How Climate Change Comes to Matter

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Appendix:
A Decade of Climate Change

Since the release of the 3rd Assessment Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2001, there have been many efforts to engage the American public. This is not a comprehensive timeline but an overview of events and changes relevant to this book.

2001  The IPCC, an international organization of thousands of climate scientists, representing 130 countries, and formed by the World Meteorological Organization and United Nations Environment Programme, releases its 3rd Assessment Reports.

— Sheila Watt-Cloutier begins four-year term as chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).

— Following the founding of their Energy and Climate Change program a year earlier, Ceres, a corporate social responsibility group based in Boston, meets to discuss how to link risk to climate change.

— Gallup begins polling Americans about whether news coverage of climate change is exaggerated, correct, or underreported. By 2010, those who see news coverage as exaggerated will reach a high of 48 percent.


— John Houghton, chair of IPCC’s 2001 Working Group One, joins with American scientist Calvin DeWitt to begin a distinctly evangelical dialogue on climate change. Together, their two groups, the John Ray Initiative (Houghton) and Au Sable Institute (DeWitt), organize a conference for Christians at Oxford. Richard Cizik, the former vice president of government affairs for the National Evangelical Association (NAE), is a reluctant attendant, but later describes his experience as one of “conversion” to concern about climate change.

2003 Republican strategist Frank Luntz, in a memo to President Bush that was later leaked, deemed “climate change” a less threatening term than “global warming” and advocated its use by the Bush administration. The memo so influenced environmentalists that, for a time, many opted for “global warming” (Lee 2003).

— Ceres holds its first biennial Investor Summit on Climate Risk at the United Nations in New York City. By 2012, INCR will have 520 participants representing assets totaling $22 trillion.

2004 The Arctic Council releases the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). Billed as a thorough combination of traditional and scientific knowledge, ACIA heavily involved indigenous people and over 300 scientists.

— The Union of Concerned Scientists issues two reports and a statement signed by sixty prominent scientists, including twenty Nobel laureates, condemning the Bush administration’s “distortion” and “misuse” of science and in particular castigating the inaction on climate change, which scientists had nearly unanimously agreed should be a priority issue.

— The intention to draft an Inuit human rights petition is announced at the annual UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) 10 in Buenos Aires. The petition is led by then international ICC chair and Canadian Inuk Sheila Watt-Cloutier.
— *Science* publishes an article by historian of science and geologist Naomi Oreskes, who analyzed 928 peer-reviewed scientific articles and argues that scientists are in consensus on climate change. She states: “Politicians, economists, journalists, and others may have the impression of confusion, disagreement, or discord among climate scientists, but that impression is incorrect.” Oreskes subsequently writes an op-ed based on this research for the *Washington Post* (2004a; 2004c).

— Cizik, Ball, and DeWitt attempt to re-create the Oxford experience in the United States at another conference held near the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay at the Sandy Cove Conference Center. Houghton is a keynote speaker, and the conference is sponsored by the Evangelical Environment Network, NAE, and *Christianity Today*. The conference produces the Sandy Cove Covenant and lays the foundation for the 2006 Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI).

— NAE releases “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility,” in which it lists Creation Care as one of its priorities.

— An article by Maxwell and Jules Boykoff is published in *Global Environmental Change* showing that media are biased in their reporting of climate change because they have reported equally on climate skeptics, adhering to the journalistic practice of balancing opposing points of view.

**2005**

— Signed in 1997, the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol comes into effect.

— Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus publish their essay, “The Death of Environmentalism,” contending that the public’s inability to attend to climate change in any significant way is prime evidence of the environmental movement’s failure. This sets off a round of intense debates and discussions within the environmental movement, including a response from environmental justice advocates called “The Soul of Environmentalism.”

— Hurricane Katrina formed over the Bahamas, hit the coast of Florida, traveled up the Gulf of Mexico, and made landfall as a Category 5 Hurricane on August 23, wreaking destruction over 100 miles inland throughout the Mississippi region—most severely on the city of New Orleans. Though the exact number remains in dispute, it is estimated
that almost 2,000 people died. It was the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Shortly after Katrina, Hurricane Rita followed, adding yet more injury and loss to an already battered Gulf coastline.

— MIT’s Kerry Emanuel publishes an article in *Nature* that finds a link between climate change and a rise in the intensity of hurricanes, but his projections are for fifty years hence. Still, he becomes a media sensation and is inundated with calls from reporters in the days following the storms. Based in large part on Emanuel’s research, *Time* magazine devotes a cover the week after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita asking: “Are We Making Hurricanes Worse? The Impact of Global Warming” (Kluger 2005). Emanuel was later profiled in the *New York Times* and other major newspapers, and *Time* named him one of the most influential people in 2006 (Dreifus 2006; Kluger 2006). It didn’t matter that Hurricane Katrina could not be directly attributed to climate change, nor could the damage it inflicted be solely attributed to the hurricane itself. Investigations afterward found that the failure of levees in New Orleans, a foreseeable technological problem, led to much of the worst damage (McQuaid and Schleifstein 2006).

— On December 7 at the UNFCCC COP 11 in Montreal, a group gathers for a side table session called “the right to be cold.” Sheila Watt-Cloutier announces that, after two years of research, she and sixty-two other Inuit individuals have submitted a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The petition named the United States as a violator of the 1948 Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. The petition states that U.S. inaction on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the effects of climate change violates the Inuit right to life and physical security, personal property, health, practice of culture, use of land traditionally used and occupied, and the means of subsistence.

2006 In May 2006 *An Inconvenient Truth* premieres, featuring Al Gore and his climate “slide show,” arguing for the scientific fact of climate change and the need for personal and political action. It features prominently the imagery from and following Hurricane Katrina, as well as other evidence of what climate change could portend for humanity on a global scale. The film later receives an Oscar in the documentary category.
— The Evangelical Climate Initiative, a declaration signed by a group that includes mega-church pastors, Christian college presidents, and para-church leaders, is released. The New York Times reports in advance of the release of ECI that other prominent evangelical leaders including James Dobson and Charles Colson have sent a letter declaring that ECI does not speak for all evangelicals. This letter spawns the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance and reinvigorates the 1999 Cornwall Declaration, which maintains that the science behind climate change is still “uncertain.”

— Sir Nicholas Stern releases The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review in November 2006 and unleashes a maelstrom of controversy in science, policy, and media circles. Commissioned by then UK prime minister Tony Blair, Stern’s 700-page report focuses on whether it makes sense or not to pursue a mitigation strategy in the face of a range of scientific climate change predictions. Its main conclusion is that the benefits of strong, early action on climate change far outweigh the costs of not acting, and that “climate change will affect the basic elements of life for people around the world. . . . Hundreds of millions of people could suffer hunger, water shortages and coastal flooding as the world warms.” Stern estimates that not acting to avert climate change could cost the equivalent of losing 5 percent global GDP annually—a figure that could rise to 20 percent “if a wide range of risks and impacts is taken into account.” Reducing greenhouse gas emissions now, in contrast, could limit those costs to 1 percent annually.

— The Inuit petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is rejected. Sheila Watt-Cloutier is later asked to make a submission in early 2007 on behalf of all indigenous peoples adversely affected by climate change.

2007 The IPCC releases its fourth series of assessment reports. For the first time, the IPCC devises a media strategy complete with press conferences in order to avoid the kind of lackluster response they had gotten in 2001. Taking off the scientific qualifications found in previous reports, the IPCC states that the warming of the climate is unequivocal and the global temperature increase is very likely due to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. The report predicts that warming, Arctic ice melt, and sea level rise would continue for de-
cades even if emissions levels were stabilized and that the attendant impacts could be catastrophic for island nation-states and those dependent on polar ice caps.

— On January 17, 2007, a group of twenty-eight scientific and evangelical leaders issue “An Urgent Call to Action: Scientists and Evangelicals Unite to Protect Creation.” The “Call” speaks convincingly about the shared “moral passion” and “sense of vocation to save the imperiled living world before our damages to it remake it as another kind of planet.” It states that the protection of life on earth “requires a new moral awakening to a compelling demand, clearly articulated in Scripture and supported by science,” and it specifically expresses concern for “the poorest of the poor” who not incidentally also inhabit some of the richest areas of Earth’s biodiversity.

— Arctic Science Summit, held at Dartmouth College, kicks off the fourth International Polar Year (2007–9). IPY is sponsored by the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and is backed by national funding bodies like the National Science Foundation in the United States. The first IPY was held in 1882–83, and included eleven participant countries, and fifteen Polar expeditions. The second IPY was held 1932–33 and included forty participant countries. The third IPY was held in 1957–58 in conjunction with the International Geophysical Year—an event proposed by the International Council of Scientific Unions. Sixty-seven nations participated, with twelve nations participating through sixty-five research stations in Antarctica.

— The Supreme Court rules that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is legally required to account for greenhouse gas emissions.

— President Bush acknowledges the veracity of climate change in his statement that Americans are “addicted to oil.” Despite this shift, six climate-related bills in the Senate, and eight in the House of Representatives, no formal changes in American policy ensue.

— Al Gore and the IPCC are awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change.” Earlier, Sheila Watt-Cloutier had been rumored to be a potential recipient of the prize.
— Al Gore joins with Kevin Wall to produce Live Earth on July 7, 2007 (7–7–7), a series of benefit concerts occurring in Sydney, Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Kyoto, Shanghai, London, Hamburg, Rome, Washington, D.C., East Rutherford, New Jersey, and Antarctica. The concerts involved 150 artists and were broadcast in 132 countries.

— Media coverage of climate change in the United States hits an all-time high.

2008

Creation Care holds its first conference to equip pastors at Northland Church in Orlando, Florida.

— Polar bears are made an endangered species as a result of climate change predictions, but many critics who reside across the Arctic in Canada and the United States decried this as a symbolic and ultimately unhelpful change to policy (Economist 2007; Palin 2008; Watt-Cloutier 2007).

— With one of the longest running records of public opinion on the issue, Gallup reports in April that climate change continues to rank near the bottom of environmental concerns and that those who worry about climate change “a great deal” are about the same percentage as in 1989 when they first began polling on the issue (Newport).

— A 2008 survey by the Pew Research Center finds that evangelicals (31 percent) are more likely than the average American (21 percent) and much more likely than mainline Protestants (18 percent) and black Protestants (15 percent) to deny the existence of climate change and anthropogenic causes. And while 47 percent of Americans acknowledged there was “solid evidence” of climate change and human causality, only 34 percent of white evangelicals and 39 percent of black evangelicals agreed. These percentages are lower than the percentage of Republicans in general who are not convinced of the fact of climate change. During this same period, the percentage of Republicans convinced of climate change began to decrease from 62 percent in 2007 to 49 percent in 2008 as compared with 84 percent of Democrats and 75 percent of independents (Pew 2008).

— Barack Obama is elected president for the first time.

2009

A Global Summit of Indigenous Peoples is held in Anchorage, Alaska, to discuss climate change, led in part by ICC chair Patricia Cochran, now two years into her four-year term following Watt-Cloutier.
resulting Anchorage Declaration is meant to provide direction to the upcoming UNFCCC COP 15, but not all parties present at the Summit agree to sign on.

— Several weeks before COP 15, e-mail accounts belonging to the Climatic Research Group at the University of East Anglia are hacked. Scientists in the United States and Great Britain are accused of bias in the peer review discussions and of manipulating or misrepresenting data. Multiple review committees later exonerate the scientists involved, finding that peer review had not been compromised.

— UNFCCC holds its COP 15 in Copenhagen. According to COP 13, held in Bali in 2007, a new framework for climate change mitigation should be adopted at Copenhagen. The resulting Copenhagen Accord was roundly criticized as a failure to achieve binding targets for emissions reduction.

2010 The SEC releases nonbinding guidelines that recommend climate change risk disclosure. Months later, however, the Chicago Climate Exchange, a voluntary, legally binding emissions trading exchange and the only one of its kind in the United States with 450 members, ceases trading. The European Climate Exchange and Chicago Climate Futures Exchange remain operational, but the loss of CCX deals a major blow to many who touted it as a market-based solution in advance of policy.

— In response to what is widely viewed as the failure of COP 15 in Copenhagen, the Bolivian government hosts the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia, resulting in a declaration entitled “the Peoples Agreement.”

2012 The first commitment period for emissions reduction related to the Kyoto Protocol (covering 2008–12) comes to an end.

2013 Following Hurricane Sandy, President Obama says this in his State of the Union address on February 12: “But for the sake of our children and our future, we must do more to combat climate change. Yes, it’s true that no single event makes a trend. But the fact is, the twelve hottest years on record have all come in the last fifteen. Heat waves, droughts, wildfires, and floods—all are now more frequent
and intense. We can choose to believe that Superstorm Sandy, and the most severe drought in decades, and the worst wildfires some states have ever seen were all just a freak coincidence. Or we can choose to believe in the overwhelming judgment of science—and act before it’s too late.” Obama announces his national climate action plan on June 25.

As this book goes to press, global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have hit 400 parts per million for the first time in 3 million years, and the IPCC is releasing its fifth assessment reports beginning in late 2013. Many hold high hopes for COP 20 in Lima, scheduled for December 2014. Gallup polls indicate that 58 percent of Americans are concerned about climate change, up from 51 percent in 2011. And while 48 percent believed media coverage of climate change was exaggerated in 2010, only 41 percent believe the same in 2013.