Global Warming: Cool the Hype

Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth," won an Academy Award for best documentary. And Al Gore is being treated like a rock star at Hollywood parties and when he testified in front of Congress. But has Al Gore's hype and hysteria gone too far?

That's what many scientists and supporters are beginning to say. They are alarmed at his alarmism. "I don't want to pick on Al Gore," Don Easterbrook (emeritus professor of geology at Western Washington University) told hundred of experts at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. "But there are a lot of inaccuracies in the statements we are seeing, and we have to temper that with real data."{1}

Kevin Vranes (climatologist at the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado) has praised Gore for "getting the message out" but also questioned whether his presentations were "overselling our certainty about knowing the future."{2}

Global warming is the observed increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans in recent decades. The argument made in many science journals and in Al Gore's film is that most of the observed warming over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities. Political activists argue we must act now to prevent a global catastrophe.

These claims bring us back to the hype that many see in Al Gore's film. He argues "Humanity is sitting on a ticking time bomb" and that "we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced."{3}

Throughout the film, Al Gore invariably will pick the most

extreme estimate to prove that we are on the edge of a catastrophe. For example, if global warming really is taking place, how much will the sea level rise? Gore says 20 feet, and then shows a dramatic animation of what it would look like if various locations on earth were flooded by a sea level rise of 20 feet.

Yet the most recent summary of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change doesn't say anything like this.{4} Even though this panel is full of policy makers who believe in global warming and argue for major policy changes, they conclude that sea levels might rise 7 to 17 inches over the course of a century. There is a vast difference between sea levels rising about one foot versus 20 feet!

Add to this the number of factual errors in many of the presentations heralding a looming catastrophe from global warming. Iain Murray documents "25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore" in his column that analyzes the scientific statements in "An Inconvenient Truth."{5} Bjorn Lomborg, author of the *Skeptical Environmentalist*, shows how the report on climate change by Nicholas Stern and the U.K. government makes sloppy errors and cherry-picks statistics.{6}

We should also mention that many scientists believe that the current warming is due to factors other than human activity. Sami Solanki (Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Germany) has quantitatively reconstructed the sun's activity since the last Ice Age and says the sun "is brighter than it was a few hundred years ago and this brightening started relatively recently."{7} Scientists have observed that the ice caps on Mars are melting, and Jupiter is developing a second giant red spot due to the sudden warming of our solar system's largest planet.{8}

Those who dare to criticize the global warming scenario are often compared to being the moral equivalent of a holocaust

denier.{9} In the film, Al Gore compares scientists who criticize his theory to scientists at the tobacco companies who tried to tell us that smoking was not harmful. Gore and others also say that many who are skeptical about global warming are being paid by the oil companies they say are running a disinformation campaign.

This last charge infuriated Dr. Easterbrook who told the geologists, “I’ve never been paid a nickel by an oil company.” He went on to add, “And I’m not a Republican.”

Al Gore argues that the global warming issue isn’t a political issue but rather a moral issue. Yet in his film, Al Gore argues we need the political will to confront and solve the issue. It doesn’t take much insight to realize there is a political agenda here.

The first step, say the activists, is to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This treaty calls for the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. When Al Gore was Vice President, it was brought before the U.S. Senate and defeated 95-0. It won’t pass if put up for a vote once again.

But even if it did pass, it would only be a start. Estimates are that it would cost $200 billion to $1 trillion every year. But other Kyotos treaties would have to be ratified by the developing countries. After all, there are a billion people in China and a billion people in India, and China plans on building an additional 2,200 coal plants by 2030.{10} One scientist speculated that “it might take another 30 Kyotos” to deal with global warming.{11} And what would be the impact? Critics say that even if adhered to by every signatory, it would only reduce surface temperature by 0.13° F.{12}

Even if we assume that global warming is occurring and assume that it is due only to human activity, the cost-benefit is enormous. Bjorn Lomborg established a program known as the

Copenhagen Consensus.{13} This panel (that included three Nobel Laureates in economics) evaluated strategies to deal with major problems facing humanity. When they listed these alternatives in descending order of effectiveness, things like treating communicable disease and hunger were at the top of the list while dealing with climate change were at the bottom of the list.

This suggests that *adaptation* to climate change will be more effective and less costly than *mitigation*. We need to cool the hype and let cooler heads make wise decisions.

Notes

1. William J. Broad, "From a rapt audience, a call to cool the hype," *The New York Times*, 13 March 2007, http://tinyurl.com/2rbtvw.
2. Ibid.
3. Al Gore, "An Inconvenient Truth," www.climatecrisis.net/aboutthefilm/.
4. United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 4th Assessment summary, www.ipcc.ch.
5. Iain Murray, "Gorey truths: 25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore," *National Review*, 22 June 2006, http://tinyurl.com/e623o.
6. Bjorn Lomborg, Stern review, *Wall Street Journal*, 2 November 2006, www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110009182.
7. Lawrence Solomon, "The heat's in the sun," 9 March 2007, *Financial Post*, http://tinyurl.com/2tf6qm.
8. Lorne Gunter, "Brighter sun, warm earth. Coincidence?" 12 March 2007, *National Post*, http://tinyurl.com/ysnwb5
9. Dennis Prager, "On comparing global warming denial to holocaust denial," 13 February 2007, http://tinyurl.com/2wdpee
10. Jonah Goldberg, "Global cooling costs too much," 9 February 2007, http://tinyurl.com/2obh59.
11. David Malakoff, "Thirty Kyotos needed to control warming," *Science*, 19 December 1997, 2048.
13. Bjorn Lomborg, "Copenhagen Consensus 2006,"

www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=770.

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