

: Professors Take on Bush Administration Over Global Warming

Chicago, IL 60638

November 8, 2005

By Adam Kivel
Gazette Magazine, Chicago

The Bush Administration shows little concern about global warming, an attitude that is a serious mistake according to a longtime University of Illinois at Chicago faculty member and his counterpart at DePaul University in Chicago.

Expected to be a major problem in the future, global warming already is causing many problems in the present. In response, more than 150 countries across the world have recognized global warming's impending threat by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty designed to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions such as methane and carbon dioxide.

Russia, the European Union, India, Canada, and many other major centers of industry and global population have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, but the United States has not. Grassroots support for the U.S. ratification of the Kyoto Protocol exists across the country, yet the current administration does not feel a need to do so, primarily citing possible economic losses and a supposed lack of solid understanding of global warming.

Global warming encompasses the systematic rise of the global temperature in both the sea and the atmosphere. An increase in temperature poses the possibility of severe effects, including a great increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, further depletion of the ozone layer, melting of polar ice caps, and subsequent rising of sea levels and flooding. The transformation of some cooler areas into more temperate ones also could result in the spread of harmful diseases like malaria.

The possible effects of global warming do include a few positive ones, including the melting of ice in the Northwest Passage, which would allow better trade routes from Europe and Eastern Asia.

Some of this warming is natural, but a majority of the warming has come about due to human activities. "Burning of fossil fuels are sources" of greenhouse gases, said Tom Murphy, a professor at South Loop-based DePaul University. "Anything we can do to decrease this would help."

To help curb the adverse effects of global warming, greenhouse gas emissions must be lowered. "Increasing energy efficiency, like miles per gallon on automobiles," said Murphy, is just one way of slowing greenhouse gas distribution into the atmosphere. Power plants also are great contributors of greenhouse gases, but there are new technologies being utilized that would reduce greenhouse emissions from these plants.

"Some companies want to build more advanced plants, but they're more expensive," said

Murphy, "They need more regulations to encourage this behavior."

According to President George Bush's Executive Summary on the issue (full text available at www.whitehouse.gov), "sustained economic growth is the solution, not the problem - because a nation that grows its economy is a nation that can afford investments in efficiency, new technologies, and a cleaner environment."

Opponents of the Kyoto Protocol allege it would cripple the U.S. economy and require spending large amounts of Federal money on the development of alternative fuel sources and other emissions reducing strategies. During the Clinton administration, Vice President Al Gore signed the Kyoto Protocol, yet it was never ratified by the U.S. Senate, many of whose members hoped that a bolstered economy unchecked by such a treaty would produce a surplus of funds that would then be made available for the development of alternative fuel sources.

Experts in the field worry that this governmental inaction will eventually lead to very severe environmental consequences. UIC Professor Torbjörn Törnqvist, who had worked at the university for five years before moving on recently, argues that spending Federal funds on emissions reducing technology is important for global safety. "Even if we don't know exactly what will happen, it completely outweighs the short-term harm," Törnqvist said.

In the G-8 summit of July 2005, U.S. officials pushed their own agenda, fighting against greenhouse gas emissions limits. The summit eventually issued a communiqué that included the blatantly U.S.-inspired language, "uncertainties remain in our understanding of climate science."

This language is very discouraging to experts who feel the current administration is not doing enough to come up with a legitimate solution to the widespread problem of global warming. Murphy articulated this worry when he said, "I'm not aware of anything they're doing to try."

The claim that spending money on studying global warming would harm the economy also is under attack, seemingly making the government's sole argument questionable. In fact, further study of potential solutions to the problems posed by global warming could help, not hurt, the economy. "Many would argue that switching to alternative energy would create many new jobs," said Törnqvist.

Some also argue that the Kyoto Protocol is not an effective means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) projected an increase in average global temperature of 34.52°F (1.4°C) to 42.44° (5.8°C) between the years 1990 and 2100. The Kyoto Protocol predicts only a 32.04° F (.02°C) to 32.5° F (.28°C) increase, which is not enough to justify the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in the minds of some government officials.

The Bush Administration argues that it is working on curbing global warming. Its Executive Summary on global climate change includes a proposed \$700 million budget increase in "climate spending" and an effort to "Reduce the Greenhouse Gas Intensity of the U.S. by 18 Percent in the Next Ten Years."

This still may not be enough. According to Törnqvist, these changes "are almost really irrelevant. It's like trying to put out a wildfire with a few buckets of water."

Murphy echoed Törnqvist's concern, "We have to start now, and there are a lot of easy things to do now."

Global warming also is considered by many to be a contributor to extreme weather conditions such as the intensity of Hurricane Katrina. The warming of oceans has produced an increase in moisture and rainstorms, two factors that build up the intensity of hurricanes. Environmental scientists have not proven or fallen completely in line with this theory, yet the possibility of it being on point is a dangerous one.

Törnqvist himself was counted as one of the more than one million people displaced by Hurricane Katrina; he had just left UIC for a job at Tulane University in New Orleans.

The possibility that many more similar storms and more ozone depletion, among several other adverse effects, could be the result of global warming is a mind-boggling proposition to some experts. Törnqvist expressed dismay when he concluded, "the efforts being undertaken" are "extremely minor...in comparison to the magnitude of the problem."

William S. Bike (anbcomm@interaccess.com)

Senior Vice President

ANB Communications

6160 W. 60th Street

Chicago, IL 60638

Phone : 773-229-0024