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Founders' Day Speaker Vocal on Global Warming Threat

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Climate expert James E. Hansen, is calling on today's youth to reign in global warming.

Director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Goddard Institute for Space Studies, Hansen will deliver the address for Illinois Wesleyan University's annual Founders' Day Convocation at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 19 in Westbrook Auditorium (1210 N. Park St., Bloomington). The evening event will cap a day of Founders' Day activities, honoring the University's founding in 1850, and is free and open to the public.

Hansen's speech, titled "Climate Tipping Points: The Threat to the Planet," will address the nature of the global warming problem that he sees as a potential "perfect storm" – an accelerated disaster out of humanity's control. Hansen believes young people may provide a "tipping point" to draw needed attention to global warming.

One of the nation's foremost researchers on climate change, Hansen has been called upon to testify before Congress on global warming and has published more than 50 articles in scientific journals and reviews on the subject. For decades, he has advocated an open dialogue on global warming, and been critical of both the Clinton and Bush administrations' stances on climate changes.

A member of the National Academy of Sciences, Hansen has twice received the NASA Presidential Rank for Meritorious Executive Award. He has been awarded the John Heinz Environment Award in 2001, the Roger Revelle Medal from the American Geophysical Union in 2002, the Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Medal from the World Wildlife Fund in 2006 and the Leo Szilard Lectureship Award from the American Physical Society in 2007.

Working with NASA's Goddard Institute for more than 30 years, Hansen has seen his work soar to other planets, but says he discovered the most exciting planetary research involves trying to understand the climate change on earth.

Hansen began his work with NASA as a graduate trainee while still at the University of Iowa, where he earned his bachelor's degrees in physics and mathematics in 1963, a master's in astronomy in 1965 and a doctorate in physics in 1967. He joined the Goddard Institute as a research fellow after graduation, and became a staff member in 1972. He was named director of the institute in 1981.

During the 1970s, Hansen was an investigator for several missions, including the Pioneer Venus Cloud Orbiter and the Voyager Photopolarimeter Experiment. He was principal investigator on the Galileo orbiter to Jupiter, which earned a NASA Group Achievement Award. He then became manager of the Goddard Institute's planetary and climate programs, working to develop research to effectively monitor and study global climate changes. Hansen also teaches at the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University.

His address at the evening Convocation will highlight Illinois Wesleyan's Founders' Day, which honors the founding of the University. Activities will take place during the day to commemorate the event, including the dedication and renaming of the newly renovated Main Lounge in Memorial Center, and a birthday party, complete with an Illinois Wesleyan birthday cake.

Founded in 1850, Illinois Wesleyan is a private liberal arts institution located in Bloomington, Illinois, with an enrollment of 2,045 students from 39 states and 22 countries. With 184 faculty scholars, the student-faculty ratio is 11 to 1 and the average class size is 17. The University offers 41 major areas of study, plus programs in pre-med, pre-law, pre-dentistry, pre-engineering, pre-veterinary science, pre-seminary studies, and professional programs in business, the fine arts and nursing.

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