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Gore Urges Cap on Carbon Emissions, Global Climate Pact

He Tells Senators the Situation Is Dire

By Juliet Eilperin
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Thursday, January 29, 2009; A03

Former vice president Al Gore urged lawmakers yesterday to adopt a binding carbon cap and push for a new international climate pact by the end of this year in order to avert catastrophic global warming.

Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Gore delivered a short slide show that amounted to an update of his Oscar-winning documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," lecturing some of his former colleagues that even if the world halted greenhouse gas emissions now, the world could experience a temperature rise of 2.5 to 7.5 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

"This would bring a screeching halt to human civilization and threaten the fabric of life everywhere on the Earth, and this is within this century," Gore said.

The high-tech display included a graphic illustration of how the Arctic's permanent summer ice cover has melted in recent decades, a pulsating image the Nobel Peace Prize winner described as "30 years in less than 30 seconds," and a short video clip of a scientist who ignited the methane gas seeping out of the melting Arctic permafrost.

After the audience watched the flames leap up and the researcher scurry away, Gore remarked: "She's okay. The question is, are we?"

Gore received a largely sympathetic hearing from the panel.

"Frankly, the science is screaming at us," said the committee's chairman, [John F. Kerry](#) (D-Mass.), who added that the United States would not make the mistake of leaving emerging economies out of any future climate agreement.

"A global problem demands a global effort, and today we are working toward a solution with a role for developed and developing countries alike, which will be vital as we work to build consensus here at home in tough economic times," Kerry said.

Gore did not sugarcoat his message to senators. While politicians including President Obama have touted the importance of exploring "clean coal technology," the former vice president said it will not be available for years: "We must avoid becoming vulnerable to the illusion that this is near at hand. It is not."

[Sen. Richard G. Lugar](#) (Ind.), the committee's top Republican, asked Gore to draw on his experience as "a practical politician" to explain how senators could muster a broad bipartisan majority for any international treaty that could come out of the Copenhagen climate conference at the end of the year.

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After distancing himself from his political past -- "I'm a recovering politician. I'm on about Step 9" -- Gore said the chances of a treaty passing the Senate should be boosted by developing countries' willingness to embrace binding climate goals, coupled with the new scientific evidence of recent warming and Obama's leadership.

[Sen. Bob Corker](#) (R-Tenn.), who supports a carbon tax rather than a cap-and-trade system, said he thinks the only way to construct a bipartisan coalition on climate change is to be honest about what it means to curb greenhouse gas emissions. "I think we can build consensus around transparency," Corker said, adding that when it comes to addressing global warming, "we're really talking about increasing the price of carbon."

Corker said that even lawmakers who have some reservations about a carbon cap's economic impact need to acknowledge it will likely become reality.

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