



Hot Topics, Cold Truth

Dr. S. Fred Singer interviewed by John F. McManus

Q. *Do you have a position regarding global warming?*

A. I certainly do. The climate warms and cools naturally all the time. It changes from day to day, month to month, season to season, year to year, and so on. At times, there is global warming; at other times there is global cooling. Some climate changes are predictable and some are not. We can predict that the winters are colder than the summers because we understand the mechanism. We cannot predict the climate from year to year, however, because we do not know why it fluctuates. When the climate warms, there could be a number of reasons for it doing so, including the sun. Another possibility is that human activities are adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, and this could produce some warming.

The important question then is: How important is the effect of human activities? And that we cannot tell. We know the theory, which says that human activity could be important, but the theory cannot be trusted until it has been verified. Until now, this theory, which is based largely on a mathematical model, has not been validated against observations. If the theory becomes validated against observations, then we can be more confident about using it to predict the future. But we're not there yet, and nobody should be basing conclusions and remedies on an unverified theory.

Q. *What do the scientific data really show about global warming?*

A. Data from earth satellites in use since 1979 do not show any warming. But, eventually, they probably will because carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are increasing in the atmosphere. My personal guess, and I stress that this is only my guess, is that there is a greenhouse effect and that it is very small in comparison to natural fluctuations of the climate. We don't see this effect yet, but we may notice it in the next century. Even if we do notice it, it will be extremely small and actually inconsequential. It will be an interesting scientific curiosity but it won't be of any practical importance.

Q. *If we experience a couple of warmer years, is it possible that the next year will be cooler?*

A. Of course. Climate fluctuates all the time, and we aren't always able to know why. During the period 1940 until 1975, the climate actually cooled. There was real fear that we were entering another ice age. But the climate suddenly warmed and these fears disappeared.

Q. *We repeatedly hear mention of the "greenhouse effect" in which heat is supposedly trapped in the atmosphere because of the presence of carbon dioxide and other gases. Is there such an effect?*

A. Yes, there is a greenhouse effect. But the problem here is that high government officials have declared that climate science is "settled" and "compelling." The clear implication is that enough is known about it to act, and that any further research findings would be "policy-irrelevant" and not important to international deliberations that have led to a climate treaty. My published conclusions state otherwise, that any warming from the growth of greenhouse gases is likely to be minor, difficult to detect above the natural fluctuations of the climate, and therefore inconsequential. In addition, the impacts of warming and the higher carbon dioxide levels are likely to be beneficial for human activities, especially for agriculture that thrives on carbon dioxide.

But, again, the greenhouse effect is real. The emissions of carbon dioxide that we are putting into the



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atmosphere will make it more pronounced. But that doesn't mean that the climate is going to warm perceptibly. The atmosphere is very complicated, and there are negative feedbacks that cancel some of the warming. The easiest way to understand what I mean by "negative feedback" is to consider clouds. If you warm the ocean, you get more water vapor, more evaporation, and more clouds that will keep sunlight from entering the earth's surfaces. This results in a cooling effect — a negative feedback.

***Q.** Reports about global warming repeatedly cite the 1990 report produced by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Is this a reliable document?*

A. The IPCC modified its own report after it had been approved, taking out key phrases to make it appear certain that human activities were affecting the climate. A few key individuals even removed much of the phraseology that discussed the uncertainties of such an opinion. Numerous scientists have pointed out that this document is unreliable.

***Q.** Were the scientists who produced the initial IPCC report aware that changes had been made after they approved it?*

A. No, the changes were done quietly by just a few individuals. Two thousand persons worked on this UN project and more than 1,000 of them were scientists. Approximately 80 saw and approved what they thought was the final report and then just a handful altered it. The newer version (in 1996) included a "Summary for Policymakers" containing a previously unmentioned factor involving human activity's effect on climate. This led to a conclusion that "the balance of evidence suggests there is a discernible human influence on global climate." Those who are skeptical about this IPCC conclusion have viewed the statement about "discernible human influence" as trivial and meaningless. But, on the other hand, the media and many policy experts have welcomed its convenient formula as scientific proof of a coming climate catastrophe.

***Q.** Did any of the scientists involved in this UN study balk at the alterations?*

A. Yes, and perhaps the most noteworthy was the highly respected Dr. Frederick Seitz, the former president of the National Academy of Sciences whose objection was published in the *Wall Street Journal*. He became aware of what had been done and considered it a very grave breach of scientific protocol and ethics. He's been maligned ever since by individuals from the UN group and by others who decided to throw in their fortune with the UN. These people actually altered a graph and some of the text in the IPCC report.

***Q.** There have been several articles about an increase in the number and size of icebergs that have broken off from Antarctica. Is the increase in icebergs due to global warming?*

A. The climate did warm over the last 100 years and that's why icebergs are breaking off. There's no question about that. But the warming took place between 1880 and 1940 so that it is a bit warmer now than it was 100 years ago.

***Q.** Does it take that long for an iceberg to break off?*

A. Yes, it takes a long time for portions of the ice to break off. The melting has been going on for thousands of years and the West Antarctic ice sheet is still melting. The ice sheet may even disappear in 7,000 years. But the real point is that there's nothing we can do about it. The reason it's melting is because it's warmer now than when the ice formed a long time ago.

***Q.** You mentioned the "climate treaty" and I assume you mean the 1997 Kyoto Protocol that called for industrial nations to cut emissions of "greenhouse gases" in order to deal with global warming. What is*



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your response to this proposal?

A. The Kyoto proposal, even if fully implemented, won't accomplish anything as far as climate is concerned. It certainly won't stop the Antarctic ice sheet from melting. The only thing that will stop that is another ice age.

Q. *Won't it accomplish a great deal as far as industry is concerned?*

A. Oh, yes. But the announced purpose of the proposal is to prevent global warming and stabilize the climate. It won't do anything of the sort. If you obey it punctiliously, and all the countries that are supposed to cut back their industrial activity do exactly as called for, even the UN group has calculated that it will reduce the temperature during the next century by 0.05 degrees. No one can even measure that! It is admittedly completely ineffective, so now they're saying that it's an important first step.

Q. *Do you see this as far more political than scientific?*

A. Yes I do. Even a UN report says that we have to reduce emissions by between 60 and 80 percent worldwide. The Kyoto Protocol, if implemented, reduces emissions by a mere five percent among industrialized nations only. But this would have a devastating effect on the economy of our nation. It's part of the anti-technology, anti-energy, anti-growth philosophy of the extreme "greens."

Q. *Have you seen or heard about the rash of television ads stressing the threat of global warming?*

A. These campaigns are being underwritten by a few foundations. The National Environmental Trust has received \$11 million to run ads. The government is doing its share by bleeding off money from research and putting it into town meetings and other gatherings to get people upset about this issue. Recently, there was a campaign in Minneapolis called "The Heat is On" to alert people in Minnesota to the danger of slightly warmer winters. That really takes the cake, doesn't it? I would think the people in Minnesota would be pleased if the climate warmed. The Canadian government has another program entitled "Environment Canada" to get the Canadian people to worry about slightly warmer winters.

Q. *Would it be harmful if the climate does become warmer?*

A. If it does warm, there will be numerous benefits. Agriculture will be aided because crops will grow faster and sturdier. There will be slightly warmer winters with no effect on summers. Sea level will be hardly affected or perhaps it will rise slightly. This is because of the melting of the ice from the Ice Age and there's nothing we can do about it. Kyoto's proposals certainly won't help.

Q. *Do you think a change in our own national leaders will help to calm the fears that have been generated by environmental doomsayers?*

A. I'm hoping that the election in 2000 will settle many things. Should George W. Bush be elected president, we have to remember that he subscribed to the science of global warming but he added that he's opposed to the Kyoto protocol. To be perfectly honest, I don't know where he stands. But I don't think the climate issue will surface during the presidential campaign. I don't think people care that much about it and maybe that's a good thing. They're not reacting to the doomsayers as they were expected to do.

Q. *Doesn't Vice President Al Gore contend that the global warming threat is real?*

A. He's not a scientist. He likes to believe the theory because it predicts strong warming and helps to advance his agenda.

Q. *Have you read his book, Earth in the Balance, where he actually calls for an end to the internal*



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combustion engine, the guts of our automobiles?

A. No, I haven't read the book but I've read numerous reviews. I understand that he did call for the end of the internal combustion engine. But, by itself, that would not be so serious if there were a substitute that works. I'm ready to substitute something for the internal combustion engine, something like a fuel cell that works, is cost effective, and economical for consumers. There are people working on this, but they haven't produced one yet.

Q. *Other than your own Science and Environmental Policy group, are you part of any scientific groups?*

A. Yes, I signed the Oregon petition, which has been signed by 20,000 persons, 18,000 of whom have scientific degrees, many with advanced degrees. This project, begun in response to Kyoto, was launched by Dr. Arthur B. Robinson. He received important help from Dr. Fred Seitz, who sent a letter to scientists across the nation containing eight pages about global warming. In his letter, he stated that the Kyoto agreement was "based on flawed ideas" and that "data on climate change do not show that human use of hydrocarbons is harmful." And he urged recipients to sign the petition, which stated simply:

We urge the United States government to reject the global warming agreement that was written in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997, and any other similar proposals. The proposed limits on greenhouse gases would harm the environment, hinder the advance of science and technology, and damage the health and welfare of mankind.

There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth's atmosphere and disruption of the Earth's climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth.

The Oregon petition was never altered and has 20,000 signatories. The doctored IPCC statement has only 2,000 signatories. But the media seem to focus only on the IPCC statement.

Q. *What about the ozone layer and the claims that it is being depleted because of human activity?*

A. The ozone layer depletion stopped about 1992. No more depletion has occurred. The total depletion that took place according to a thick United Nations report is about four percent. That's negligible. Ozone varies from day to day by about 100 percent, and from season to season — if you average it — by about 40-50 percent. The World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program together produced figures stating that there has been no ozone depletion since 1992.

Q. *If there are no problems associated with global warming or ozone depletion, is there any environmental problem?*

A. The big problem, in my view, is disposing of solid waste, a nice way of referring to garbage. Many areas of the country are finding it difficult to locate suitable places for landfills. Some states are trying to ship their waste to other states. Officials are trying to prohibit the dumping of sludge in the ocean. And if you put waste underground, it may pollute the ground water. This is a real problem. But nobody seems to be getting excited about it. It doesn't appeal to politicians because politicians seem to love global problems that are more glamorous than garbage.

Q. *Do you have an answer to the garbage problem?*



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A. Incineration is a good answer. But it's frowned on because it might create a little bit of dioxin. Yet this is the solution that's being used in Europe. Taking care of the problem this way also generates some energy, so it has some additional advantages.

Q. *What is your attitude about nuclear power?*

A. Nuclear power is a perfectly reasonable solution to our energy problem. It may or may not be cheaper depending on how the generating stations are built and maintained. The degree of regulation now in place makes it rather expensive, particularly if you force power companies to rebuild their plants while they're being built in order to satisfy newer regulations. But in many countries, generating electricity with nuclear power is cheaper than any other method. It is tragic that there have been no new nuclear power stations built in this country for many years. In countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and now China, they are building these stations rapidly. I hope they are using American technology because it is the safest.

Q. *Any final comments?*

A. Ten to twenty years from now, younger people will look at their parents and grandparents in disbelief and ask, "Gosh, were you really worried about global warming and ozone depletion?"

Dr. S. Fred Singer is an atmospheric physicist who leads the Washington-based Science and Environmental Policy Project. He is also a distinguished research professor at George Mason University in Virginia and the Institute for Space Science and Technology in Florida. He was the first director of the U.S. Weather Satellite Service, now a branch of the Department of Commerce. He is the author of numerous books, the latest of which is Hot Talk, Cold Science: Global Warming's Unfinished Debate.



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