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July 05, 2006

A Convenient Lie

By **John Stossel**

When he was in college, atmospheric-science professor John Christy was told, "it was a certainty that by the year 2000, the world would be starving and out of energy."

That prediction has gone the way of so many others. But environmentalists continue to warn us that we face environmental disaster if we don't accept the economic disaster called the Kyoto treaty. Lawyers from the Natural Resources Defense Council (another environmental group with more lawyers than scientists) explain: "Sea levels will rise, flooding coastal areas." And Al Gore's new movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," depicts a future in which cities are submerged by rising sea levels.

Wow.

But many scientists laugh at the panic.

Christy says, "Doomsday prophecies grabbed headlines but have proven to be completely false. Similar pronouncements today about catastrophes due to human-induced climate change sound all too familiar."

But the media can't get enough of doomsday.

The *Washington Post* reported that because of melting ice caps and glaciers, "The End Is Near!" But melting Arctic ice won't raise sea levels any more than the melting ice in your drink makes your glass overflow.

MSNBC and the BBC ran stories on the coming calamity from Greenland's melting glaciers. Unlike Arctic ice, those melting glaciers could raise sea levels. But other reports note that Greenland's ice has been thickening in the interior of Greenland.

The former vice president's film shows dramatic film of big chunks of ice breaking off glaciers, but the "calving" of icebergs is a normal, natural process involved in the growth of glaciers into the sea. The movie features some majestic glaciers that existed in the 19th Century that have all but disappeared today -- but it doesn't bother to mention any of the glaciers growing in Norway, New Zealand and even the United States. The U.S. Forest Service reports that the Hubbard Glacier in Alaska's Tongass National Forest is advancing so rapidly, it threatens to close off a major fjord.

He shows shocking time-lapse photos of ice disappearing from Mt. Kilimanjaro. The ice there has been melting for over a hundred years.

Climate always changes. "An Inconvenient Truth" implies that all serious scientists agree that it is a crisis, and that the United States must immediately reduce carbon dioxide emissions as dictated by the Kyoto treaty the Bush administration so arrogantly refuses to sign -- the same treaty the Clinton-Gore administration didn't even submit to the Senate.

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But even advocates of Kyoto admit that if all nations signed the agreement and obeyed it, it would affect global temperatures by less than a tenth of a degree!

To achieve a meaningful reduction in emissions, politicians would have to set drastic limits on driving, air conditioning and all industrial production. I suppose "essential" car use would be allowed, and politicians would decide what is essential. A \$10 a gallon tax on gasoline might be a start, and Al Gore could funnel the tax money to the scientist "friends" he repeatedly cites in his movie.

Let's calm down.

The scary claims about heat waves and droughts are based on computer models. But computer models are lousy at predicting climate because water vapor and cloud effects cause changes that computers fail to predict. They were unable to anticipate the massive amounts of heat energy that escaped the tropics over the past 15 years, forcing modelers back to the drawing board. In the mid-1970s, computer models told us we should prepare for global cooling.

The fundamentalist doom-mongers ignore scientists who say the effects of global warming may be benign. Harvard astrophysicist Sallie Baliunas says added carbon dioxide in the atmosphere may actually benefit the world because more CO₂ helps plants grow. Warmer winters would give farmers a longer harvest season.

Why don't we hear about this part of the global warming argument?

"It's the money!" says Dr. Baliunas. "Twenty-five billion dollars in government funding has been spent since 1990 to research global warming. If scientists and researchers were coming out releasing reports that global warming has little to do with man, and most to do with just how the planet works, there wouldn't be as much money to study it."

And the politicians would have one less excuse to take control of our lives.

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