

Bush Voices Doubts on Global Warming Causes

President Pledges More Studies, but Offers Few Plans to Allies

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President Bush declared yesterday that substantial doubts remain about the causes and severity of global warming as he set off on his maiden presidential trip to Europe with promises of more studies but few specific proposals on how to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

Bush, addressing an issue that will be a prominent subject of his talks with European leaders, said he was determined to take "a leadership role on the issue of climate change" by sponsoring increased scientific inquiry and "partnerships within our hemisphere and beyond to monitor and measure and mitigate emissions."

But the president struck a defiant tone in the face of widespread criticism by U.S. allies in Europe and Asia that he is failing to recognize the seriousness of global warming. He offered a detailed critique of the Kyoto global warming treaty that he renounced in March and gave his most expansive explanation yet of his doubts about studies that blame the planet's rising temperatures largely on man's activities.

"We do not know how much effect natural fluctuations in climate may have had on warming," Bush said in a Rose Garden appearance before he departed for Madrid, the first stop on his five-day trip. "We do not know how much our climate could, or will change in the future. We do not know how fast change will occur, or even how some of our actions could impact it. . . . And, finally, no one can say with any certainty what constitutes a dangerous level of warming, and therefore what level must be avoided."

Some European allies, and many environmental groups, took immediate issue with the president's remarks, charging he was returning to questions that had been raised and answered during his father's administration, which ended in 1993. Former Clinton administration officials said that one of the centerpieces of the plan Bush outlined yesterday was a program that had been developed by President Bill Clinton.

European and Japanese leaders had anxiously awaited the president's speech in hopes he might offer the outlines of a proposal that would lead to an international agreement on global warming this year. "This will not meet the test in Europe of what they are looking for," said a European diplomat in Washington who is close to the global warming negotiations. "He hasn't given them much to go on here."

In Japan, the early morning news report by NHK, the national broadcasting corporation, gave the details of Bush's speech briefly and noted, "This has made the confrontation between the U.S. and Europe a very definitive one."

Bush said the global warming accord negotiated by the United States and 167 other nations in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997 was "fatally flawed in fundamental ways." The agreement, which was never ratified by the Senate or any other major industrialized country, set the first binding limits on emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases that scientists say are contributing to global warming and threaten disastrous climate change.

White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr. acknowledged yesterday that the administration had mishandled the announcement that it would not adhere to the Kyoto accord, telling reporters "we did not do a good job setting the stage for the obvious discussion of the flaws of Kyoto."

"The emperor Kyoto was running around for a long time and he was naked," Card said. "It took President Bush to say, 'The guy doesn't have any clothes on.' "

Bush said in his speech that the United States accounts for nearly 20 percent of the world's man-made greenhouse emissions; European governments and environmental groups say it is closer to 25 percent. But the president also noted that the United States is responsible for a fourth of the world's economic output, and said the Kyoto pact exempted developing countries, including China and India, two other large polluters.

The agreement set unrealistic targets that were "arbitrary and not based upon science," Bush said. Kyoto would have required the United States to reduce emissions by 7 percent below 1990 levels. Because of the extraordinary economic growth over the past decade, however, it effectively would have resulted in a 30 percent cutback, which the administration argues would have a devastating impact on the economy.

"We recognize our responsibility and will meet it -- at home, in our hemisphere, and in the world," Bush said. "We're committed to protecting our environment and improving our economy, to acting at home and working in concert with the world."

Bush proposed spending as much as \$25 million to help build climate observation systems in developing countries. He also proposed a joint venture with the European Union, Japan and other countries to develop improved methods of forecasting climate change. He also announced he would launch a program to work with universities and laboratories to fund demonstration projects for more environmentally friendly vehicles and energy production.

The Global Climate Coalition, representing industry and utilities, hailed the president's speech as a "practical, forward-looking approach" that would "lead the world out of the Kyoto quagmire." Eileen Claussen of the industry-backed Pew Center on Global Climate Change noted that while Bush had given the Europeans little to cheer about, "he left open the opportunity for further action."

Most global warming experts, however, said they were stunned by Bush's skepticism about the scientific research on the problems of climate change, including a National Academy of Sciences report requested by the administration and issued last week that supported the body of opinion that global warming is real. They noted that the president's father acknowledged the extent of the problem in 1992 by signing the original global warming treaty negotiated in Rio de Janeiro.

Former Clinton officials asserted that Bush's technology research initiative was merely a repackaging of a program begun during the Clinton administration. Clinton launched a Climate Change Technology Initiative in October 1997 that called for \$6.3 billion over five years in new funding and tax incentives for research and development on ways of addressing the problems of climate change.

Congress funded the program, but at substantially reduced levels. Bush proposed further cuts in the program as part of his budget submission this year.

Philip E. Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust, said Bush's "continued harping on scientific uncertainty undercuts his credibility, both at home and abroad." Brent Blackwelder, president of Friends of the Earth, said, "Going to Europe with this message can only heighten Bush's image there as an arrogant leader who puts the interests of his wealthy, polluting friends above those of the health and safety of the entire planet."

European Union leaders are expected to raise global warming on Wednesday when they meet with Bush in Goteborg, Sweden. The Kyoto treaty committed industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average 5.2 percent by 2012 from 1990 levels. The EU said it plans to cut emissions by 8 percent over that period.

Correspondent Kathryn Tolbert in Tokyo contributed to this report.