



Stop digging

Molly Ivins - Creators Syndicate

06.03.02 - AUSTIN, Texas — Throwing around words like "fantastic" and "stupefying" is considered bad form outside the tabloid press. But I'm damned if I know what else to say about the news that the Bush administration has decided that global warming is indeed taking place and they are planning to do exactly nothing about it.

Here we are in the middle of wallowing in this, "What didn't they know and why didn't they know it?" debate — this maddening, haunting and probably useless exercise in "Why didn't somebody do something?" Sept. 11 left quite a bit of spilt milk on the floor, but even that disaster will pale against the consequences of unchecked global warming. Yet here is the Bush government announcing right here and now that it knows this disaster is coming but *it will not do anything to stop it*. They will not even do anything to slow it down or soften its impact. What can you call that except fantastically irresponsible?

According to *The New York Times*, the United States has reported to the United Nations that that global warming will substantially alter our climate in the next few decades, but the report "recommends adapting to inevitable changes. It does not recommend making rapid reductions in greenhouse gases to limit warming, the approach favored by many environmental groups and countries that have accepted the Kyoto Protocol, a climate treaty written in the Clinton administration that was rejected by Mr. Bush." For the first time, the Bush administration acknowledges that global warming is mostly caused by humans burning fossil fuels, but it proposes to do exactly nothing about it.

"Adapt to the inevitable changes"? The changes are not inevitable. The changes, according to scientists, can be mitigated, the effects ameliorated and at the very least we can stop aggravating the potential catastrophe. The First Rule of Holes is that when you are in one, you should stop digging. To keep right on doing what is already causing disastrous consequences is either insane or profoundly stupid.

Environmentalists do not underestimate the difficulties the United States faces in trying to wean itself from fossil fuel. Pretty much our entire transportation grid is based on the gasoline engine. "Lay rail," is one thing we could do. Switch to cars with hybrid engines, increase fuel-efficiency standards, change as rapidly as possible to renewable energy sources — the menu of alternative behaviors is already long and it works. We can cut greenhouse gases; we can even do it dramatically. We are not helpless.

We are, however, currently governed by an administration of oil executives and people whose main guiding principle seems to be opposing anything Bill Clinton favored. This is both pathetic and ridiculous. Kert Davies, director of Greenpeace USA's global warming campaign, said, "The Bush administration's climate policy smells like Exxon-Mobil."

That's not conspiratorial thinking or a politically motivated crack against Bush. Greenpeace has a new report out, "Denial and Deception: A Chronicle of Exxon-Mobil's Efforts to Corrupt the Global Warming Debate." Exxon-Mobil and the other oil giants have spent millions of dollars to undermine the science of global warming. They are not in denial, a perfectly understandable reaction to bad news, but acting out of greed-driven duplicity.

Here's an idea. Under the right-wing legal doctrine of "takings," whenever the government does something that reduces the value of your property, you have a right to sue. Bush is in fact busily appointing judges who uphold this doctrine. One thing global warming will do is destroy an awful lot of property value. So let's sue the government now.

To fail to take action in the face of a recognized threat is not only incredibly stupid, but also legally actionable. Misfeasance, malfeasance and nonfeasance can all be alleged, reckless, irresponsible conduct, failure of duty ... a litany of charges.

The eternal complaint, "Everybody complains about the weather but nobody does anything about it," is about to be stood on its head. No point in complaining about global warming if you *don't* do something about it.

"In the next few decades ..." says the report. Let's call it 20 years, so most of us can expect we'll still be here. We'll live to see the meadows and the marshlands gone, the coasts going under and blasted by hurricanes, the Southwest dead of thirst and the whole problem getting worse because nothing has been done to stop it. And when they hold the great congressional investigation in 20 years to find out who knew and who should have done something about it, they won't have to subpoena documents from the CIA and the FBI, no energy company will need to shred the evidence, the White House won't have to stonewall, no cover-up will be needed — because we will find that it was all on the front pages 20 years ago.

And whom will we blame then for not doing something in time?

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