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The Politics of Global Warming

Remarks delivered at the 2009 International Conference on Climate Change

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We have gathered here to bring some reality and sound science into the ongoing global debate on climate change and global warming. I certainly am pleased to join this very distinguished assembly of experts who have come here to confirm that the "debate on the science is not over."

Another Rush to Judgment

This is a very significant event because it will give focus to the false underpinnings of the current international "rush to judgment" and the calls for implementation of drastic policies to deal with this rashly proclaimed "crisis." My message today is to make sure we recognize that no matter how effectively we deal with exposing the errors and games behind that agenda, we need to know the battle will never end, because it's not really about global warming.

The global warming crisis is just the latest surrogate for an over-arching agenda of anti-growth and anti-development. This agenda grew and gathered support in the years following World War II.

One of the first issues to be celebrated as a crisis by these reformers was over-population. That fad peaked in the '60s and early '70s. The bible of that cult, "The Population Bomb," argued that "... the battle to feed all of humanity is over" and claimed we had lost the battle, claiming "... in the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death."

This clearly phony crisis was followed by warnings about global climate change: Global cooling was going to lead to a new ice age.

But the best parallel to the current crusade, the real precursor to the current "panic du jour," was the computer model-based alarmism of the "Club of Rome." The Club of Rome's claim that global economic collapse was imminent because the world would soon "run out" of some critical resources was a very appropriate precursor to the current dire warnings. It too based its alarms not on any scientific analysis of specific issues, but on a computer model. And like the current call to action, their model was pre-destined to give the result they wanted.

The criticism of the "Club of Rome" models by Resources For the Future clearly applies to the Global Climate Models' predictions of doom. RFF pointed out that parameters with a negative impact were programmed to grow non-linearly (exponentially in fact) and parameters that mitigated negative effects were programmed to grow, if at all, "only in discrete increments."

In each of these false alarms, nature and technology spiked their prophecies. The natural cooling period of the '50s and '60s turned into the warming period of the '80s and '90s, and with the help of increased CO2, a plant nutrient, instead of mass starvation, we had no problem growing enough food for the rapidly increasing world population, and we continue to find and make more efficient use of our other critical resources.

But the anti-growth, anti-development crowd are a hardy bunch. They won't give up. As nature switched from global cooling to global warming, so did they.

It is quite easy to link virtually all of the principal proponents of this overall agenda through a two- or three-generation mentor-apprentice-mentor professional family tree. I don't want to go through a specific list of names. That has all been well researched and reported by many of you here. But it is important to understand that without this process of resonating self-acclamation, such bad science and ludicrous predictions would long ago have relegated them all to obscurity.

Make no mistake, their cast of characters may have expanded a bit, but at the core, there is an unbroken lineage back to those unbelievably wrong, unscientific prognosticators.

Their basic method of attack may be the same, but they have certainly refilled their operations. They learned from the "Club of Rome" episode. Since basic hard science is more difficult to bias, they would resort again to modeling. And since critics will take the time to examine their assumptions, they make the models big, obscure, and full of complex feedback structures much too abstract to debate in a public forum.

That all brings us to what has happened in the last 20 years, and where we are today. It is worthwhile reviewing what has gone on over the past two decades to give perspective and context to what is taking place today.

Some Basic Facts

Let's begin by summarizing what we did know then and what we do know now. In fact, we don't know as much as the media and the public have been led to think we know.

Here is what we could include in an absolute fact base:

- Over long periods of time climate changes
- Over short periods of time weather changes
- There have been relatively long periods of time when the world has been colder than it is now
- There have been relatively long periods of time when the world has been warmer than it is now
- CO₂ is a trace gas whose presence in the atmosphere can contribute to an increase in the absorption of thermal radiation
- The increased use of carbon-based fuels has produced significant increases in the amount of CO₂ released to the atmosphere, though still dwarfed by natural sources

Also, there have been a number of identifiable periods of temperature variability over the past century:

Cooling in the '20s

Heating in the '30s and '40s

Cooling in the '50s and '60s and '70s

Warming in the '80s and '90s

and cooling for the past decade

It was the warming period of the late '80s and '90s that provided the context and the opportunity for the alarmists to argue that once again we faced a serious calamity.

Climate Change and Public Policy

My own involvement with global climate change began in 1989 when I was serving as Chief of Staff in the White House for the first President Bush. The year before had seen the staged testimony before the Congressional Committee that launched into the public consciousness a fear of global warming.

In 1989 the pressure for drastic policy changes to respond to the crisis began. Since some of those changes had a budget impact, Dick Darman, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, came to my office to discuss the issues. We both met with Allan Bromley, the President's Science Advisor, and we agreed to let some of the leading advocates come in and discuss the science and the models behind their concern.

In 1989/1990 the Global Climate Models were being run on computers very much less powerful than those now available. Models were relatively primitive. They had virtually no inclusion of ocean/atmospheric interactions. When the alarmists came to see Allan Bromley and me, I asked how they could believe results if they were modeling climate without including, in any effective way, the ocean/air heat and mass transfer. That shortcoming was required of the models because of time

step limitations imposed by the model elements and characteristics.

They tried to argue the ocean wasn't that significant because the culprit was airborne CO₂. I pointed out that the top couple of meters of the ocean had a thermal capacity greater than the entire atmosphere, and that the top 100 meters of ocean were generally well mixed and that the heat and mass transfer coupling at the interface was truly significant. All this meant the air/ocean interactions were a major driver of reality. When I suggested they could confirm the critical significance of the ocean in a one-dimensional model, they suggested we didn't understand how complex the issue was. They were still determined to use their faulty models to influence policy. Only in recent years have they been able to begin to model the significant ocean contributions within the models. But they are still far from being able to handle the reality of nature.

Our response to their call for policy change in 1989 was to point out that their models should be supported by good science, and that in order to get good science, we would provide a very substantial increase in funding for global climate research. I believe we raised it from a couple of hundred million dollars to what was then considered a huge level of funding: \$1.5 billion. We believed that level would support some serious research to clarify all perspectives of climate change.

Over the years, the anti-growth lobby has used the global warming issue very effectively. They have received even more significant levels of funding. One estimate puts the U.S. contribution to climate research today at \$10 billion per year and climbing. Unfortunately, the alarmists have effectively captured the funding allocation process.

An important question to ask now is: What have we gotten for that investment? In my opinion, surprisingly little. Of course, the computing capacity has been increased, and the models have become bigger and more complex, and they have been able to include better detail in some of the air-ocean interactions, but they still are a long way from modeling detailed phenomena very well. And of course, many of the most critical phenomena are still represented in the computer models by an assumed interaction or feedback process. And thus, the models are still susceptible to the same predestination of results as was the "Club of Rome" model.

Some Elements of the Science

This presentation is not intended to go into any of the technical details of modeling, or of the science of climate. However, there are a couple of aspects of those technical details which should, in broad general terms, be understood by those responsible for policy. These issues, in fact, are where we must be diligent in clarifying the science and separating fact from myth.

One of these issues is feedback. Feedback in climate systems is a regulating mechanism within the climate system that dampens or enhances fluctuations, most particularly fluctuations in temperature. If, for example, a climate change that is produced by a slight increase in temperature will itself further increase the temperature, that is positive feedback. But if that temperature-increase-induced change will tend to reduce the increase, that is negative feedback.

One visualization of the difference between positive and negative feedback is to consider what happens to us when we take a shower. If the water temperature is exactly what we want and doesn't change, feedback has no impact. But suppose the temperature drifts up a bit, gets hotter. We reach over, and either turn the cold up a bit, or the hot down a bit until we return to our ideal temperature. That is how negative feedback stabilizes a system.

However, consider our shower with the faucets incorrectly marked, the cold faucet marked hot and the hot marked cold. When the temperature drifts hot, we may turn higher the faucet marked cold. But this is really the hot faucet, and so the flow gets ever hotter. If we try to correct temperature by turning down the faucet marked hot (when actually this is the cold line) the water again gets hotter. The more feedback response there is, the hotter and hotter the flow gets. This is positive feedback.

If computer models represent critical phenomena in such a way that the feedback is always positive, it is inevitable that with increasing CO₂ the result will be excessive heating.

There is just now beginning to be some closer examination of a number of the feedback phenomena critical to the model results such as cloud-climate feedbacks. Furthermore, we are beginning to recognize that some possibly significant phenomena with strong stabilizing negative feedback have been left out of the models. One potentially extremely important such effect is the iris effect being studied by Dr. Richard Lindzen at MIT.

Another critical issue which deserves more serious, dispassionate study is the basic carbon exchange cycle, which determines how much CO₂ remains in the atmosphere. We need better science to determine which phenomena actually establish CO₂ concentration at any given time. It is virtually accepted as given that a fixed fraction of anthropogenic CO₂ remains in the air, even though the initial emissions and remaining CO₂ are both extremely small fractions of much larger natural CO₂ fluxes. This basic assumption makes inevitable the conclusion that CO₂ produced by man-made processes is responsible for the "great disaster of global warming."

Paradoxically, and very important to this concept of CO₂ driving temperature, there is also a well-accepted data-set of

global temperature and CO2 concentrations for the past 400,000 years which shows it is temperature driving an increase in CO2 and not CO2 driving temperature. It is interesting to note how this contrasting set of data is finessed in the alarmist rationalization of the world. In essence, they dismiss it with a self-serving phrase: "While carbon dioxide may have acted as a feedback in the past, it is acting as a forcing in the current climate." No science, just rhetoric.

I have dwelt a bit on these two technical details because I feel that they are among the least effectively understood issues that deserve better scientific study and a better share of the climate research budget for real, unbiased scientific examination, analysis, and data collection. They are important because they are the critical assumptions which virtually predestine the doom and gloom.

Return to Policy

But let me get back to the policy debate. In one of the only times he has ever said anything that was right, Al Gore recently told the American Association for the Advancement of Science "we have a full-blown political struggle to communicate the truth." His only problem is that his version of science is more political than true.

As noted earlier, the alarmists have learned well from the past. They saw what motivates policy makers is not necessarily just hard science, but a well-orchestrated symphony of effort. Their approach is calculated and deliberate. Remember the quote from one of the most outspoken alarmists, "We have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified dramatic statements, and make little mention of the doubts we have."

They have used that strategy to execute an orchestrated agenda over the last two decades:

- Announce a disaster
- Cherry pick some results
- Back it up with computer modeling
- Proclaim a consensus
- Stifle the opposition
- Take over the process and control the funding
- Roll the policy makers

In the past, when they tried some of this on population explosion and global starvation, or global cooling, or their Malthusian vision of a world running out of resources, they were thwarted by nature and technology. Over time, we are confident that nature will thwart them again. Their computer model-generated output may give them the result they want for press releases, but nature is not impressed.

Nature will eventually do what nature has always done. It will respond in a self-stabilizing manner over the long term with moderate variability over multi-decade periods and with occasional significant variability over the short term.

But waiting for "eventually" to prove the alarmists wrong is not the wisest course of action. Unfulfillable ambitions to stifle growth will devastate a world trying to deal with the complexities of economics, stability, and the environment. Quality of life depends on access to energy. Noble intentions about "CO2-free" sources of energy are not sufficient, if their agenda of eliminating coal as a source, and turning their back on nuclear, are allowed to be part of our near-term policies.

The Challenge Ahead

So what is our challenge? What agenda do we define for ourselves if we are to avert a policy disaster?

We need to recognize that for at least most of the next decade the real battle will be to win over public opinion and influence the policy makers. Unfortunately, standing between us and the public most of the time is the media. And the press seems to have bought the alarmist line, hook and sinker. They thrive on reinforcing the alarms.

I am often asked about the press. The question is usually something like "is the press biased or ignorant?" My answer is: Yes they are.

We have to try to deal with a long-term education process and a long-term lobbying process.

And we have to keep working to make the science right and restore integrity to the data-gathering process. This concern about data is very significant. It is critical that there be real consistency and validity in the observed data which define the state of climate, and changes in the state of climate.

We are all aware of the games played with the data producing the infamous "hockey stick" plot of temperatures. We also know how many of you here worked hard with good, persistent forensics and analysis to force the correction of the

misrepresentation that had been a showpiece in the early IPCC reports. That kind of diligent effort and good science is a good example of how we must continue to deal with specific issues.

The world-wide data collection network is also far from world-class. There has been a lot written about the far-from-ideal locations here in the U.S., and how the large loss of stations in recent years makes comparisons across time questionable.

The best approach to assure honest consideration of reality in developing policy alternatives would be to establish standards for siting, and establish equipment and procedural standards for collection, processing, and dissemination. This is the only way to affirm data quality and reliability.

But most critically, in order for the science to be right there has to be broader, less-restrictive distribution of research funds. In a sense there has to be a "Fairness Doctrine" applied to the funding of research and to the journal review and publishing of papers. We have all seen and heard of the success the alarmists have had in taking control of who gets funding, who gets published, who gets acclaimed, and who gets demonized. We have started to address this perversion of process, and have begun to overcome some of the obstacles. And with nature affirming our belief, and confirming our science, we will continue to make headway.

And, most important, we must work hard to communicate on these issues in terms that can be understood by non-technical individuals. We must remember we are trying to educate the public and policy makers.

It won't be easy. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. But it is certainly worthwhile to restore honest science, valid science, and good data as the basis for good public policy. Climate changes, but good science can explain it. That is our mission.

John H. Sununu is president of JHS Associates, Ltd. and a former partner in Trinity International Partners, a private financial firm. He was commissioned chief of staff to the president of the United States on January 21, 1989 and served in the White House until March 1, 1992. He became New Hampshire's 75th chief executive on January 6, 1983 and served three consecutive terms prior to joining the White House staff. In 2004 he co-chaired the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, Nuclear Energy Task Force. He has taught at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and Tufts University; served Tufts as associate dean of the College of Engineering; served on the Advisory Board of the Technology and Policy Program at MIT; co-hosted CNN's nightly "Crossfire" program; and helped establish and served as chief engineer for Astro Dynamics Inc. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering.

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