

The Media Climate on Global Warming

Testimony to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

December 6, 2006

Subject: Global Warming and the Media

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Thank you Mr. Chairman, Senators, ladies and gentlemen. We're here to discuss the media coverage of the climate change debate. But there's only one problem, there is almost none of that debate actually in the media.

Journalists pledged to be neutral, long ago gave up their watchdog role to become lapdogs for one position. The media became alarmist claiming the planet is at a "tipping point" as if at any moment everything would go over the edge. An April 2006 issue of Time magazine pushed readers over that edge with 24 pages of advocacy, claiming: "The debate is over. Global warming is upon us – with a vengeance."

CBS's Scott Pelley, who covers the environment, actually compared climate change skeptics with Holocaust deniers and claimed: "There becomes a point in journalism where striving for balance becomes irresponsible."

In an effort to provide balance to *that* irresponsible position, let's recall the media's record on climate change. Reporters told us roughly 30 years ago that a similar fate awaited mankind. Then, journalists were convinced we would all freeze to death.

In an April 1975 article entitled "The Cooling World," Newsweek advised us that "the earth's climate seems to be cooling down." A May 1975 New York Times piece cautioned: "Scientists Ponder Why World's Climate is Changing: A Major Cooling Widely Considered to Be Inevitable."

The Washington Post, U.S. News & World Report and Science News all chimed in that cool was suddenly very hot. One award-winning piece in Fortune said if the trend continued, it could "affect the whole human occupation of the earth."

The irony of this scare is that just years before, we had been warned the earth was warming. In March 1929, the Los Angeles Times told readers "Most geologists think the world is growing warmer, and that it will continue to get warmer." The New York Times took a similar approach with a headline that said "America in Longest Warm Spell Since 1776." And less than 10 years before that, the Times had detailed the exploits of Capt. Donald MacMillan's Arctic expedition and how "MacMillan Reports Signs of New Ice Age."

In more than 100 years, the major media have warned us of at least four separate climate cataclysms – an ice age, warming, another ice age and another bout of warming. If you count the current catch-all term of “climate change,” that would be five separate media predictions. Even by their count, they’re 0-3.

The hubris that convinces supposedly unbiased journalists they are providing the “truth” on climate change has led them to criticize America for its stance on the issue including the Kyoto treaty. But they typically leave out the 95-0 vote against Kyoto by this very Senate or the many billions of dollars such an agreement would cost America. This attitude has resulted in a media obsession with Al Gore’s film “An Inconvenient Truth.” At least 75 TV shows covered Gore or the film in just three months this summer – more than three-and-a-half times the length of his movie.

The Today Show’s Matt Lauer even lent his status to a Sci-Fi Network program that listed global warming among other potential threats to our species including asteroids, aliens and evil robots.

Scientists who dare question the almost religious belief in climate change, and yes, they do exist, are ignored or undermined in news reports as are policy makers and pundits who take similar views. The few journalists who sometimes give another side, like the New York Times’ Andrew Revkin, emphasize funding sources for that side of the debate and rarely bother to question the billions of dollars that go into promoting global warming.

This goes against the basic tenets of journalism to be skeptical of all sides of an issue. It also violates the ethical code of the Society of Professional Journalists which urges the media to “Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.” That code calls for reporters to “Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.”

But that wasn’t the media response when Chairman Inhofe read some of our report “Fire & Ice” on the Senate floor in September. Newsweek responded with a roughly 1,000 word clarification of its 1975 global cooling report, but added it made the mistake as recently as 1992. Newsweek still claimed “the story wasn’t ‘wrong’ in the journalistic sense of ‘inaccurate.’” But at least it owned up to the error – after 31 years.

In the New York Times editorial that responded to Sen. Inhofe’s comments, the Times summarized: “Cooling, warming – we never get it right.”

That’s the inconvenient truth.

Thank you.

