

## Al Gore's telling whoppers again

*That's not unexpected.*

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Al Gore will be in Houston this week promoting his movie and book, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Predictably, his message is dire. The planet must be saved — and quickly — from manmade carbon-dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions produced by coal, petroleum and natural gas usage. Self-interested consumer choices are the culprit, and a government-directed reshaping of energy production and consumption is necessary. The Gore-led campaign is clear: A grass-roots movement must arise to force politicians to give us our bitter medicine — smaller cars, more expensive appliances and higher gasoline prices and electricity rates.

Wait! Before we jump to government energy-planning, let's look at the track record of the sky-is-falling crowd. Didn't we hear in the 1960s that the "population bomb" would cause food riots in American cities and mass starvation globally? Didn't the Club of Rome in the 1970s predict the end of mineral resources by now? Wasn't global cooling the scare before global warming? Isn't it suspicious that the problem is always individual behavior, and the solution is always government action?

There should be great hesitation before swallowing the Chicken Little du jour. The good news is that the bad news about the climate is exaggerated. Leading climate scientists such as Richard Lindzen of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Houston's own Dr. Neil Frank, a hurricane expert, as well as popular writers such as Michael Crichton, John Stossel and George Will are not careless, deceivers or plain bad folks. They are reporting the flaws in the analysis behind climate alarmism.

What are some of the inconvenient truths that *An Inconvenient Truth* fails to consider? First, CO<sub>2</sub> is not a pollutant but a building block of life, benefiting plant life and agriculture. The one-third increase in atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>, from pre-industrial levels, has produced a "greening" of planet Earth, and this will continue for decades to come. Second, the surface warming that many scientists associate with manmade greenhouse gas emissions shows a relatively benign distribution. Minimum (night, winter) temperatures have been increasing twice as much as maximum (daytime, summer) temperatures. Higher night-time temperatures and longer growing seasons reinforce the carbon-fertilization effect, aiding plant growth and agricultural productivity.

Third, the actual rate of global warming to date is well below the high levels predicted by some climate models. As climate scientists know, it is feedback effects that turn a low level of predicted warming into a potentially problematic one; yet it is the nature and impact of such feedbacks that are most in dispute. Real-world climate is far too complex to be modeled. Local weather predictions several days out are notoriously suspect; models predicting the global climate decades and even a century out are will-o'-the-wisps.

At a minimum, Al Gore should add some caveats to his stage show. Citizens and policy-makers should beware those who habitually blame free markets for problems and call on government planning to solve them. Many climate economists argue that global warming — whether man-made or natural — has significant economic benefits, not only costs. *The Impact of Climate Change on the United States Economy*, an anthology by 26

specialists, pointed out that the United States would be a net beneficiary from most warming scenarios in the 21st century. It concluded: "Agronomic studies suggest that carbon fertilization is likely to offset some if not all of the damages from warming."

Strangely, the environmental lobby that is at war with fossil fuels is also warring with nuclear power and hydroelectricity, the only two large-scale, low-emission substitutes for hydrocarbon energy. And they seem to forget that their beloved windpower has its own set of environmental problems. A California representative of the Sierra Club labeled wind turbines "the Cuisinarts of the air." The bird-kill problem is an important argument that environmentalists are currently using against the proposed construction of a wind farm in the Gulf of Mexico, just off the coast of Padre Island and south of Baffin Bay.

Without Texas' renewable energy mandate, and without a slew of special subsidies, this environmentally controversial project would not be on the drawing board. What utility, after all, wants to buy electricity that goes away every time the wind stops blowing?

Al Gore has been a master of exaggeration ever since then—Sen. Gore blamed the heat and drought of the summer of 1988 on manmade global warming. Eighteen years later, despite contrary evidence that the human influence on climate has significant benefits, not only costs, and that a political cure could be far worse than the alleged disease, he is creating more heat than light. It is time for cooler heads to prevail.