

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON THE SCIENCE OF GLOBAL WARMING
MAY 17, 2000

C We meet here today to examine the issues surrounding global warming. This subject continues to be an issue of great importance to the environment and to the economic future of the country. To better prepare ourselves to objectively evaluate future legislative policy, the Committee will explore three issues: 1) the underlying science behind global warming; 2) exactly, where we are in our research efforts; and, 3) what does it all mean?

C For many years, scientists have been warning us about the "greenhouse effect" caused by man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases, and the far-reaching environmental consequences which could result if the problem is not properly addressed. A large amount of evidence has been presented to suggest that this phenomenon is real and is due to the activity of man. However, there has also been evidence presented to contradict this conclusion.

C Earlier this year, the National Research Council concluded that the warming trend during the past twenty years is real and is substantially greater than the average temperature of warming during the twentieth

century. The report also identified a substantial disparity between satellite data trends and surface temperature trends.

C The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has also issued a draft of its Third Assessment Report which will, in all likelihood, suggest a warming trend when its final version is released early next year. These two reports, in addition to hundreds of other studies, outline the need for a more firm understanding and a scientific consensus of global warming.

C I would like to offer one brief example of global warming's potential harm. According to the United Nation's Environment Program, the global average sea level has risen by 10 to 25 centimeters over the past 100 years. It is likely that much of this rise is related to an increase in the lower atmosphere's global average temperature since 1860. Scientific models further project a rise in sea levels of a foot and a half by the year 2100. This projected rise is two to five times faster than the rise experienced over the past century. The impact of such movement on our coastal communities and businesses, such as fisheries, agriculture, and tourism is unknown, but the consequences could be serious considering that half of the U.S. population lives in the coastal communities.

C We look forward to hearing more about the outlined reports and potential scenarios from our witnesses today, along with the new findings from the government's research efforts.

C Most importantly, any actions the United States takes in response to claims of "global warming" must be based on the best science available and not on rhetoric or political expedience. We must continue to invest in our research capabilities to fully understand the scientific interactions between humans, the land, the ocean, and the atmosphere.

C The testimony presented here today will serve as valuable insight for this Committee. We hope to establish a baseline for the Committee on the current state of knowledge on the subject of global warming.

C I welcome all of our witness here today.