

Final Press Guidance
(6/6/02: 10:30 a.m.)

Q: Why did President Bush yesterday dismiss the report put out by his administration on climate change – the U.S. Climate Action Report?

A: The President did not dismiss the report – he dismissed the notion that the report signaled a change in U.S. policy regarding the need to address climate change, nationally and internationally, or in our thinking about the nature of the challenge. He was responding to a reporter who asked whether the U.S. needed new initiatives to combat global warming, and his answer was “no.” He was not asked what he thought of the report itself.

Q: But the *New York Times* reported on June 3 that the report represented a “stark shift” for the Bush Administration – is that not true?

A: Taken as a whole, including the many uncertainties about climate change noted in the report, the U.S. Climate Action Report is entirely consistent with previous administration statements.

Specifically, the President said a year ago, in his June 11, 2001, Rose Garden speech, that best science available from the National Academy of Sciences indicates that temperatures have risen in the last century, and that is probably caused by human influences. At the same time, he noted continued scientific uncertainties. Contrary to the *New York Times* characterization, the recent report reinforces the President’s perspective: It notes the “considerable uncertainty” about the science and the role of natural variations in the climate cycle, and the prevailing view of scientists “that definitive prediction of potential outcomes is not yet feasible.”

Q: Some environmental groups are also saying that the report represents a 180-degree turn on the science – isn’t what they are saying true?

A: No, it is not true. In his June 11 statement last year, the President acknowledged that concentrations of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, have increased substantially since the beginning of the industrial revolution, and that the National Academy of Sciences indicates that the increase is due in large part to human activity. But the President also pointed out that the Academy’s report tells us that we do not know how much our climate could, or will change in the future, or how fast change will occur, or even how some of our actions could impact it.

The President said in June last year that the policy challenge is to act in a serious and sensible way, given the limits of our knowledge, and he said that while scientific uncertainties remain, we can begin now to address the factors that contribute to climate change.

More recently, on February 14 this year President Bush announced his climate change policy, noting that global climate change presents a set of challenges different from those involved in cleaning up air pollution, and that it requires a different strategy. He pointed out that the science is more complex, the answers are less certain, and that the technology is less developed. He called for a flexible approach that can adjust to new information and new technology. And he announced that the United States will cut U.S. greenhouse gas intensity – the amount we emit per unit of economic activity – by 18 percent over the next 10 years.

Q: Others are criticizing the U.S. Climate Action Report because it details many findings contained in the National Assessment on Climate Change – an assessment that they claim was unlawfully produced and deeply flawed. They also say that plaintiffs in a lawsuit last year, including some members of Congress, agreed to withdraw their complaint based on assurances from the administration that the National Assessment on Climate Change would not represent policy positions or official statements of the U.S. Government. If so, why did the administration use those findings in the U.S. Climate Action Report?

A: The national assessment, titled *Climate Change Impacts on the United States: The Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change*, consists of an overview document of about 150 pages and a foundation document of about 600 pages. These documents were the product of the National Assessment Synthesis Team, an advisory committee chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. As such, they are not policy positions or official statements of the U.S. government. Rather, they were produced by the scientific community and offered to the government for its consideration.

Chapter 6 of the U.S. Climate Action Report – which deals with climate change impacts and adaptation in the United States – drew upon the national assessment as well as international assessments prepared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – in presenting an overview of the potential impacts of climate change on the United States. The chapter states very clearly that it is not intended to serve as a separate assessment in and of itself but drew on these documents because they offer more detailed consideration of the issues and specific references to the available literature.

Reference to the national assessment in the U.S. Climate Action report did not convert that assessment into an official policy position or statement of the United States Government, no more than reference to the IPCC assessments converted them into official policy positions or statements of the United States Government.

Chapter 6 of the U.S. Climate Action Report contains numerous caveats about the information it presents. With respect to the national assessment and the IPCC assessments, the chapter notes that, “These assessment studies recognized that definitive prediction of potential outcomes is not yet feasible as a result of the wide range of

possible future levels of greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions, the range of possible climatic responses to changes in atmospheric concentrations, and the range of possible environmental and societal responses.”

Chapter 6 also makes clear that “Because of these ranges and their uncertainties, and because of uncertainties in projecting potential impacts, it is important to note that this chapter cannot present absolute probabilities of what is likely to occur. Instead, it can only present judgments about the relative plausibility of outcomes in the event that the projected changes in climate that are being considered do occur.”

In addition, the introduction to the U.S. Climate Action Report makes clear that: “While current analyses are unable to predict with confidence the timing, magnitude, or regional distribution of climate change, the best scientific information indicates that if greenhouse gas concentrations continue to increase, changes are likely to occur. The U.S. National Research Council has cautioned, however, that ‘because there is considerable uncertainty in current understanding of how the climate system varies naturally and reacts to emissions of greenhouse gases and aerosols, current estimates of the magnitude of future warmings should be regarded as tentative and subject to future adjustments (either upward or downward).’ Moreover, there is perhaps even greater uncertainty regarding the social, environmental, and economic consequences of changes in climate.”

Q: But doesn't Chapter 6 of the U.S. Climate Action Report go well beyond what the administration has said previously about the potential impacts of climate change on the United States?

A: Chapter 6 of the U.S. Climate Action Report consists of 32 printed pages devoted to a discussion of potential impacts on and adaptation responses available to the United States. It contains many observations and many caveats, and provides a fairly detailed overview of these issues. Still, it does not represent any change in our thinking about the challenge posed by climate change or about the appropriate policy response.

Q: Was the U.S. Climate Action Report subjected to any public review and comment before it was finalized, and why did the administration release it at this time?

A: The United States is a party to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. Under the Convention, each party is required to submit a national communication. The guidelines developed for preparation of national communications by industrialized countries called for submission of the third national communication by November 30, 2001.

The administration published a notice in the Federal Register on March 19, 2001, of its intention to begin preparation of the third U.S. national communication under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change – the U.S. Climate Action Report -- and

inviting public input into that preparation process. This initial comment period ran for a month, until April 18, 2001, and two sets of comments were received.

The Environmental Protection Agency coordinated the U.S. Government interagency process in which the draft U.S. Climate Action Report was developed. Specific drafting assignments were tasked to multiple federal agencies.

After extensive interagency review and comment, the administration published a second Federal Register notice on November 15, 2001, inviting public review and comment on the draft U.S. Climate Action Report, which was made available on the EPA website. This second comment period ran for another month, until December 17, 2001, and comments were received from six organizations and two individuals.

Thereafter, the administration delayed submission of the U.S. Climate Action Report in order to take into account the climate change policy announced by President Bush on February 14, 2002.

The Department of State advised the Secretariat of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change on May 24, 2002, that the U.S. Climate Action Report would be transmitted electronically during the week of May 27, 2002. In light of the date for submission of third national communications under the UNFCCC guidelines and the fact that one of the Convention's subsidiary bodies – the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice – would be meeting in Bonn, Germany, beginning June 5, 2002, our goal was to ensure that the document was made available by the time of that meeting.

Q: The European Union ratified the Kyoto Protocol last week, and Japan ratified this week. Has the administration given any second thought to its decision not to proceed with the Kyoto Protocol?

A: No, we have said clearly and repeatedly that the United States will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol because its targets are arbitrary and not based on sound science, because it would require the United States to make deep and immediate cuts in our economy to meet an arbitrary target, and because it requires no action from the majority of the world's nations. We have not changed our view.

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