



Wealth Creation ... and Preservation

3rd Quarter 2007

Special Report

\$25.00 per copy

GLOBAL WARMING or Climate Change?

Yes, I suppose you *could* say that I am just foolish enough to tackle a "third rail" politically charged subject like this one. I venture into this arena for several reasons, though none of them are sufficiently good to warrant running the risk of alienating my current and prospective clients:

1. I bring no bias to the discussion. I am not running for public office, I belong to no political party, and I am not a member of any activist, lobbying, environmental, tree-hugging, or similar group in the U.S. or anywhere else. I do believe that each of us has a responsibility to preserve and protect our world, to improve rather than deplete its ability to sustain human (and all other forms of) life. After all, it's the only one we have.

2. I have devoted a fair amount of study to this matter, and believe I have something to contribute. Though my notions are not original, I believe the way in which I present them may well be.

3. I believe that the American people are not getting a true picture, and certainly not a complete one.

4. Some of those who have a political agenda are proposing "solutions" which, if implemented, run the risk of needlessly bankrupting the entire world and causing war and conflict all over the globe. Others choose to ignore the problem entirely or pretend it does not exist. Until now there has been little but complacency [and ignorance] in between these extremes. Besides, the world is close enough to bankruptcy at the moment without us incurring immense costs to accomplish something that might not have the desired effect.

5. There are now [finally!] good answers to the right questions, but the right questions are seldom being asked. Both the right questions and the right answers are often suppressed in this debate. Just as the U.S. desperately needs an effective energy policy, we also need a comprehensive policy that will effectively address the real problems and work to resolve them. Aside from Al Gore, there seem to be few with the political will to address either problem.

6. Making the wrong choices is going to cost us a lot of money. Failure to properly evaluate the data free of bias, and to make appropriate decisions at the highest levels, will waste trillions of dollars and provide no benefit. It may even be counterproductive.

In this discussion it is vitally important to distinguish between man-made events which in some peoples' opinion are "destroying the environment" and events that are entirely out of our control that may well be changing the environment. We also need to separate out those man-made events that end up destroying productive land and degrading the aesthetics of our environment.

For example, in the portion of Virginia in which we now reside there is an all-too-common campaign in progress to take productive agricultural land - or land that could, if utilized, be productive for agriculture - and convert it into cities and residential subdivisions. This is a 20th century phenomenon in the West which could easily fizzle out as energy costs rise and private transportation must be supplemented by public transportation. The trend will doubtless continue in the Third World, India and China due to "population pressures". China is building cities for 25,000,000 people on formerly "empty" land, and is completing these cities at the rate of about two a year.

There is also the loss of environmental aesthetic that comes about due to poor local planning, bribery, corruption, and greed. It is a proven fact that paving the planet severely diminishes the ability of the earth to absorb moisture, with the effect that excess rainwater - and in some cases what used to be normal is now excessive because it has no place to go - becomes a danger, particularly for those living downstream. If you exacerbate the situation with climatic changes such as those we are currently experiencing, where rain comes in infrequent, torrential downpours instead of the former light, soaking rains over longer periods, you begin to see flooding and all the related damage that stems from it. We now have a very real, manmade problem in conjunction with one that may or may not be man-made, and the results are devastating.

There is even a political agenda that claims that war and disasters *stimulate* the economy and are therefore beneficial. This argument is completely false. Rebuilding a structure that has been destroyed in war or disaster may temporarily increase the velocity of money, but doing so depletes valuable resources and diminishes the wealth of the structure's owner. In fact, this argument is so completely illogical I am surprised that well-known politicians and economists proclaim it.

Some Observations

In all of my reading and study on the subject several things have become obvious to me regarding changes in world climate. I can't speak for the entire world because I have not even been to Antarctica, Australia, Africa or South America, but I have visited more than 30 countries and 49 of the 50 United States. If that gives me some useful insights, that's good.

One observation goes back to my childhood. I have seen mountains in many places, and everywhere I have gone I have seen glaciers in retreat. This includes Alaska, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, France, New Zealand, and the "lower 48". In other words, glaciers are melting in the Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western hemispheres. Does this indicate global warming, or climate change, or something else? Keep in mind that despite two related incidents in recent months, the breakoff of huge ice shelves in both the Arctic and Antarctica, the net amount of ice in Antarctica is *increasing* by hundreds of millions of tons each year.

(Note: Since I have so little space in *Wealth Creation and Preservation* I prefer not to occupy that valuable space with footnotes and references. If you would like them, I can provide them. All of my sources are available on the Internet and in your local library.)

Scientific studies have demonstrated clearly that for the relatively brief period for which data is available, the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere has increased - but only slightly as a percentage of the total amount of atmospheric gas. It has increased significantly relative to its former levels. There are two important questions regarding this increase; first, what has caused it? It is all too easy to claim that the Industrial Revolution and the use of fossil fuels is the culprit, but one active volcano like Mt. St Helens can put more CO₂ into the air in a month than the entire world does in a year. Second, does this very minor increase in carbon dioxide have *any* effect on world climate and weather?

When asking this question it makes sense to compare the date with those regarding the proliferation of CHFCs and the probably link to the hole in the ozone layer. We may be looking at two very different situations. I believe that CHFCs may well have contributed to the increasing size of the hole in the ozone layer, or at least I have reason to believe that the decision to ban CHFCs was based on better science than we have been seeing out of the global warming debate. As more and better data become available, a very disturbing picture is emerging.

Now think about how weather patterns have changed where you live. If the trend has been for warmer weather, what effect has that had on you? Many areas are seeing warm-weather flora and fauna move north into formerly cooler regions, along with molds, pollen and allergens. Is rainfall less frequent and more violent today than it was thirty years ago? Are heat waves more severe and longer-lasting? What about drought, or flooding, or brush fires, or inadequate snowmelt to feed streams and rivers throughout the summer and into fall? Have the forests begun to change their nature as warmer-climate trees take over from those that can survive brutal winters? When you go to the mountains year after year, have you noticed that the treelines are slowly moving *up* the mountain-side?

Do things grow better because there is more sunlight and more CO₂? According to the USDA, the answer is yes, and we ought

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to be grateful that crop yields have increased as a result. However, more CO₂ also means more weeds and undesirable plant life.

It is very important to separate the statistical data from the evidence before our eyes, because hard data is needed to accurately determine trends. However, we do know from our own experience whether things are changing, and we can sense the trend. There are many factors that contribute to these changes, if changes they truly are, and none of us is qualified to gather, interpret and analyze all the data by ourselves.

Other evidence

We are just now discovering how Greenland got its name, because for centuries it was a land of snow and ice with very short growing seasons in various parts of the country. Recently it has come to the attention of scientists and other that Greenland is experiencing a tremendous "thaw", a very significant climate change that could, if prolonged, greatly increase the capability of that country to sustain life.

Manmade Environmental Changes

Finally, think about the human impact upon our environment. The Colorado River is a great example. Before the West was developed to its current extent, and back in the 1960s, the Colorado flowed into the Gulf of California. Now, because so much of its flow has been diverted and damned for human use, water from the Colorado doesn't even cross the border into Mexico. Every drop is used by humans, is wasted, or evaporates along the way.

Similarly, workers under the direction of Stalin diverted the sources of the Aral Sea for the growth of cotton. They got lots of cotton, but the Aral Sea has lost as much as 90% of its water and a huge wasteland has formed around it.

I grew up in New York, and even where we lived 300 yards from Long Island Sound we used to get at least six to eight feet of snow each winter. My wife's family in the Black Forest had winters where they had to dig tunnels through the snow from their front door to the street. All that has changed gradually over the past half century to the point where snow is often no more than a minor inconvenience.

I recently got an updated copy of the climate zone map for the USA, and was amazed to find that the little pocket of land we lived in in New Hampshire is now in the same climate zone (Zone 4) as the area we are living in now in western Virginia. If this keeps up they will may be planting citrus trees in Maine fifty years from now.

Some of this information is experiential and by no means conclusive in and of itself. However, two facts are inescapable. First, winters have become milder and summers hotter across most of the U.S.A. Second, we seem to be experiencing more powerful weather and climate events. The drought in Florida and Hurricane Katrina are a couple of examples; the flooding of the Mississippi and other major rivers in recent years is another.

The big question

The big question is this; do we simply have global warming or climate change because of man's impact on the planet, or are we seeing climate change which is largely or entirely natural in origin? Having cited the bit about CHFCs and the ozone layer, I no longer believe that we can answer either half of the question in the affirmative by itself. My study indicates that we are experiencing both global warming and climate change due to man's impact and natural causes.

This is uncomfortable. We all look for quick and easy solutions to our problems, but this problem still defies definition. Until we understand all of the factors affecting climate change we cannot attack the root problem. In fact, until we identify and quantify all of those factors we will not know whether there is anything we could or even should do to effect changes. Nature is never static or fixed; nature *is* change. The world's climate is in a constant state of change, some of it short-term, some of it long-term, and some of it involving periods of time which we will never be able to accurately comprehend.

Those who would take action now - or those who promote awareness and action now - cannot possibly know what they are talking about if the statements in the previous paragraph are correct. Some things are perfectly clear; urban sprawl and paving "everything" are bad for the environment and man's ability to feed himself, but there seems to be no political will to alter the pace of growth. In fact, recent administrations have focused on the need to "keep the economy moving", as if America's self-indulgence were all that mattered in the world. Why is there no political will? You might ask those who hire lobbyists and provide politicians with all sorts of perks to get legislation passed that will enable them to continue to build and develop. There is no spirit of compromise in what we do, and little solid research into improving the ways we do things so that we might spare the environment.

However, we are rapidly approaching the day when we will be able to declare with much greater certainty how man and nature have unwittingly conspired together to permanently alter this planet's ability to sustain human life. We must eliminate misconceptions and bad data and focus on what is happening and why. Only then can we begin to address the question of what, if anything, we can do about it.

For example, it's not melting sea ice that will raise sea levels worldwide; ice contracts when it melts. It's glaciers and land-based ice sheets that are melting much more quickly that will raise sea levels perhaps several inches this century. This event alone will drive more than a hundred million people from their homes, and it has already begun.

It is true that there is an almost perfect correlation between sunspot activity and warming and cooling trends in the brief period of time we have been able to make accurate measurements. What is also important is that solar activity is *increasing* and, with it, the earth's temperature. It also now appears to be true that human activity - particularly the increase in CO₂ levels and the distribution of "aerosols" - are causing global temperatures to increase at what may now have become an increasing rate.

If you read nothing else on the subject - and I suppose we will be inundated with information from now on - I recommend you read the article *The Physical Science behind Climate Change* in the August 2007 issue of *Scientific American* magazine. It changed my mind about this problem because it reports on the latest data and analysis performed by hundreds of scientists around the world.

What can you do?

I hope you will get involved in the process of identifying and eliminating the causes of global warming and climate change. Even in our own neighborhoods there is much we can do. As a species we need to resume and update the discussion begun by Robert Malthus in the early 19th Century about the limits to growth and the ways in which we can make this world a better place for all of us. According to Ray Kurzweil, reversing the increase in CO₂ in the atmosphere will be easy once nanotechnology really gets going. That would enable us to solve what appears to be the greatest cause of global warming. What if he is wrong, or the technology comes too late, or if the "cure" turns out to be worse than the cause?

Those wonderful, high-efficiency mini-fluorescent light bulbs

Now here's a "crackpot" item if ever I saw one. The whole world is going to these compact, curled-up fluorescent light bulbs that replace regular incandescent bulbs, aren't they? You get solicitations from your utility company about them, you see them on TV, and they are prominently displayed in every grocery store, hardware store, and WalMart. Both Los Angeles County and the entire island continent of Australia have banned incandescent bulbs, phasing them out over the next several years.

It's a truly wonderful thing; these new mini-fluorescent bulbs consume approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ the electricity of an incandescent bulb of corresponding brightness. Though they are much more expensive to buy, they more than make up for their initial cost because they last much longer than incandescent bulbs and save you money on your electric bill each month.

What a wonderful idea, and what a marvelous technological achievement! Unfortunately, the color temperature of these new bulbs is generally unacceptable, but the engineers are trying to find a way to make that adjustment.

Now, however, someone has carelessly pointed out that these new mini-fluorescent bulbs, like all fluorescent bulbs, contain mercury, that highly toxic element found in contaminated seafood. One woman recently discovered that the cost of cleaning up the hazardous waste in her daughter's bedroom from a broken mini-fluorescent bulb was going to run around \$2,000. Why? Mercury contamination, of course. You run the same risk if you break a mercury thermometer. I have no idea why the cost of cleanup is so high; I'm just passing along what was reported.

Please read *An Inconvenient Truth*, if you haven't already. Much of the information in it is observational data. We may not be absolutely sure of the reason *why* the environment has changed, but we can be certain it *has* changed from the evidence before our eyes.

There are only about five milligrams of mercury powder (mercury is ordinarily a liquid at room temperature, so I don't know what they do to make it a solid), but environmentally safe dispersal of five milligrams requires some 17,000 cubic feet of earth. Now *there's* an interesting statistic, one that is probably a hodgepodge drawn from two unrelated tables in the OSHA handbook. That's the kind of statistic that, true or not, can be used to bludgeon the unsuspecting.

Two facts remain from this item, however: first, mini-fluorescent light bulbs *do* contain mercury, which is highly toxic and an environmental hazard. Second, disposal and storage of hazardous wastes is more than just problematic. Will you agree that if you dispose of thousands of these bulbs in a trash bin, some of them are going to break and release their mercury powder? If that is the case, how many will break when the mass of bulbs is compacted by a machine? Since this poses an obvious health and environmental hazard, will we have to segregate all our burnt-out mini-fluorescent bulbs from the regular trash and call for a decontamination squad to remove them? (The image in *Monsters, Inc.* comes to mind.) Perish the thought, but what are the real costs of cleanup should we ever break one? Finally, what happens to all those mini-fluorescent bulbs we have already thrown away, many of which have undoubtedly broken on their way to the landfill?

The facts stated above are as true as I can determine. Your comments and suggestions would be appreciated.