

November 9, 2004

Destroying America To Save The World

TV's Global Warming Coverage Hides Cost Of Kyoto Treaty

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For nearly four years, network news programs have presented a skewed view of global warming and the Kyoto treaty that liberal environmentalists claim would cure it. Those same newscasts have all-but ignored the negative economic consequences that ratifying Kyoto would have on the U.S. The network coverage also largely ignored scientific evidence questioning global warming theory, while touting dramatic claims of liberal environmental activists.

To document how network news has slanted the global warming debate, researchers with the Media Research Center's Free Market Project analyzed all 165 news stories about global warming aired on the three broadcast network evening newscasts and two cable news shows between January 20, 2001 and September 30, 2004. Among the major findings:

- **Global Warming More Dangerous Than Kyoto Treaty:** Three times as many network stories (46 percent) featured dramatic reports about global warming's potential impact than mentioned the downside of signing the treaty (12 percent).
- **NBC, CBS and CNN Ignore Specific Cost of Kyoto:** The cost to American taxpayers of adopting the Kyoto provisions have been estimated as high as \$440 billion annually. ABC and the Fox News Channel were the only two networks that told viewers about the potentially crippling price tag. Even those were brief mentions in larger reports. NBC, CBS and CNN failed to pass on this essential information. No story on any network was devoted solely to discussing the treaty's economic impact. Broadcast news shows mentioned polar bears three times as often as they discussed any cost attributed to signing Kyoto.

- **Bipartisan Opposition to Treaty Unreported:** Only one of 165 news stories mentioned that the Senate had voted unanimously 95-0 against Kyoto. Forty-nine stories on all five news programs cited President Bush's blocking or pulling out of Kyoto without mentioning the unanimous vote. That unanimous resolution included Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry, though that is never discussed either. *The Fox Report* was the only show that included this key information about the Senate opposition.
- **No Science Debate Allowed:** Broadcast news programs presented the claims of liberal environmentalists that global warming is a given, that mankind is to blame for it, or both, 55 percent of the time (77 stories). That's six times more often than they showed valid scientific objection to global warming theories.
- ***Fox Report* the Best News Show, *NBC Nightly News* the Worst:** The best show for covering climate change was the *Fox Report*. It reported the cost of Kyoto and was the only show to mention the Senate vote opposing the treaty. It also made effective use of experts on both sides. Sixty-four percent of the *NBC Nightly News* climate change stories were pro-Kyoto – more than any other program. Only three of those stories raised questions about the science behind global warming.
- **ABC's Bob Jamieson the Best Reporter, NBC's Robert Hager the Worst:** The best reporter was ABC *World News Tonight's* Bob Jamieson. Jamieson was the sole broadcast reporter who included the costs of signing the climate treaty. Reporter Robert Hager's January 8, 2004 story earned him the title as worst reporter. Hager undermined an interview subject by referring to him as being "with a think tank funded in large part by big oil companies."

The MRC's Free Market Project report concludes with four recommendations. First, news organizations must provide a balance of experts and opinions on both sides of issues in their stories. The global warming stories show that is a major problem. Secondly, news shows need to explain the cost and impact of significant proposals like the Kyoto Treaty. Third, the networks need to be more skeptical of comments made by environmentalists, just as they are skeptical of comments from the business community. Lastly, networks need to find a way to monitor coverage over time so they can track their performance on these key concerns.

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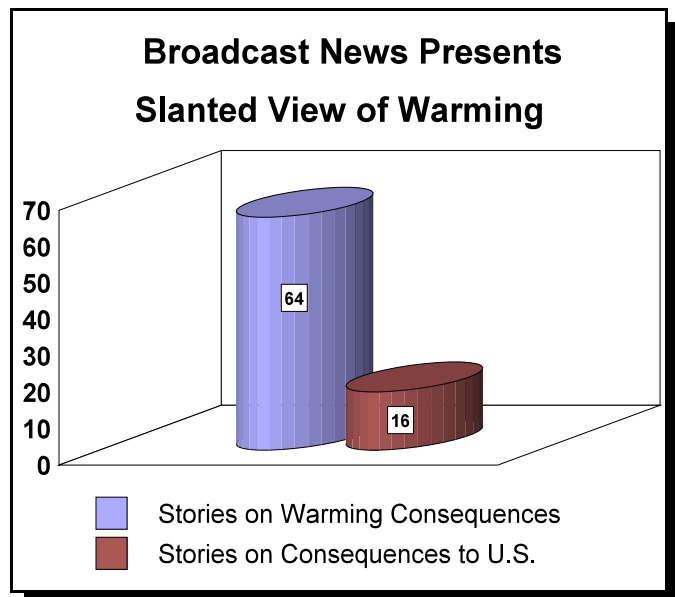
DAN GAINOR
DIRECTOR, MRC'S FREE MARKET PROJECT

Deadly droughts, polar caps melting, forest fires, sweltering heat. Global warming hasn't hit the news every day, but when it has, it has done so with a bang. Network news programs have parroted almost any claim to paint a horrifying picture of climate change and focus on the "impending doom" of global warming.

One thing has become clear: what is "impending" is the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty designed to cut emissions that allegedly contribute to global warming. In October, Russia's lower house of parliament ratified the treaty - giving it sufficient support to force participating industrialized nations to cut their collective emissions of six key greenhouse gases to 5.2 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Thousands of scientists challenge the thinking behind this new treaty, but the opposite view is in force on network news shows. ABC's World News Tonight reporter Terry Moran provides a fine example. On June 3, 2002, after Moran listed several possible impacts from global warming, including lost snow packs in mountains and sinking islands in the Atlantic, he then reported, "The scientists note these kinds of projections are iffy, but the basic science, as you say, they are certain of, and that is that global warming exists, and humans help make it."

That view is commonplace on



network news. The Media Research Center's Free Market Project studied 165 global warming stories from January 20, 2001 through September 30, 2004 and found the network news shows typically have presented a biased view of the issue. Show after show emphasized the view that global warming is here and threatens not only our way of life, but our very existence. That position overlooked how a climate change treaty would impact the United States.

The very foundation of the view the networks presented ignored much scientific evidence questioning global warming theory. Many reputable scientists argue the entire foundation for global warming is questionable. Even many warming supporters raise questions about the extent of mankind's contribution to the possible problem.

The heart of the global warming dispute remains quite important. Scientists have been debating the reality of climate change and its potential impact for years. Despite extensive scientific opposition, worldwide environmental groups pushed for action that led to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. The pact required reductions in emissions below 1990 levels for developed nations. The U.S. received the strongest sanction and was required to cut emissions 7 percent below 1990 levels - nearly 20 percent below current estimates.

President Bill Clinton signed the treaty, but never sent it to the Senate for ratification because of its strong vocal opposition. The issue appeared dead in the U.S. until George W. Bush resurrected the debate when he was elected president. President Bush pulled back from Kyoto because of the cost and unresolved questions that remained about the science behind it. The networks repeatedly labeled and blamed President Bush as the sole person who wanted to "pull out," "block" or "kill" Kyoto. Bush was roundly criticized by environmental groups and world leaders for focusing on the impact it would have on the U.S. economy. The networks emphasized that as well. News programs virtually paid no attention to Clinton's lack of action on the treaty or the Senate's 95-0 vote opposing it.

The Good

The **Fox News Channel** delivered better and more balanced reporting on global warming. Their use of experts on both sides of the issue was fair. In addition, they were the only network to explain that the Senate had voted 95-0 in a resolution against Kyoto. Fox also showed the climate treaty might have hefty costs for U.S. consumers.

Honorable mention goes to ABC News reporter **Bob Jamieson** who was the only broadcast reporter to discuss specific costs that could be the result of the Kyoto pact. Jamieson even quoted an expert who challenged the usefulness of the treaty.

Kyoto Would Cost Billions of Dollars, Millions of Jobs

In the seven years since Kyoto was tentatively agreed to, there have been several economic surveys about its impact on the U.S. These reports estimate signing the accord would cost the U.S. between \$225 billion to more than \$400 billion per year. The U.S. Energy Information Administration also predicted Kyoto would cause widespread employment loss nationwide ranging from 1.1 million to 4.9 million jobs. They added that it would cause a major spike in energy prices, predicting an increase of prices that could hit as high as 100 percent if the treaty were signed. These estimates were rarely reported on the five networks news programs we studied.

The Bad

While **CBS Evening News** did more stories than any other news show, they also were more tilted toward the view of climate catastrophe than any other network, as well. CBS did 49 stories and more than half of those painted a view that global warming is devastating, but they never included the basic financial costs of signing the treaty to balance their story. CBS consistently was willing to embrace exaggeration and sensationalism to make its points about climate change.

While many experts question the economics of Kyoto, others continue to find flaws in the science behind it. Recently, the Russian Academy of Sciences added its voice to the growing list of those who question the thinking behind Kyoto. That didn't stop eight state attorneys general from starting the latest round of the fight. They filed suit against U.S. power companies to force cuts in carbon dioxide emissions. The attorneys general represent New York and California and are headed up by New York State Attorney General Elliot Spitzer. He has been in the news a great deal for filing a series of corporate wrong-doings lawsuits. The outspoken Democrat, who is eyeing the governor's seat in 2006, also has taken on executives at Merrill Lynch, Enron, WorldCom and Tyco.

A new climate change report landed in the middle of this ongoing dispute in August 2004. "Our Changing Planet," by the Climate Change Science Program and the Subcommittee on Global Change Research, indicated that manmade gases like carbon dioxide are linked to global warming. Two Bush Cabinet members, Secretary of Commerce Don Evans and Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, signed the letter introducing the paper to Congress.

The network newscasts haven't been bystanders in the debate on warming. Their stories have taken on a theatrical nature predicting cataclysm after cataclysm. Here is

only part of a sample from Patricia Sabga at *NBC Nightly News* (Aug. 6, 2003):

“Europe is burning, sweltering in one of the hottest summers in memory. Temperatures topping 104 degrees from Lisbon to Berlin. Searing heat, high winds and drought sparking forest fires throughout the continent. In Portugal, officials asked NATO for water-dropping planes to battle blazes that have killed a dozen people. The French nuclear reactor was hosed down to keep it from overheating. Rail service in parts of Britain slowed or suspended for fear the train tracks will buckle in the heat. Across Europe, crop damages from drought estimated in the billions of dollars. “

The Ugly

It was a challenge picking the worst report out of the 165 surveyed. Many were biased – lacking even an attempt at balance with science and economic information that counters network group think. One report stood out from the rest – NBC’s January 8, 2004 story about a global warming study. **Reporter Robert Hager** cited the report for the bulk of his story – predicting extinction for more than a million species by the middle of the century.

Rather than use the chance to delve into warming, Hager buried one quote from an opponent and used it to undermine the opposition view. He referred to the speaker as being “with a think tank funded in large part by big oil companies.” NBC produced a completely unbalanced report as a result.

Such reports are all too common. If you didn’t know any better, you would think climate change already is a problem of Biblical proportions. The potentially devastating impact of climate change is consistently emphasized on a routine basis in network news reporting.

Media Coverage of Climate Change an Ongoing Problem

This is the third time the MRC’s Free Market Project has analyzed network coverage of global warming. We wanted to know whether the past pro-Kyoto slant continued. To find out, Free Market Project researchers analyzed all the news stories about global warming and the Kyoto Protocol during the George W. Bush presidency – from January 20, 2001 until September 30, 2004. This was a time of a pivotal policy shift in the executive branch of government. The stories aired on the three broadcast network evening news shows (*ABC’s World News Tonight*, *CBS Evening News* and *NBC Nightly News*), as well as the two major cable news shows (*CNN’s News Night with Aaron Brown* and the *Fox Report*).

All three broadcast networks provided a fairly similar amount of coverage. CBS aired the most stories (49 stories, including 37 full reports and the largest number of anchor briefs – 12) followed by NBC with 47 stories (41 full reports, 6 anchor briefs) and ABC with 43 (36 full reports and 7 anchor briefs). The two cable networks ran a total of 26 pieces on global warming. The Fox News Channel led with 16 pieces (9 full reports and 7 anchor briefs). CNN had the lowest level of coverage with only 10 stories.

Global Warming More Dangerous Than Kyoto Treaty

The network news bias strongly favors reporting about the potential impact of global warming over any potential impact from signing the Kyoto agreement. Reported consequences of global warming showed up in 44 percent (73 stories) of the stories while any reference to the impact of signing the pact occurred in only 13 percent (22 stories). That’s an incredible difference of more than 3 to 1.

CBS was disaster central. A full 55 percent (27 stories) of their stories discussed some sort of negative impact of climate change. That eclipsed their stories on the impact Kyoto might have by more than a 3-to-1 margin.

The networks love “scary” weather stories. They don’t seem to love explaining the “scary” consequences of signing the climate change pact. The networks rarely mentioned any financial impact in those 20 stories we analyzed. That sounds far better than it really was. In fact, most comments were extremely minor – either limited explanations by reporters or a one- or two-sentence quote from President Bush. On several occasions, the networks relied on versions of the Bush quote, “harm the economy” to elaborate on the possible impact of the treaty. The few times the networks mentioned the potentially positive effects of global warming, they were also buried beneath more statements about the perceived horrors of warming.

That didn’t stop the networks from going into amazing depth about the potential impact of global warming. In nearly half of the total stories, the five networks focused on the harsh “realities” of global warming.

Most of the articles were consistent in tone and style. Bad things are happening out there, they claimed, and many of those things can be traced back to global warming. Drops in lobster catches, hot weather, cold weather, more rain, less rain and a host of other occurrences were all linked in some way to global warming.

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The network even blamed warming for heightening our danger to terrorism by allowing terrorists to potentially take ocean routes previously impassible to naval traffic. On May 31, 2004, CBS reporter Jerry Bowen explained, "But Dennis Conlon, who helped write a recently declassified document exploring the military implications of a watery Arctic, says an open Northwest Passage makes America open to new threats."

ABC's *World News Tonight* had the worst record of the five news shows studied in this area. While they covered the impact of warming in only 40 percent (17) of their stories, less than their broadcast competitors, they only covered the impact of signing the pact three times. That means warming received nearly six times as much coverage. In the newscasts we studied, cable was less hysterical. CNN only mentioned the consequences of Kyoto in 30 percent (three) of their reports – the lowest percentage among any network. The Fox News Channel cited the potential consequences of warming 38 percent (six), or only one-and-a-half as many times as they discussed the impact of Kyoto. That ratio of 1.5 to 1 was the lowest of any of the networks.

NBC, CBS and CNN Ignore Specific Cost of Kyoto

Networks reported estimates of the costs of signing the Kyoto treaty in only two of the 165 news stories. That's just 1 percent of the time. Since one of those accounts was on cable's Fox News Channel, the numbers for the broadcasters were even worse. Cost appeared in ONE broadcast network story out of 139 stories. This is despite the fact that estimates, including one by the Department of Energy, ranged from \$225 billion to \$440 billion each year.

Such a failure is fairly commonplace. Journalists are taught to include the five Ws of "who, what, where, when and why," along with the H for "how or how much." That last part falls on deaf ears at the major news networks. They

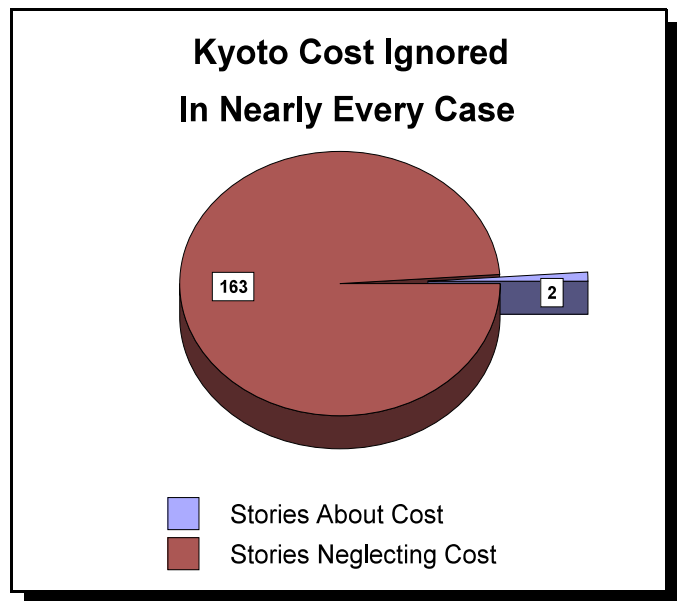
Only two stories on any network mentioned the potential cost to American consumers of signing onto the global warming pact. Those two stories in our study – one on the Fox News Channel and the other on ABC – were the only chance for network news viewers to learn about the cost of this multi-billion dollar agreement.

report almost endless concern about the potential implications of global warming but there is virtually nothing about what happens if the United States does sign Kyoto. What will it cost? How much will each American consumer pay?

As Cuba Gooding said in “Jerry Maguire,” “Show me the money!”

Unfortunately, the networks, especially the Big Three broadcast media, seem unwilling to do just that. Only two stories on any network mentioned the potential cost to American consumers of signing onto the global warming pact. Those two stories in our study – one on the Fox News Channel and the other on ABC – were the only chance for network news viewers to learn about the cost of this multi-billion dollar agreement. Since one of those accounts was on cable, the numbers for the big three broadcasters are even worse. Cost appeared in one broadcast network story out of the 139 studied.

Bob Jamieson, of ABC News, was one of the two reporters who tried to answer the obvious question: “How much?” In a July 23, 2001 report, Jamieson tackled the agreement, “The administration says it would hurt the U.S. economy by costing jobs and raising the price of energy \$2,000 per family. It exempts China and India, even though within decades they will be the world’s biggest polluters. And the administration believes it will produce little change.”



That was it – all 15 seconds of it. That was the only report in any of the three broadcast network news shows we studied that addressed the potential price of the world agreement. The remaining 130 stories never attempted to put an exact figure on the agreement.

The Fox News Channel addressed the issue – short, but to the point. Even so, it was vastly more than most of its competitors. On March 28, 2001 Jim Angle explained the treaty opposition, “One reason is that the treaty would not force reductions by the developing nations including major polluters such as China, but it would have required the United States to cut emissions by about 30 percent beginning in 2008.” He continued with the essential two sentences. “Supporters say it would cost American families about

\$100 a year. Critics said it would have doubled the price of energy, costing families \$2,700 a year.”

Though the networks weren't forthcoming on the costs of Kyoto, they helped promote plans that urge spending even more money. On April 20, 2004, ABC reporter Barry Serafin did a story about the oceans and a report that advocated a new tax of up to \$4 billion on oil and gas royalties.

Serafin added: “Today's report also says we simply need to be better educated about the seas. It calls for making ocean studies part of the curriculum, starting in kindergarten.” His story on this enormous proposal had no opposing view and ended with a quote from Dr. Robert Ballard, who discovered the Titanic and, of course, also advocated ocean studies. There was no explanation of what schools might have to drop to include Dr. Ballard's personal curriculum choice.

Criticism of Kyoto's costs continues, though it seldom appears on the news shows we studied. In May 2004, a group of international economists including three Nobel laureates, called the Copenhagen Consensus, released an assessment of “the numerous problems the world faces.” Out of 17 options, the three global warming choices finished under the heading “Bad Projects” – ranked 15th, 16th and 17th.

The Consensus is far from right-wing. Its founder, Bjorn Lomborg, was described by the Copenhagen Post as: “a former member of Greenpeace, an avowed homosexual, a passionate vegetarian, and, by his own admission, his political leanings lie somewhere between the left-wing Socialist People's Party and the Radical Left.” The top two issues on their list where they urge action are curing HIV/ AIDS and working to end malnutrition.

Criticism of Kyoto by the Copenhagen Consensus appeared on none of the shows we analyzed.

Bipartisan Opposition to Treaty Unreported

The networks cited President Bush as blocking or pulling out of Kyoto about one-third of the time (30 percent or 49 stories). That's only partially true. Bush was only one of many opponents, including the U.S. Senate, which must vote on all treaties. The networks only made that point once in all 165 stories. They blamed Bush for U.S. actions on the treaty 49 times more often than on the one story that discussed how the Senate had voted unanimously 95-0 against Kyoto. That unanimous vote included

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), although that is never discussed in any of the 165 reports.

On July 23, 2001, CBS reporter John Roberts explained how other nations were lining up against the U.S. position on climate change. "After a marathon negotiating session, they defiantly announced they had rescued the Kyoto treaty the president had tried to kill."

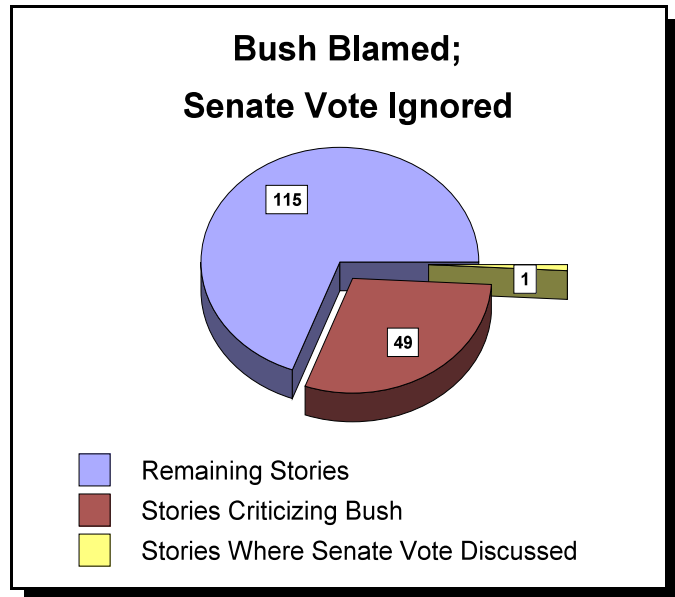
The Fox News Channel was the only network to talk about the Senate vote. Officially, it's called the Byrd-Hagel Resolution and passed the Senate in 1997. The news show obviously remembered this overwhelming action by the Senate, because they were the only one to report the vote during this period. On March 28, 2001 Sen. Don Nickles told Fox News, "The Senate has already spoken on the Kyoto treaty and we had 95 votes that said we wouldn't ratify the Kyoto treaty because it didn't apply to all countries."

The rest of the networks handled the issue almost identically. The only essential difference was how often they blamed the president for withdrawing from the treaty. At NBC, they did so 19 times (40 percent), which was more than any other network both by number and percentage. ABC only did so 10 times (23 percent), the lowest numbers for the three broadcast networks.

In cable, the Fox News Channel only used the expressions twice (13 percent) among those reports we studied and CNN used them three times (30 percent).

ABC's May 30, 2001 story by reporter John Cochran was anything but typical and about as close as the networks got to discuss the Senate vote. Cochran actually mentioned something other than blaming President Bush, though he didn't go far enough to include the Senate resolution. He said, Bush "refused to take part in a global warming treaty which the Clinton administration wanted but did not fight for..."

An NBC report in March 2001 was especially interesting because it not only blamed President Bush for pulling out of the treaty but it also misrepresented the extent of American support for Kyoto. NBC anchor Tom Brokaw discussed how President Bush decided not to back the Kyoto treaty in this March 28, 2001 story: "Now to another



controversial decision on the environment from the Bush administration today which announced that the president considers a worldwide treaty on global warming worthless," Brokaw reported. "The United States, after all, was a leading force for the 1997 Kyoto treaty..."

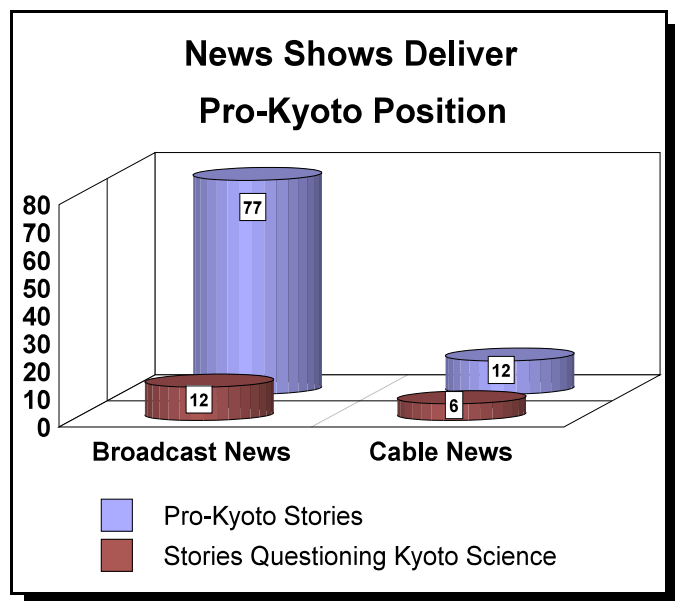
However, here are the facts: Only President Bill Clinton and several environmental groups were advocating the treaty. The Senate voted 95-0 in a resolution against it. The Senate vote certainly suggests the United States was far from a "leading force for the 1997 Kyoto Treaty."

No Science Debate Allowed

There is an aggressive debate over global warming and the science behind it. The Russian Academy of Sciences recently agreed that the science of Kyoto is faulty. According to Reuters, the academy said: "The Kyoto Protocol has no scientific foundation," as one of their conclusions about the treaty. That move didn't jeopardize Russia's support for the pact, in part because Russia had to do it to be approved for membership in the World Trade Organization. On network news, most of that scientific debate doesn't even exist. Broadcast news programs repeated the claim that global warming is a given, that mankind is to blame for this "problem" or both 55 percent (77 stories) of the time. That's roughly six times more often than they even admitted there might be some scientific objection (9 percent/12 stories).

For example, consider this fairly typical comment – this one from *CBS Evening News* reporter Jerry Bowen on August 29, 2002, "Whatever its cause, there is now abundant evidence that the Earth is having a heat wave." Contrary to Bowen's statement, it is not clear that the Earth is warming at all. Dr. S. Fred Singer, president of The Science & Environmental Policy Project, is one of the most well-known and respected opponents of global warming theory. Singer, a professor emeritus of environmental science at the University of Virginia, points out conflicting evidence about whether the earth is indeed warming.

He explained that the U.N. data



showing the earth getting warmer disagrees with both data from satellites and weather balloons. Neither of these show any change in global temperature since 1979 when the satellite record began. Singer co-authored an article in August 2004 along with two other warming skeptics, including Patrick J. Michaels, who has recently published a book on the subject. They said: "The odd-record-out turns out to be the U.N.'s hot-surface theory."

Michaels also explained in his new book, "Meltdown: The Predictable Distortion of Global Warming by Scientists, Politicians, and the Media," that "there are, no doubt, some pretty strong internal feedbacks and checks that keep the surface temperature within a relatively small range."

Singer and Michaels are far from alone in their opposition. Frederick Seitz, the past president of the National Academy of Sciences and president emeritus of Rockefeller University circulated a document in 1998 called the "Oregon Petition" that gathered more than 17,000 names from scientists in various fields.

According to Seitz, "This treaty is, in our opinion, based upon flawed ideas." This view is rarely seen in our study.

The broadcast networks treated the pro-Kyoto view on global warming as a given. In other words, they did one of three things: 1)

Accepted global warming as a fact; 2)

Blamed mankind for the problem; or 3) Both. They did this roughly six times more often than they even admitted there might be some scientific objection. NBC was the worst of all five networks, including cable. It took the pro-Kyoto view in 30 stories (64 percent). It also had the lowest percentage of opposition to this view, only three stories (6 percent). That is a ratio of 10 to 1.

The cable networks did slightly better in our study. The Fox News Channel mentioned the pro-Kyoto viewpoint often (10 stories/63 percent), but it also included opposition views at a higher rate than any network (5 stories/31 percent). Both Fox and CNN included opposition views 50 percent of the time that they included the pro-Kyoto viewpoint. While low, that is still substantially better than the broadcast networks.

CBS's Jerry Bowen was all too typical. In part of a periodic series about climate change in the Arctic, he traveled to Barrow, Alaska on August 28, 2002. Anchor John

Both Fox and CNN included opposition views 50 percent of the time that they included the pro-Kyoto viewpoint. While low, that is still substantially better than the broadcast networks.

Roberts introduced the report by actually entertaining some doubts about warming. "Despite the ongoing scientific dispute over the cause, nature and even existence of global warming, evidence of it can be now be found on U.S. soil."

Bowen's close of the story puts that issue to rest. "Barrow is a window on climate change, a change that's indisputable. The question is the cause: man, nature or some combination."

The networks raise questions that typically are based on the assumption global warming already is occurring. The only question they seem willing to allow is about the cause - man or nature. For this and mostly every other aspect of the debate, they rely almost entirely on advocates from environmental groups.

One of the most self-serving quotes along those lines came from a CBS report July 15, 2001. Businessman Jeremy Leggett, CEO of British solar energy firm Solar Century, was used for his "expert" commentary. CBS called him simply, "Solar Energy Producer." According to Leggett, "We keep pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, we are going to reap a harvest of horror and that's accepted and it's bewildering to consider why it's not accepted in the United States." If carbon-based fuels like oil and coal suddenly became either expensive or limited because of Kyoto, solar energy firms stand to make huge profits. CBS failed to make that point.

Nowhere in the report does it explain that the NRDC is a liberal environmental group that thinks the Bush "administration, in catering to industries that put America's health and natural heritage at risk, threatens to do more damage to our environmental protections than any other in U.S. history."

Contrast how that was handled with one of those extremely rare situations where the networks quoted an expert who didn't agree with the view they projected of global warming. When that happened, NBC reporter Robert Hager did his best to undercut him. Myron Ebell, who had worked on an environmental study for the Competitive Enterprise Institute, had his organization referred to as, "a think tank funded in large part by big oil companies" in the January 8, 2004 story. Nowhere among their appearances are radical environmentalists ever given that type of investigative treatment.

On June 6, 2001, CBS reporter John Roberts tried to put the science aspect of the debate to rest. He began his report this way: "In the most comprehensive assessment

yet of the issue of global warming, a team from the National Academy of Sciences found compelling evidence that the Earth is getting hotter as a result of human activity.” He followed up his intro with a quote from David Hawkins from the Natural Resources Defense Council, “Well, the debate over the science is over,” Hawkins boasted. “When we burn coal and oil, we pollute the air, it causes global warming. We know what the problem is, we know what the solution is. The time now is for action.”

Nowhere in the report does it explain that the NRDC is a liberal environmental group that thinks the Bush “administration, in catering to industries that put America’s health and natural heritage at risk, threatens to do more damage to our environmental protections than any other in U.S. history.” And that’s according to the NRDC’s own website. More telling is the complete lack of objectivity in Roberts’ story. In fact, the report is never questioned and not one expert who might disagree is consulted.

When network “science experts” disagreed on global warming, they still accepted the basic premise, they just battled over the result. CBS reporter Randall Pinkston explained it this way in an April 28, 2002 story: “Terry Joyce, a scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, studies the effects of global warming. He and other researchers

Networks Choose Animals over American Citizens

The networks mentioned polar bears three times as often as they mentioned any possible cost attributed to signing Kyoto. It didn’t stop there.

Two of those accounts were full stories devoted to the fate of the furry man-eaters. None devoted an entire story to detail the possible financial impact of the treaty on the United States economy.

Why tell Americans about the realities of a treaty when you can focus on cuddly animals that make good video? From Arctic foxes to Winter Flounder, global warming broadcasts focused more on Mother Nature than essential facts about Kyoto. Lobsters, birds, caribou, fish, even plants filled the TV screens on a regular basis.

The most obvious example of this is the coverage of polar bears. Polar bear peril was typical of the way networks addressed issues involving nature.

In an Aug. 31, 2002 report about the Arctic, CBS quoted Lee Cooper, chief scientist of the Arctic expedition: “There are a lot of organisms up here, including the polar bear, that seem dependant upon sea ice being present and so if the ecosystem changes, the ice disappears, you may just be able to see polar bears here in zoos in the future.”

ABC anchor Peter Jennings echoed that sentiment in a May 20, 2002 story. “Finally from us this evening, the future of polar bears.,” Jennings reported. “Scientists believe they evolved about 200,000 years ago from their brown bear ancestors. Today, there are more than 20,000 polar bears living in the wild, and there may be trouble ahead.”

are increasingly sounding a new alarm, a paradox that global warming could produce an abrupt climate change and cooler temperatures very soon.”

News report after news report took global warming for granted and often in what the reporters and anchors said themselves, not just in the limited range of “experts” chosen for the stories. On August 11 2002, ABC reporter Terry Moran explained, “[C]limate specialists predict the longer global warming lasts and the warmer the planet becomes, the more often we can look forward to this [bizarre weather].” Here’s Moran again: On June 3, 2002, after he listed several possible impacts from global warming, he then said, “The scientists note these kinds of projections are iffy, but the basic science, as you say, they are certain of, and that is that global warming exists, and humans help make it.” Moran didn’t acknowledge a dissenting view.

In a report from the same network just two weeks earlier on May 20, 2002, reporter Richard Gizbert disagreed with Moran’s conclusion. “Not everyone agrees global warming is a man-made phenomenon. But there is no arguing the effect it’s having on Arctic wildlife...” Gizbert’s report on polar bears disputed the cause mentioned in Moran’s story. Neither questioned the theory of global warming.

An ABC report on December 26, 2001 summed up the network scientific bias by blaming “erratic” changes in weather on global warming. Reporter Neal Karlinsky explained, “Scientists say there is a pattern here. The weather is becoming more erratic for one main reason, the earth is getting warmer.” This perspective virtually guarantees the networks are correct on the issue of global warming. If the weather gets warmer, they were right. If it gets colder, they can blame that on warming. Right again. And, lastly, if the weather simply changes and produces (as they mentioned in the story) snow of all things in Buffalo on Christmas Eve, then they can say the weather is changeable. They blame global warming for that, as well.

Even when the networks included specific financial data, it focused on the costs of global warming – not of signing the agreement. On February 19, 2001, ABC *World News Tonight* anchor Peter Jennings discussed a U.N. report on global warming in this quote, “The U.N. says today that the economic loss alone has gone from \$4 billion a year in the 1950s to \$40 billion a year in 1999 and going up.” By tracing global warming far back into the era of Eisenhower and Elvis, the report made world governments, especially the U.S., appear even more blameworthy for taking so long to act.

What the ABC report failed to mention is that, even into the 1970s, many climatologists were claiming the world was in the midst of an ice age. In fact, that claim still surfaces in some of the global warming reporting – blaming it for changes that would ultimately make the world colder.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After analyzing 165 global warming network stories that aired between January 20, 2001 and September 30, 2004, it is evident that the networks present climate change as an imminent catastrophe.

Anything the U.S. and other nations can do to head off this doomsday scenario, no matter how costly, should be attempted – even if doesn't work, according to a majority of the network news programs we analyzed. The networks make little attempt at balance on this pivotal issue. In fact, the stories we analyzed didn't even include opponents of global warming theory in any substantive manner.

One of the most telling examples of this came with *CNN Tonight* anchor Stephen Frazier on March 31, 2001. Frazier was discussing the results of a new Gallup poll about environmental views and then let his own view attempt to settle the debate. "As for the environment, one of the issues of greatest concern is global warming, but how does that rank among other environmental concerns? That's the topic of a new Gallup poll. Gallup Editor-in-Chief Frank Newport has the results."

Newport went on to argue just how foolish Frazier's comment was. "Our key point in global warming, in terms of American public opinion is that the country does not seem to be overly concerned about it in general."

He explained that only 33 percent viewed global warming a problem, barely half of the number who considered water pollution a major concern. In fact, those who were worried about global warming had actually declined from 1989, when 35 percent had considered it an issue of concern. Somehow Frazier missed this essential point.

Unfortunately this was a common problem in the newscasts we studied. Anchors and reporters consistently were biased. Only the Fox News Channel made an ongoing attempt at balance.

It would be easy for network news programs to do better with very little effort. Network reporters could expand their list of experts and rely less on the same environmental groups. They could also do a better job of simply explaining both sides of the issue – complete with costs and other possible results.

This report is designed to make it easier for journalists to do a better job of reporting on the issue of global warming. It attempts to both highlight their biases and commend those who did more in-depth reporting. The resources included at the end of this study should make it possible for journalists to understand the issue better.

Here are a few recommendations for better and less-biased coverage in the future:

1. **Give some Balance:** Cover major issues in depth from both sides. Those reports should include experts from all aspects of an issue and lay out the potential benefits and detriments of each perspective. They should make a point of appropriately labeling each expert as well. Had that been done in this case, every network would have touched on salient points at least once during the three-and-a-half years of this study.
2. **Follow the Money:** The American public needs essential financial information so it can make decisions. The lack of this information leads to choices based on emotion, not fact. No nation has unlimited funds, so tough choices have to be made. Those choices require facts. The networks need to press Kyoto treaty advocates for hard numbers.
3. **Be Skeptical of Environmentalists:** The news media have no trouble being skeptical of big business, but they seldom apply the same principles to the environmental movement. And, rarely, do journalists investigate these so-called experts' agenda. They should. News reporters should ask them the same questions about built-in biases, funding and conflicts of interest.
4. **Track Balance Long Term:** It is impossible to ensure that every story is perfectly balanced. News events drive agendas back and forth across the political spectrum. It is essential that the media find ways of tracking their performance on major issues as a check against an ongoing bias on different topics.

Resources

If journalists expand the resources they rely on for global warming stories, their reports could improve a great deal. Here is a short list of items that can help journalists cover the global warming beat more effectively.

The Byrd-Hagel Resolution: This is the resolution (S.Res.98) that the Senate passed in 1997 stating their reservations about the Kyoto treaty. Remember, it passed 95-0 – the Senate voting unanimously against the pact. Here is a link to the PDF document. (The link is long, so be sure to cut and paste the whole string into your browser.)

http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=105_cong_bills&docid=fsr98ats.txt.pdf

The Copenhagen Consensus: From their own statement of purpose: “The basic idea was to improve prioritization of the numerous problems the world faces, by gathering some of the world’s greatest economists to a meeting where some of the biggest challenges in the world would be assessed.” The Consensus climate change paper, written by William Cline, also included opposition notes by Alan Manne and Robert Mendelsohn. Contact information for all three is included in the Experts section.

<http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/>

The Energy Information Administration (EIA): This offshoot of the U.S. Department of Energy was created by Congress in 1977. It is the DOE’s statistical agency and provides data, forecasts and analyses, including an extensive look at the impact of signing Kyoto. Here is a link to that report:

<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/kyoto/kyotobtxt.html>

American Council for Capital Formation: The ACCF and the ACCF Center for Policy Research advocate for a strong and stable U.S. economy. The organization promotes the view “that a nation’s economic strength and stability depend upon well-thought-out economic and environmental policies to promote capital formation.” They did a detailed economic analysis of global warming that included economic models from several different sources. That report can be found here:

<http://www.accf.org/thorning1098.htm>

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