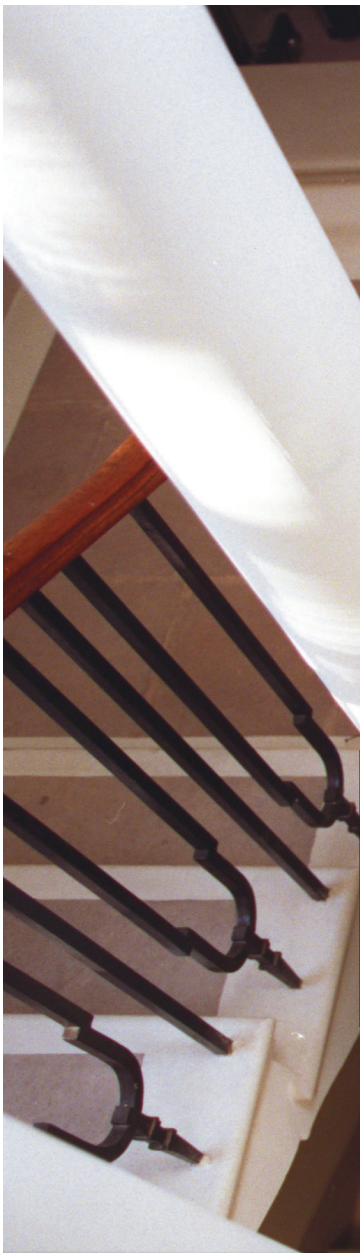
The ENVIRONMENT BARON



By the age of 7, John Gummer knew that he needed to be a leader in public life—to defend the colors of train carriages.

"I distinctly remember arguing with my father about the nationalization of the railways," he told the *Brunswick Review*. "I believed that if you had a national railway, you would lose the diversity of shapes and colors of coaches from all the different companies. That would be a shame. I remember thinking, 'Well, somebody's got to do something about that.'"

Now 81, he is Baron Deben and has dedicated his entire career to public service, including as a Member of Parliament, Conservative Party Chairman, and Secretary of State for the Environment in John Major's cabinet. In 1997, he founded Sancroft, a corporate responsibility consultancy and in 2010 he was made a Life Peer in the House of Lords. Instrumental in the passage of the Environment Act of 1995 and the 2008 Climate Change Act, in 2012, he was named Chairman of the independent Committee on Climate Change, which advises the UK government. As such, Lord Deben is responsible for policy recommendations that guide the UK government on its legally binding target to be net zero by 2050.

He cites Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, her seminal 1962 book on the dangers of pollution, as a major influence on his leadership on the environment. He is also a religious man, a Catholic who sees his faith as tightly woven with his social calling.

Born at the start of World War II, the son of a Church of England priest, he recalls a household with few luxuries but a supportive and happy family. "The one thing we weren't allowed to be was bored. If you said, 'I'm bored,' then you'd be in trouble. The world was far too interesting ever to be bored in."

That tireless curiosity remains with him as he prepares to step down as CCC chairman in a year and a half. "I have no intention of retiring because I don't think I know how to do that," Lord Deben says. "But I shall go on doing this job. And when I've done it, I'll do something else."

The "job" as he sees it, is mobilizing action to combat global warming.

"Climate change isn't waiting for us," he says.

As founder of Sancroft, you have seen the evolution of corporate culture first hand. Do you see the past year as an important inflection point?
I'm always worried about inflection points, because there's too much prognostication in that. But I've certainly seen a huge change in people's attitudes.

When we started 23 years ago, you had to fight hard for people to understand that ESG actually made companies profitable, improved management and avoided costs. In those days, you had to fight right from the beginning. Thankfully, that has changed over the years.

Last year, as the world ground to a halt with the pandemic, ESG and climate rapidly rose to the top

Rt. Hon. John Gummer at the Royal Geographic Society in 1997. Formerly a Member of Parliament, he was appointed to the House of Lords in 2010.

LORD DEBEN, Chairman of the UK's powerful Committee on Climate Change, talks about charting the course of business and society toward net zero and a healthy planet. By Brunswick's UK Director for Energy Transition **CHARLES MALISSARD.**

PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX LENTATI/EVENING STANDARD/SHUTTERSTOCK

of the political and board agenda. Now, corporates come banging on our door. That's the difference; they're coming to us. It's not something we ever expected before.

With the pandemic possibly receding, are we at risk of fading back into business as usual?

I don't think business as usual is "as usual." That's really what the change has been. We used to have ESG on our risk register—pandemic, climate change—and people would go through them and tick them off, and say, "Yes, well, they are important," and then get on with the things they really thought were important—which were the immediate risks. The pandemic has revealed risks which people have not taken seriously before.

One of those risks is climate change. It made management realize that their supply chains were maybe more fragile. They didn't have anything like the elbow room they thought they had. That has certainly come home to people and will continue to affect them even after the pandemic has receded.

We used to get the bulk of our salads in Britain from Spain and other southern countries. Today, it's increasingly difficult because of water scarcity. And it's getting hotter. When you think about Britain, you think about rainy days. Where I live, in the east of England, is now internationally called a semi-arid zone. We have just opened up the old Victorian system of roof collection of our water in order to be able to have the water we need for our vegetables, and our garden, and the rest.

Do you find that there's any tension between your public role with the Committee on Climate Change and your advisory work?

No, because we are very, very clear about the division. I don't advise any fossil fuel company. I've ceased to be the chairman of an offshore wind group. The Climate Change Committee comes first. What I do there is more important.

That said, it is also very important for the Committee to have real world experience. It always bases its judgments on the science, and never asks people to do things that they couldn't do. In order to do both, it has to have a real understanding of how the real world works. If it doesn't, then government won't accept its recommendations. This Conservative government has accepted all the recommendations of our sixth Carbon Budget (78% emissions reduction by 2035 compared to 1990). All six budgets proposed have been accepted by successive UK governments, whatever their kind and color. I'm sure we couldn't have done that if there wasn't a very good dose of realism embedded in the ambition.

Is there disagreement between the CCC and the UK government over how the policy is written?

Not really. The policy that the government has put forward is very close to what we have proposed. The issue is delivery.

In some areas, they've done things which have shown just how effective government can be in kick-starting transformation. We now have an amazing offshore wind system which produces electricity cheaper than any other way except onshore wind. Boris Johnson recently announced that after 2030 no new petrol- or diesel-driven cars will be sold in Britain, bringing the date forward 10 years. We advised them to do it, but credit to them for actually turning it into government policy.

The real challenges for them are around delivery—because it requires changes in other policy areas which are trickier politically, such as the planning and land use regimes. They are essential levers to deliver what you need to deliver, but are notoriously hard to reform. That's what we are going to be pressing the government on and what our annual report will focus on. We will continue to be very supportive of all of government's policies—but we will be pretty tough about ensuring they deliver.

Are UK corporations on board? Are they lagging or are they ahead of government?

In general, I tend to think they are ahead of government. I think they have understood what the future is going to demand of them, and that they've got to get to net zero. Their investors have seen that as well, and have begun to understand what stranded assets really could mean to their portfolio.

Sensible companies have understood that it's better to be ahead of government and decide in their own time what they're going to do to meet what are obviously going to be regulatory changes. If you seize the moment, you can do it according to your timetable. And it's likely to be significantly cheaper.

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Is the UK offering effective global leadership? Or are you operating in a bubble?

No, it's effective. Until very recently, when we left the European Union, we'd been leaders there. And frankly, we're going to have to find a way of continuing to work with our EU neighbors in spite of this decision. But all around the world, countries are emulating and copying our approach. I am pleased to see a growing number of climate change committees operating in different jurisdictions, and very much based on our model. Our commitment to net zero, which is now legally binding in the UK, has also been followed by many countries around the world.

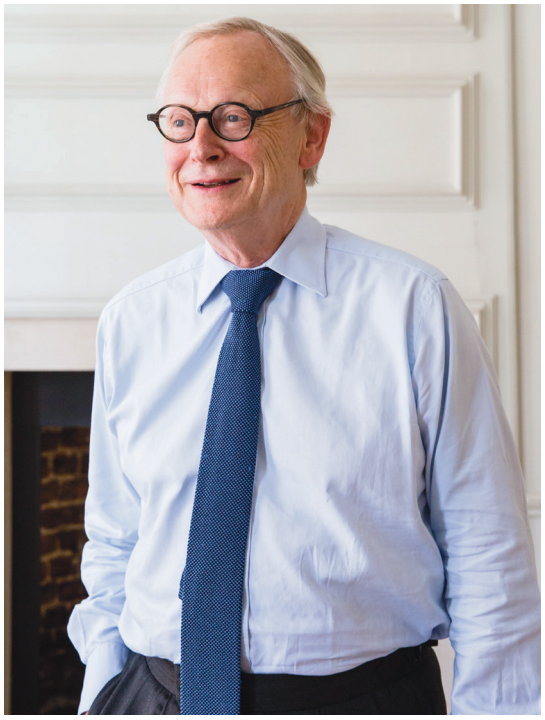
The United States position is hugely important as well, particularly given the policies of the new administration. Almost all the industrial might of the world is now behind a net-zero date, although China is still 10 years out.

Are we really going to be able to meet the Paris Agreement target and keep global warming under 2°C?

I'm entirely optimistic about, first of all, the fact that we can and second, that it isn't anything like as costly as people thought it was. As our research has shown, it will cost the United Kingdom somewhat less than 1% of the GNP—a relatively a small amount. There are just three very simple caveats to that.

First of all, we've got to get on with it. Because the longer you leave it, the more difficult and expensive it becomes. Secondly, rich countries must agree to pay for poorer ones to help them jump the dirty phase. The developed economies gained hugely in wealth because of the pollution we were willing to accept. If we want Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia to join in, then we're going to have to help them advance without that pollution. The third thing is to keep the pressure up. It is not something that you can leave off.

And it's right across the whole of the economy, right across everything the government does from



education to training, to tax and trade agreements. From the way we build new schools and hospitals to the policies that regulate the way we shop and travel. Governments must embed net zero thinking in every decision they make.

How does COP26 look to you from here?

Had we had COP26 a year ago, we'd have had it in wholly different circumstances. I cannot deny that the change of government in the United States has been enormously important for generating positive momentum among the global community. The delay and the pandemic have also helped to focus minds on the need to ensure this summit is a success. On top of this, the changes in the private sector's mindset have put us into a much stronger position. All the pressure's on government now.

The idea of having a 68% reduction in our emissions from 1990 by 2030 is a very tough commitment. There is also the huge need to make it possible for countries in Africa or Asia to jump the pollution period. There's no reason why Africa couldn't have its energy entirely from the sun and the wind. But they do need the technology, expertise and the money. And we're going to have to deliver that.

Also, at the moment, shipping and aviation don't come under the same international arrangements as other sectors because they are looked after by two other agencies of the United Nations. We're going to have to bring them in because otherwise net zero doesn't mean anything.

"WHAT REALLY STRUCK ME MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IS AN INSIGHT FROM THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL *LAUDATO SI'* WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AS A SYMPTOM OF WHAT WE'VE DONE TO THE WORLD."

CHARLES MALISSARD
is a Director at Brunswick, based in London, specializing in helping clients navigate the energy transition.

These are some of the issues COP26 will need to address. But I am more optimistic now than I was a year ago. After COP, assuming it's a success, the Prime Minister will need to be clear that it is not the end of the process but a new beginning—not just constantly reminding people of what a success it was. You can't let up.

You're known as a very compelling storyteller. What kind of a role does that play in your communication style?

I'm very keen to be able to explain the issues of climate change in a way which everyone can understand. This is why I banned the use of technical language in the Climate Change Committee. A kilowatt hour, for example—I can't feel it, or touch it, or see it. And therefore, it doesn't mean anything. But if you talk about people's bills and say they have dropped by 9%, people begin to relate to the matter.

In the old days, when I had to convince colleagues that climate change was a reality, I'd talk about gardens. I had found that many climate skeptics were also gardeners—and they knew that their spring started 17 days earlier and that the rain came down in torrents rather than in a soft, refreshing sprinkle. Once you started talking about that, they began to understand in their own way that climate change was happening to them. And then you could say, "Of course, it's even worse for those countries closer to the equator, and even worse for those countries which are below sea level."

What really struck me more than anything else is an insight from the Pope's encyclical *Laudato si'* when he talks about climate change as a symptom of what we've done to the world. I think this is the most creative way of looking at all these things. It is the Earth crying out for medicine, crying out for curing. And we are, happily, powerful enough to cure it. If we don't, it will die and we will die with it. So we are both enormously privileged to be able to rise to the occasion and enormously threatened by what happens if we don't.

In this age we all feel personally challenged to change our views on one thing or another. Is there something you could point to that you've really had to change your mind about?

I think I am much more socially liberal now than I was as a know-all young man. I think I understand more widely the amazing diversity of people and activities which have been allowed us by the creator. I find life, in that sense, enormously more liberal and therefore more adventurous than I did before. ◆