

## Notes and Thoughts Stemming from EPA's Final Climate Leaders Meeting

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As many of you know, the EPA recently announced that it would be phasing out the Climate Leaders program. This announcement comes at a time when Congress has failed to pass meaningful climate legislation, the Administration is struggling with its approach to leading climate change response, and significant challenges are pending to AB 32 in California.

This past week, the EPA hosted its final Climate Leaders meeting in New Orleans. I was invited to participate in and speak at the program and wanted to share some of the comments that were made by attendees with my perspectives on those comments:

### **A large number of attendees expressed concern about replacing the technical support and expertise that had been offered by EPA through this program.**

**My thoughts:** While EPA's technical support was obviously invaluable to its partners, it's clear to me that member companies can obtain that expertise by collaborating with peers in industry, government, academia and the non-profit community. In particular, NGOs such as The Climate Registry, World Resources Institute and the Carbon Disclosure Project have been working with numerous companies in this regard.

Given the resource constraints that EPA is apparently under and its intent to regulate under the Clean Air Act, it's not realistic to expect that the technical support offered under this program continue. While this means that industry is going to have to foot the bill for this support, expecting that it come at no cost from government is not practical.

### **The luster of the program to executives was associated with EPA's involvement, which significantly enhanced the program brand's value.**

**My thoughts:** The credibility that government brings in these sorts of programs is undeniable. EPA's ENERGY STAR program and the USDA's "Organic" certification have become cornerstones for retailers moving toward carrying more progressive product lines.

That said, it's worth pointing there are numerous instances where comparable brands have been established without government involvement. Some examples that come to mind include the LEED certification for buildings, which clearly has dominated EPA's ENERGY STAR for Buildings in brand value. Other examples of brands that have become dominant players for professionals and

companies include Martindale Hubbell's ratings for attorneys (who are peer-reviewed), the Better Business Bureau, American Hospital Association's certification programs and Michelin ratings for hotels.

A combination of stakeholders from industry, government and the non-profit community could clearly come together to develop solutions for ensuring that a highly credible brand (whether EPA or not) survives this ordeal.

### **EPA Plans to issue an RFP to ensure that certain aspects of the Climate Leaders program are continued.**

**My thoughts:** It is unclear as to what EPA plans to cover through this RFP, though a recognition program for climate leadership was referenced. I commented publicly (and in private to several EPA officials) that a good start would be to reinstate the EPA Climate Protection Award program, which went unfunded this year. That said, it could be at least a month or two (if not longer) before this RFP is issued, and the results of the RFP (winners and impacts from the "new programs") could be at least 6-12 months away.

### **Many attendees expressed a desire to have access to one another by way of a community of peers and expressed disappointment that they would not be able to collaborate at future Climate Leaders events.**

**My thoughts:** Collaboration and community development is not a primary function of a regulatory body. While I recognize the importance of EPA using its power and resources to convene thought and action leaders, the establishment and nourishment of peer-to-peer organizations is not their function. It is incumbent on all sectors to work together to establish and nourish a community of climate professionals.

### **Companies asked how they would message this internally, in particular, referencing that executive support had come because of EPA's involvement in the program.**

**My thoughts:** SAP's Jim Sullivan (an ACCO Board member and formerly manager of the EPA Climate Leaders program) shared a concern that this transition might result in the pushing downward of focus within organizations from senior and chief executives to technical and middle management. This is clearly an important concern. ACCO has endeavored to bring together senior executives looking at climate change from a business and economic perspective to collaborate with one another. It's imperative that EPA develop a solution to the risk of losing the interest and involvement of this level of executive in industry.

### **How Should Members Convey the Phase Out of the Program and the Transition to Leadership in Their Companies**

**My thoughts:** It was clear from this past week's meeting that members felt the program had provided significant value to them over the past 8 years. There was a collective sigh or groan that could be heard miles away when it became clear that there would be no recourse to continue or revive the

program. Additionally, the message from EPA was not clear, so a substantial guidance from EPA on the transition will be imperative for members of the program.

While nobody wants to hear this, the program is a closed book. Climate Leaders served its purpose from EPA's perspective in mobilizing industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during an Administration that demonstrated a complete lack of support for establishing climate policy. From industry's perspective, participating in the program has provided significant value in recognition, education and opportunity.

The message to convey to leadership is that this program has helped organizations quantify emissions, set goals and recognize that climate change and greenhouse gas emissions impact the company's bottom line. Now, it's time for companies to ask broader questions such as "What does climate change mean for my company?" and "What do we need to do to respond to climate change?" Identifying and participating in communities and programs that help with strategies for responding to climate change (including, but not limited to inventory quantification and reduction) is the next step.

### **A Time for Action**

All of the areas of concern expressed by members of the program are valid and should not be disregarded or diminished in importance. However, a vibrant community of thought and action leaders from industry, government, academia and the non-profit community could clearly create a community and related programs that not only covered the gaps being created by the phase out of the Climate Leaders program, but frankly, could go much further than the program ever endeavored.

Imagine a community of climate professionals collaborating to develop best practices and methodologies, establishing standards and strategies for operationalizing supply chain programs, aggregating interests on emerging technologies, setting standards for energy efficiency and clean energy consumption, collaborating on adaptation, developing strategies for managing waste, assessing lifecycles of products and operations, and advancing the profession and function of climate change leadership in organizations ...

This is the vision we had when we launched the [Association of Climate Change Officers](#) two years ago. This community can exist ... it does exist ... it needs to exist ... and it will only realize its full potential if climate professionals across sectors take ownership and responsibility in building this community.

So I put it back to you the reader ... are you going to wait on EPA or someone else to build YOUR community, or are you going to be a leader in establishing it yourself?

If you read the last question and felt motivated to help us build this community, **please join us on November 8-9 at our [Climate Change Leadership Summit](#)** for the first event for climate professionals featuring more than 25 working group sessions and designed to launch collaboration not just at the event, but going forward as well.