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Al Gore Speaks on Global Warming and the Environment
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Thank you, Carol, Joan and Peter. And thanks to all of you for coming here today. It was an honor to work with Carol Browner on environmental policies in the last administration and I am grateful for her leadership of Environment 2004. I want to thank Peter for his leadership as Executive Director of MoveOn.org Civic Action and I appreciate all of those who have worked in the trenches with both of these organizations that are co-sponsoring today's speech.

I want to say a special word about Joan Blades, who traveled from California for this event and who, along with her husband, Wes Boyd, co-founded Moveon.org. She has been from the beginning a moving force behind the emergence of this dynamic new grassroots movement in American politics and public policy. I have made a series of speeches about the policies of the Bush / Cheney Administration towards the major challenges that confront our nation: national security, economic policy, civil liberties, and today: the environment.

For me, this issue is in a special category because of what I believe is at stake. I am particularly concerned because the vast majority of the most respected environmental scientists from all over the world have sounded a clear and urgent alarm. The international community – including the United States – began a massive effort several years ago to assemble the most accurate scientific assessment of the growing evidence that the earth's environment is sustaining severe and potentially irreparable damage from the unprecedented accumulation of pollution in the global atmosphere.

In essence, these scientists are telling the people of every nation that global warming caused by human activities is becoming a serious threat to our common future. I am also troubled that the Bush/Cheney Administration does not seem to hear the warnings of the scientific community in the same way that most of us do. Here is what we are talking about: PICTURES 1 THROUGH 8 Even though the earth is of such vast size, the most vulnerable part of the global environment is the atmosphere – because it is surprisingly thin – as the late Carl Sagan used to say: like a coat of varnish on a globe.

PICTURES 9 THROUGH 12 I don't think there is any longer a credible basis for doubting that the earth's atmosphere is heating up because of global warming. PICTURES 13 THROUGH 65 So the evidence is overwhelming and undeniable. Global Warming is real. It is happening already and the anticipated consequences are unacceptable. But it is important to understand that this crisis is actually just a symptom of a deeper underlying cause: PICTURES 66 THROUGH 126

Yet in spite of the clear evidence available all around us, there are many who still do not believe that Global Warming is a problem at all. And it's no wonder: because they are the targets of a massive and well-organized campaign of disinformation lavishly funded by polluters who are determined to prevent any action to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming, out of a fear that their profits might be affected if they had to stop dumping so much pollution into the atmosphere.

And wealthy right-wing ideologues have joined with the most cynical and irresponsible companies in the oil, coal and mining industries to contribute large sums of money to finance pseudo-scientific front groups that specialize in

sowing confusion in the public's mind about global warming. They issue one misleading "report" after another, pretending that there is significant disagreement in the legitimate scientific community in areas where there is actually a broad-based consensus.

The techniques they use were pioneered years earlier by the tobacco industry in its long campaign to create uncertainty in the public's mind about the health risks caused by tobacco smoke. Indeed, some of the very same scientific camp-followers who took money from the tobacco companies during that effort are now taking money from coal and oil companies in return for their willingness to say that global warming is not real. PICTURES 127 AND 128

In a candid memo about political strategy for Republican leaders, pollster Frank Luntz expressed concern that voters might punish candidates who supported more pollution, but offered advice on the key tactic for defusing the issue: PICTURE 129 The Bush Administration has gone far beyond Luntz' recommendations, however, and has explored new frontiers in cynicism by time and time again actually appointing the principal lobbyists and lawyers for the biggest polluters to be in charge of administering the laws that their clients are charged with violating.

Some of these appointees have continued to work very closely with the outside pseudo-scientific front groups even though they are now on the public payroll. Two Attorneys General have now publicly accused officials in the Bush White House Council on Environmental Quality of conspiring with one of the outside groups to encourage the filing of a lawsuit as part of a

shared strategy to undermine the possibility of government action on Global Warming.

Vice President Cheney's infamous "Energy Task Force" advised lobbyists for polluters early in the new administration that there would be no action by the Bush White House on Global Warming and then asked for their help in designing a totally meaningless "voluntary" program. One of the industry lobbyists who heard this pitch later made an unguarded speech to his peers about the experience and said the following: "Let me put it to you in political terms. The President needs a fig leaf. He's dismantling Kyoto, but he's out there on a limb. The White House has routinely gone out on a limb to involve large contributors representing companies charged with violating environmental laws and regulations in the drafting of new laws and regulations designed to let their clients off the hook. The story is the same when it comes to protecting the American people from pollution. The Bush administration chooses special interests over the public interest, ignoring the scientific evidence in favor of policies its contributors demand. Consider Mercury, an extremely toxic pollutant causing severe developmental and neurological defects in fetuses.

We know its principal unregulated source is coal-fired power plants. But the Bush Administration has gutted the protections of the Clean Air Act, revoking an earlier determination by the EPA that mercury emissions from power plants should be treated as hazardous air pollutants. Even Bush's own FDA issued warning about mercury in tuna. Are you all right with that – the President saying that Mercury shouldn't be treated as a hazardous air

pollutant? Consider toxic wastes. The Superfund has gone from \$3.8 billion to a shortfall of \$175 million.

The result is fewer cleanups, slower cleanups, and a toxic mess left for our children. That's because the Bush administration has let its industry friends off the hook; the tax these polluters used to pay to support the Superfund has been eliminated, so that you, me, and other taxpayers are left holding the bill. Are you all right with that – the country's worst polluters getting off the hook while you and I pay? And consider the enforcement of environmental laws. For three years in a row, the Bush administration has sought to slash enforcement personnel levels at EPA.

Offices were told to back off cases, leaving one veteran EPA servant to say, "The rug was pulled out from under us...You look around and say, "What contribution can I make here?" Are you all right with that – the EPA being stripped of its ability to protect our air and water? I'll tell you who's all right with that. A recent review of contributions to the Bush campaign from utility industry executives, lawyers and lobbyists showed that 15 individuals were Bush Pioneers – those who raised at least \$100,000 for the Bush campaign.

We've seen this radical change in our parks too. Just ask the coalition of more than 100 retired career park service employees who wrote a letter saying that their mission to protect parks' natural resources has been changed to focus on commercial and special-interest use of parks. These are not small shifts in policy – they are radical changes that reverse a century of American policy designed to protect our natural resources. Here's what America used to be. Yellowstone Park was created in 1872, in part to preserve its forest, mineral and geothermal resources.

Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 championed this philosophy, setting aside millions of acres of forest reserves, national monuments and wildlife refuges. This balanced approach - combining use of needed resources in the short term with conservation for future generations -- has been honored by Roosevelt on down the line, president after president - until this one. In preparing this series of speeches, I have noticed a troubling pattern that characterizes the Bush/Cheney Administration's approach to almost all issues. In almost every policy area, the Administration's consistent goal has been to eliminate any constraints on their exercise of raw power, whether by law, regulation, alliance or treaty - and in the process they have in each case caused America to be seen by the other nations of the world as showing disdain for the international community. In each case they devise their policies with as much secrecy as possible and in close cooperation with the most powerful special interests that have a monetary stake in what happens. In each case the public interest is not only ignored but actively undermined.

In each case they devote considerable attention to a clever strategy of deception that appears designed to prevent the American people from discerning what it is they are actually doing. Indeed, they often use Orwellian language to disguise their true purposes. For example, a policy that opens national forests to destructive logging of old-growth trees is labeled " The Healthy Forest Initiative. " A policy that vastly increases the amount of pollution that can be dumped into the air is called the " Clear Skies Initiative. And in case after case, the policy adopted immediately after the inauguration has been the exact opposite of what was pledged to the American people during the election campaign. The promise by candidate

Bush to conduct a “humble” foreign policy and avoid any semblance of “nation building” was transformed in the first days of the Bush presidency, into a frenzied preparation for a military invasion of Iraq, complete with detailed plans for the remaking of that nation under American occupation.

And in the same way, a solemn promise made to the country that carbon dioxide would be regulated as a polluting greenhouse gas was instantly transformed by the inauguration into a promise to the generators of CO₂ that it would not be regulated at all. And a seemingly heartfelt declaration to the American people during the campaign that he genuinely believed that global warming is a real problem which must be addressed was replaced after the Inauguration by a dismissive expression of contempt for careful, peer-reviewed work by EPA scientists setting forth the plain facts on at global warming.

These and other activities make it abundantly clear that the Bush White House represents a new departure in the history of the Presidency. He is so eager to accommodate his supporters and contributors that there seems to be very little that he is not willing to do for them at the expense of the public interest. To mention only one example, we've seen him work tirelessly to allow his friends to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Indeed, it seems at times as if the Bush-Cheney Administration is wholly owned by the coal, oil, utility and mining companies.

While President Bush likes to project an image of strength and courage, the truth is that in the presence of his large financial contributors he is a moral coward – so weak that he seldom if ever says “No” to them on anything – no matter what the public interest might mandate. The problem is that our

world is now confronting a five-alarm fire that calls for bold moral and political leadership from the United States of America. With such leadership, there is no doubt that we could solve the problem of global warming.

After all, we brought down communism, won wars in the Pacific and Europe simultaneously, enacted the Marshall Plan, found a cure for polio and put men on the moon. When we set our sights on a visionary goal and are unified in pursuing it, there is very little we cannot accomplish. And it is important to recall that we have also already succeeded in organizing a winning global strategy to solve one massive global environmental challenge: PICTURE 130 AND 131

Instead of spending enormous sums of money on an unimaginative and retread effort to make a tiny portion of the Moon habitable for a handful of people, we should focus instead on a massive effort to ensure that the Earth is habitable for future generations. If we make that choice, the U. S. can strengthen our economy with a new generation of advanced technologies, create millions of good new jobs, and inspire the world with a bold and moral vision of humankind's future. PICTURES 132 THROUGH 138 We are now at a true fork in the road. And in order to take the right path, we must choose the right values and adopt the right perspective.

PICTURES 139 THROUGH 142 My friend the late Carl Sagan, whose idea it was to take this picture of the Earth, said this: " Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know. Everyone you ever heard of, every yhuman beingwho ever WAS lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering , thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines, every hunter and

forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every “superstar”, every “supreme leader”, every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors, so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot.

Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds, Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light... The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes.

Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand... There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known Here are some excerpts from Al Gore's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, as transcribed by the Toronto Star: Sometimes, without warning, the future knocks on our door with a precious and painful vision of what might be.

One hundred and nineteen years ago, a wealthy inventor read his own obituary, mistakenly published years before his death. Wrongly believing the inventor had just died, a newspaper printed a harsh judgment of his life's work, unfairly labeling him 'The Merchant of Death' because of his invention - dynamite. Shaken by this condemnation, the inventor made a fateful choice to serve the cause of peace. Seven years later, Alfred Nobel created this prize and the others that bear his name. Seven years ago tomorrow, I read my own political obituary in a judgment that seemed to me harsh and mistaken - if not premature.

But that unwelcome verdict also brought a precious if painful gift: an opportunity to search for fresh new ways to serve my purpose. Unexpectedly, that quest has brought me here. Even though I fear my words cannot match this moment, I pray what I am feeling in my heart will be communicated clearly enough that those who hear me will say, 'We must act. ' The distinguished scientists with whom it is the greatest honor of my life to share this award have laid before us a choice between two different futures - a choice that to my ears echoes the words of an ancient prophet: 'Life or death, blessings or curses.

Therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live. ' We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency - a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here. But there is hopeful news as well: we have the ability to solve this crisis and avoid the worst - though not all - of its consequences, if we act boldly, decisively and quickly.

However, despite a growing number of honorable exceptions, too many of the world's leaders are still best described in the words Winston Churchill applied to those who ignored Adolf Hitler's threat: 'They go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent. ' So today, we dumped another 70 million tons of global-warming pollution into the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet, as if it were an open sewer. And tomorrow, we will dump a slightly larger amount, with the cumulative concentrations now trapping more and more heat from the sun.

As a result, the earth has a fever. And the fever is rising. The experts have told us it is not a passing affliction that will heal by itself. We asked for a second opinion. And a third. And a fourth. And the consistent conclusion, restated with increasing alarm, is that something basic is wrong. We are what is wrong, and we must make it right Earth's Fate Is the No. 1 National Security Issue By Al Gore Friday, October 12, 2007 11: 05 AM Editor's note: The following article appeared in the Post's Outlook section on May 14, 1989. HOW CAN WE possibly explain the mistakes and false starts President Bush has been making on environmental policy?

His administration's decision to censor scientific testimony on the seriousness of the greenhouse effect -- and initially to oppose an international convention to begin working out a solution to it -- may well mean that the president himself does not yet see the threat clearly. Apparently he does not hear the alarms that are awakening so many other leaders from Margaret Thatcher to Mikhail Gorbachev. Humankind has suddenly entered into a brand new relationship with the planet Earth. The

world's forests are being destroyed; an enormous hole is opening in the ozone layer.

Living species are dying at an unprecedented rate. Chemical wastes, in growing volumes, are seeping downward to poison groundwater while huge quantities of carbon dioxide, methane and chlorofluorocarbons are trapping heat in the atmosphere and raising global temperatures. How much information is needed by the human mind to recognize a pattern? How much more is needed by the body politic to justify action in response? If an individual or a nation is accustomed to looking at the future one year at a time, and the past in terms of a single lifetime, then many large patterns are concealed.

But seen in historical perspective, it is clear that dozens of destructive effects have followed the same pattern of unprecedented acceleration in the latter half of the 20th century. It took 10, 000 human lifetimes for the population to reach 2 billion. Now in the course of one lifetime, yours and mine, it is rocketing from 2 billion to 10 billion, and is already halfway there. Yet, the pattern of our politics remains remarkably unchanged. That indifference must end. As a nation and a government, we must see that America's future is inextricably tied to the fate of the globe.

In effect, the environment is becoming a matter of national security -- an issue that directly and imminently menaces the interests of the state or the welfare of the people. To date, the national-security agenda has been dominated by issues of military security, embedded in the context of global struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union -- a struggle often waged through distant surrogates, but which has always harbored the risk of

direct confrontation and nuclear war. Given the recent changes in Soviet behavior, there is growing optimism that this long, dark period may be passing.

This may in turn open the international agenda for other urgent matters and for the release of enormous resources, now committed to war, toward other objectives. Many of us hope that the global environment will be the new dominant concern. Of course, this national-security analogy must be used very cautiously. The U. S. -Soviet rivalry has lasted almost half a century, consumed several trillions of dollars, cost close to 100, 000 American lives in Korea and Vietnam and profoundly shaped our psychological and social consciousness.

Much the same could be said of the Soviets. Nothing relieves us of our present responsibilities for defense or of the need to conduct painstaking negotiations to limit arms and reduce the risk of war. And yet, there is strong evidence the new enemy is at least as real as the old. For the general public, the shocking images of last year's drought, or of beaches covered with medical garbage, inspired a sense of peril once sparked only by Soviet behavior. The U2 spy plane now is used to monitor not missile silos but ozone depletion.

Every day in parts of southern Iowa, where it hasn't rained for more than a year, National Guard troops are being used to distribute drinking water. In the not too distant future, policies that enable the rescue of the global environment will join, perhaps even supplant, our concern with preventing nuclear war as the principal test of statecraft. However, it is important to distinguish what would -- in military jargon -- be called the level of threat.

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Certain environmental problems may be important but are essentially local; others cross borders, and in effect represent theaters of operations; still others are global and strategic.

On this scale, the slow suffocation of Mexico City, the deaths of forests in America and Europe or even the desertification of large areas of Africa might not not be regarded as full-scale national-security issues. But the greenhouse effect and stratospheric ozone depletion do fit the profile of strategic national-security issues. When nations perceive that they are threatened at the strategic level, they may be induced to think of drastic responses, involving sharp discontinuities from everyday approaches to policy.

In military terms, this is the point when the United States begins to think of invoking nuclear weapons. The global environment crisis may demand responses that are comparatively radical. At present, despite some progress made toward limiting some sources of the problem, such as CFCs, we have barely scratched the surface. Even if all other elements of the problem are solved, a major threat is still posed by emissions of carbon dioxide, the exhaling breath of the industrial culture upon which our civilization rests.

The implications of the latest and best studies on this matter are staggering. Essentially, they tell us that with our current pattern of technology and production, we face a choice between economic growth in the near term and massive environmental disorder as the subsequent penalty. This central fact suggests that the notion of environmentally sustainable development at present may be an oxymoron, rather than a realistic objective. It declares war, in effect, on routine life in the advanced industrial societies.

And -- central to the outcome of the entire struggle to restore global environmental balance -- it declares war on the Third World. If the Third World does not develop economically, poverty, hunger and disease will consume entire populations. Rapid economic growth is a life-or-death imperative. And why should they accept what we, manifestly, will not accept for ourselves? Will any nation in the developed world accept serious compromises in levels of comfort for the sake of global environmental balance?

Who will apportion these sacrifices; who will bear them? The effort to solve the nuclear arms race has been complicated not only by simplistic stereotypes of the enemy and the threat he poses, but by simplistic demands for immediate unilateral disarmament. Similarly, the effort to solve the global environmental crisis will be complicated not only by blind assertions that more environmental manipulation and more resource extraction are essential for economic growth.

It will also be complicated by the emergence of simplistic demands that development, or technology itself, must be stopped for the problem to be solved. This is a crisis of confidence which must be addressed. The tension between the imperatives of growth and the imperative of environmental management represents a supreme test for modern industrial civilization and an extreme demand upon technology. It will call for the environmental equivalent of the Strategic Defense Initiative: a Strategic Environment Initiative.

I have been an opponent of the military SDI. But even opponents of SDI recognize this effort has been remarkably successful in drawing together

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previously disconnected government programs, in stimulating development of new technologies and in forcing a new analysis of subjects previously thought exhausted. We need the same kind of focus and intensity, and similar levels of funding, to deal comprehensively with global warming, stratospheric ozone depletion, species loss, deforestation, ocean pollution, acid rain, air and water and groundwater pollution.

In every major sector of economic activity a Strategic Environment Initiative must identify and then spread increasingly effective new technologies: some that are already in hand, some that need further work, and some that are revolutionary ideas whose very existence is now a matter of speculation. For example, energy is the life blood of development. Unfortunately, today's most economical technologies for converting energy resources into useable forms of power (such as burning coal to make electricity) release a plethora of pollutants. An Energy SEI should focus on producing energy for development without compromising the environment.

Priorities for the near term are efficiency and conservation; for the mid-term, solar power, possibly new-generation nuclear power, and biomass sources (with no extraneous pollutants and a closed carbon cycle); and for the long term, nuclear fusion, as well as enhanced versions of developing technologies. In agriculture, we have witnessed vast growth in Third World food production through the Green Revolution, but often that growth relied on heavily subsidized fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation and mechanization, sometimes giving the advantage to rich farmers over poor ones.

We need a second green revolution, to address the needs of the Third World's poor: a focus on increasing productivity from small farms on marginal land with low-input agricultural methods. These technologies, which include financial and political components, may be the key to satisfying the land hunger of the disadvantaged and the desperate who are slashing daily into the rain forest of Amazonia. It may also be the key to arresting the desertification of sub-Saharan Africa, where human need and climate stress now operate in a deadly partnership.

Needed in the United States probably more than anywhere is a Transportation SEI focusing in the near term on improving the mileage standards of our vehicles, and encouraging and enabling Americans to drive less. In the mid-term come questions of alternative fuels, such as biomass-based liquids or electricity. Later will come the inescapable need for re-examining the entire structure of our transportation sector, with its inherent emphasis on the personal vehicle. The U. S. government should organize itself to finance the export of energy-efficient systems and renewable energy sources.

That means preferential lending arrangements through the Export-Import Bank, and Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Encouragement for the Third World should also come in the form of attractive international credit arrangements for energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable processes. Funds could be generated by institutions such as the World Bank, which, in the course of debt swapping, might dedicate new funds to the purchase of more environmentally sound technologies.

Finally, the United States, other developers of new technology, and international lending institutions, should establish centers of training at locations around the world to create a core of environmentally educated planners and technicians -- an effort not unlike that which produced agricultural research centers during the Green Revolution. Immediately, we should undertake an urgent effort to obtain massive quantities of information about the global processes now under way -- through, for example, the Mission to Planet Earth program of NASA.

And we also must target first the most readily identifiable and correctable sources of environmental damage. I have introduced a comprehensive legislative package that incorporates the major elements of this SEI: It calls for a ban, within five years, on CFCs and other ozone-depleting chemicals, while promoting development of safer alternatives; radically reducing CO₂ emissions and increasing fuel efficiency; encouraging massive reforestation programs; and initiating comprehensive recycling efforts.

Although Congress is recognizing the challenge, there remains a critical need for presidential leadership, for President Bush to show that as a nation we have the vision and the courage to act responsibly. And in order to accomplish our goal, we also must transform global politics, shifting from short-term concerns to long-term goals, from conflict to cooperation. But we must also transform ourselves -- or at least the way we think about ourselves, our children and our future.

The solutions we seek will be found in a new faith in the future of life on earth after our own, a faith in the future which justifies sacrifices in the present, a new moral courage to choose higher values in the conduct of

human affairs, and a new reverence for absolute principles that can serve as guiding stars for the future course of our species and our place within creation.