**Actual Text that appeared on 11 March 2001 Atlanta Journal-Constitution Global warming distress signals overblown**

By John R. Christy

In recent weeks a torrent of reports have proclaimed that the Earth's climate will become so catastrophically bad in the coming century that we must do something to stop it.

The alarming news was linked to the release of a U.N. document, the 18-page "Summary for Policymakers" from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2001 Report -- part of a 1,000-page doorstop to be published this spring. I was one of about 130 lead authors of the main report, considered by most scientists in the field to be the world's authoritative work on climate observation, theory and projections.

Despite recent headlines -- many warning that global warming was going to occur faster than previously thought with up to 10.4 degrees warming in the next 100 years -- the bulk of the scientific findings in the IPCC report, in my view, don't support the doomsday scenarios. What ended up the focus were a few model results on the outer fringes.

The most widely reported forecast of impending disaster was the worst-case scenario of more than 200 runs of a simplified computer model. That means it is one of the scenarios least likely to happen.

Incidentally, reports that new computer model forecasts prove that human-induced global warming is a reality are misguided. Computer models can't prove anything. They are valuable tools for understanding complex systems and for making forecasts. But a computer model that reproduces past climates doesn't mean the model is right. And a forecast, especially a worst-case one, doesn't prove something will happen.

Climate models aren't ready to tell us how weather will change. Our understanding of the climate system is so incomplete that climate models don't even have real clouds, hurricanes, tornadoes and thunderstorms in them. "Uncertainty" appears everywhere in the IPCC text, especially in discussions of climate fluctuation and the believability of climate models. When considering predictions and consequences, the report, responsibly, is a series of "ifs," "mights" and "coulds."

The document does say that weather events people really care about -- hurricanes, tornadoes, thunderstorms, hail, winter storms, droughts, floods, etc. -- have not changed enough to see a difference. Of course, that kind of news doesn't make news.

All in all, the IPCC report is a great piece of scientific work -- 1,000 pages of dense yet concise scientific material. I recommend it.

Many (but not all) of my IPCC colleagues will differ with me on views of how this situation is playing out. Most, I suspect, have more confidence than I in the computer model forecasts.

What does the present rhetoric and, in my view, misrepresentation of the IPCC report really mean? It could mean government-mandated higher prices for energy from fossil fuels, which produce carbon dioxide, or CO2.

But energy means life, a longer and better life. And CO2 is the lifeblood of the biosphere.

As a former missionary in Kenya, I know that if every home there had a single functioning electric light and stove, the quality of the environment and of human life would soar, especially for women. I watched daily as women walked miles to the forest edge, cut and stacked wet, green wood and carried home on their backs these 80-pound bundles of low-grade fuel for cooking and heating. To these people, cheap energy would be a godsend. Light would provide the opportunity to learn; a stove the opportunity to prepare safer food. It would reduce the pall of toxic wood smoke and the ravages of deforestation and habitat loss. It would ultimately free people for other pursuits, as it does for us.

And worse, regulations passed to force reductions in CO2 emissions (i.e., limit access to energy) will have no measurable effect on the climate or sea level -- no matter what direction the climate chooses to take.

Should we do nothing? Of course not. Wasting energy is expensive and foolish. We should be sensible about conservation. Research to find new ways to produce inexpensive energy without burning carbon is smart. (Caveat: Energy that requires large tax subsidies is not inexpensive.)

We shouldn't neglect identifiable environmental problems. For instance, more than 1 billion people don't have access to clean, safe drinking water. Providing clean water will require cheap energy, but will save millions of lives, especially of children, and clean up some very polluted places. I think the Earth's temperature will rise in the next century, but not to the extent you would notice in terms of weather affecting your particular spot. Part of that increase will likely be caused by humans, but we don't know how much.

We know that climate will change despite anything we might do. Glaciers and ice caps have been melting since end of the last ice age. That will continue. Sea level has been rising for thousands of years. Areas threatened by further rises will see perhaps an additional inch per decade.

Supporting research to monitor and understand climate is mandatory. I'm being selfish, but it's true. Gaining knowledge that will allow us to have reasonable confidence in our observations and forecasts will also help us deal with potential changes -- no matter what the climate does.

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