

Case # 70

Global WarmingC
Environment**Case:**

There is growing consensus in the scientific community that increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions since the advent of the Industrial Revolution is causing global climate change - specifically, global warming or "greenhouse effect." The United States is currently responsible for a quarter of global CO₂ emissions. Not surprisingly, waning U.S. commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions has sparked heated de

The 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Global Warming, signed by then President George H. W. Bush, came to fruition in 1997 in the form of the Kyoto Protocol, which represents the most comprehensive effort to reduce CO₂ emissions to date. Under Kyoto guidelines, President Clinton agreed to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent (or 7% below 1990 levels) between 2008 and 2012. Environmentalists and world leaders heralded the treaty as a crucial step towards heading off potentially catastrophic global climate change. During the latest summit held in Morocco in 2001, over 160 countries came to a ground breaking new agreement requiring 40 industrialized countries to reduce gas emissions.

Despite these efforts, the accords recently were rejected by the Bush Administration on the grounds that adherence to them would have grave consequences for the U.S. economy and that global warming is still a matter of scientific uncertainty. The Bush administration has estimated that the required U.S. reduction in CO₂ emissions would result in massive unemployment, steep price increases (52% for gasoline and 86% for electricity), and a sharp decrease in gross national product. Moreover, the Bush administration argues, "developing nation" polluters, like China and India, are exempt from the restrictions that the U.S. is bound to, even though estimates indicate that by 2025 China will emit more CO₂ than the current combined total of the U.S., Japan, and Canada.

Critics of the Bush administration policy point to the crippling effect the lack of U.S. support will have on the strength of the accords themselves. The rejection has also been a black eye to Bush administration foreign policy, with world leaders and others characterizing the U.S. as self-absorbed and a poor global citizen. Presidents and Prime Ministers of Germany, France, Thailand, Venezuela, Mexico, and dozens of other countries have severely criticized the Bush administration reversal. The Bush administration has also been criticized by scientists for ignoring evident facts in an over-zealous obsession with economic expansion. In the words of one Dupont official, "We saw sufficient science emerging to warrant what in our judgment was prudent action [to reduce CO₂ emissions] back in 1991."

The Bush administration has made it clear, however, that it has no intention of reconsidering its position on global warming at the present time.

Notes:

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