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Rebuffing Bush, 132 Mayors Embrace Kyoto Rules
By ELI SANDERS

SEATTLE, May 13 - Unsettled by a series of dry winters in this normally wet city, Mayor Greg Nickels has begun a nationwide effort to do something the Bush administration will not: carry out the Kyoto Protocol on global warming.

Mr. Nickels, a Democrat, says 131 other likeminded mayors have joined a bipartisan coalition to fight global warming on the local level, in an implicit rejection of the administration's policy.

The mayors, from cities as liberal as Los Angeles and as conservative as Hurst, Tex., represent nearly 29 million citizens in 35 states, according to Mayor Nickels's office. They are pledging to have their cities meet what would have been a binding requirement for the nation had the Bush administration not rejected the Kyoto Protocol: a reduction in heat-trapping gas emissions to levels 7 percent below those of 1990, by 2012.

On Thursday, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg brought New York City into the coalition, the latest Republican mayor to join.

Mr. Nickels said that to achieve the 7 percent reduction, Seattle was requiring cruise ships that dock in its bustling port to turn off their diesel engines while resupplying and to rely only on electric power provided by the city, a requirement that has forced some ships to retrofit. And by the end of this year the city's power utility, Seattle City Light, will be the only utility in the country with no net emissions of greenhouse gases, the mayor's office said.

Salt Lake City has become Utah's largest buyer of wind power in order to meet its reduction target. In New York, the Bloomberg administration is trying to reduce emissions from the municipal fleet by buying hybrid electric-gasoline-powered vehicles.

Nathan Mantua, assistant director of the Center for Science in the Earth System at the University of Washington, which estimates the impact of global warming on the Northwest, said the coalition's efforts were laudable, but probably of limited global impact.

"It is clearly a politically significant step in the right direction," Dr. Mantua said. "It may be an environmentally significant step for air quality in the cities that are going to do this, but for the global warming problem it is a baby step."

Mr. Nickels said he decided to act when the Kyoto Protocol took effect in February without the support of the United States, the world's largest producer of heat-trapping gases. On that day, he announced he would try to carry out the agreement himself, at least as far as Seattle was concerned, and called on other mayors to join him.

The coalition is not the first effort by local leaders to take up the initiative on climate change. California, under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, is moving to limit carbon dioxide emissions, and Gov. George A. Pataki of New York, also a Republican, has led efforts to reduce power plant emissions in the Northeast. But the coalition is unusual in its open embrace of an international agreement that the Bush administration has spurned, Mayor Nickels's office said, and is significant because cities are huge contributors to the nation's emission of heat-trapping gases.

Michele St. Martin, communications director for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said the Kyoto Protocol would have resulted in a loss of five million jobs in the United States and could raise energy prices.

Ms. St. Martin said President Bush "favors an aggressive approach" on climate change, "one that fosters economic growth that will lead to new technology and innovation."

But many of the mayors said they were acting precisely out of concern for the economic vitality of their cities. Mr. Nickels, for example, pointed out that the dry winters and the steep decline projected in the glaciers of the Cascade range could affect Seattle's supply of drinking water and hydroelectric power.

The mayor of low-lying New Orleans, C. Ray Nagin, a Democrat, said he joined the coalition because a projected rise in sea levels "threatens the very existence of New Orleans."

In Hawaii, the mayor of Maui County, Alan Arakawa, a Republican, said he joined because he was frustrated by the administration's slowness to recognize the scientific consensus that climate change was happening because of human interference.

"I'm hoping it sends a message they really need to start looking at what's really happening in the real world," Mayor Arakawa said.

Mayor Nickels said it was no accident that most cities that had joined were in coastal states. The mayor of Alexandria, Va., is worried about increased flooding; mayors in Florida are worried about hurricanes.

But Mr. Nickels has also found supporters in the country's interior. Jerry Ryan, the Republican mayor of Bellevue, Neb., said he had signed on because of concerns about the effects of droughts on his farming community. Mr. Ryan described himself as a strong Bush supporter, but said he felt that the president's approach to global warming should be more like his approach to terrorism.

"You've got to ask, 'Is it remotely possible that there is a threat?' " he said. "If the answer is yes, you've got to act now."