

ARMS 293

RECORD TYPE: FEDERAL (NOTES MAIL)

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CREATION DATE/TIME: 12-JUL-2002 09:37:58.00

SUBJECT:: BNA story on climate hearings

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TEXT:

BNA

No. 134

Friday, July 12, 2002

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ISSN 1521-9402

Climate Change
Administration Agrees Humans Responsible
For Climate Effects, but Rejects Drastic Rules

Senior Bush administration officials told a Senate committee July 11 they support recent findings that climatic changes over the past several decades probably are due mostly to human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases, but that mandating drastic reductions of those emissions is not an appropriate response by the United States.

James Mahoney, assistant secretary for oceans and atmosphere at the Department of Commerce, said the "best known and most commonly observed" greenhouse-effect gas is carbon dioxide, primarily emitted from the burning of fossil fuel. He said he agreed with scientists who found atmospheric concentrations of carbon of 280 parts per million before the industrial revolution as compared to the 365 ppm that currently exists. But he said, scientific models are not capable of predicting the exact greenhouse gas effect on climate and temperature changes to come.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who chaired a hearing of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on global climate change and the recent U.S. Climate Action Report to the United Nations, pointed to the findings of the Bush administration's U.S. Climate Action Report 2002. The report, which studied the U.S. greenhouse gas emission trends from 1990 through 1999 was written by career staff at the Environmental Protection Agency. They wrote that climatic changes observed over the past several decades probably are due mostly to human activities.

Furthermore, the report said the growth rate of climate changing agents such as carbon dioxide emissions will accelerate and the "predicted warming" of 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) "by the end of the 21st century is consistent with the assumptions about how clouds and atmospheric relative humidity will react to global warming" (107 DEN A-1, 06/4/02) .

Connaughton, Hubbard Target

'Intensity.'

James Connaughton, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, and Glenn Hubbard, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, described the administration's immediate goal of reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions relative to the size of the economy by 18 percent in the next 10 years. This method, described as addressing greenhouse gas "intensity," "will set America on a path to slow the growth of greenhouse gas emissions and, if science justifies, to stop and then reverse the growth of emissions," Connaughton said.

But applying this intensity approach to U.S. emissions over the period 1990 to 1999, Kerry said the intensity dropped by 17 percent, while the economy grew, and total emissions grew by 12 percent.

Therefore, the new plan is not based on real reductions in emissions, Kerry said.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), calling the intensity plan "ridiculous," pointed to a July 11 report by the National Wildlife Federation that said the Bush plan would allow more greenhouse gas pollution to occur at a faster rate than if the nation maintained the pollution trends of the past five years.

The U.S. climate report marked the third formal national communication to the United Nations under the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change. As a signatory to that framework, the United States must describe national circumstances, indicate future trends in emissions, and identify existing and planned policies and measures. The framework participants pledge to globally achieve "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropological interference with the climate system."

The NWF report, *Beneath the Hot Air*, is available at <http://www.nwf.org/climate> on the World Wide Web.

By Pamela Najor

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