Kawaguchi, whose laboratory holds the only research tanks in the world used to breed and study krill. "This interrupts the physiology of krill. It stops the eggs hatching, or the larvae developing." Dr. Kawaguchi pumped CO₂ into his jars, acidifying the water to mimic conditions that might occur over the next three centuries. "If we don't act on reducing CO₂ emissions, there could be a 20 to 70 percent reduction in Antarctic krill by 2100," Dr. Kawaguchi said. "By 2300, the Southern Ocean might not be suitable for krill reproduction." ([NYTimes](#)) *Sheldon Whitehouse*