

"The Name of This Hurricane is Global Warming"

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Democracy Now! - Shortly after he took office, the President reneged on his campaign promise to cut emissions from power plants. He then ordered the EPA to remove all references to the damages of global warming from its website. Vice President Cheney came out with his energy plan calling for 1,900 new power plants, most of them coal. This is the fast track to climate hell. And, of course, the President withdrew us from the Kyoto Protocol, so he is really going in the opposite direction from the rest of the world, and he really is following the dictates of the fossil fuel lobby. There's no question about it.

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Democracy Now!

September 1, 2005

As the Bush administration promotes regulations that allow more pollution from power plants, we look at the increased impact of human-induced global warming in the form of extreme weather events such as Hurricane Katrina. [includes rush transcript]

The Bush administration has drafted regulations that would ease pollution controls on older, dirtier power plants and could allow those that modernize to emit more pollution, rather than less. The language could undercut dozens of pending state and federal lawsuits aimed at forcing coal-fired plants to cut back emissions of harmful pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. The draft rules were obtained by the Washington Post from the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Meanwhile, as the Gulf Coast struggles to cope the devastation left behind by Hurricane Katrina, a number of analysts around the country and the world are reflecting on the unusual severity of the storm and are making a connection with global warming.

In Germany, Environmental Minister Jurgen Tritten sparked a political firestorm this week when he penned an article in a German newspaper saying "Greenhouse gases have to be radically reduced worldwide. The US has, up until this point, had its eyes closed to this emergency." He linked Hurricane Katrina to global warming and America's refusal to reduce emission.

In 2001, the Bush administration announced it would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol that has been signed by 120 countries. The global treaty went into effect earlier this year without the support of the United States.

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In an article in the Boston Globe Tuesday, journalist and author Ross Gelbspan writes, "The hurricane that struck Louisiana yesterday was nicknamed Katrina by the National Weather Service. Its [real name is global warming](#) ." Gelbspan goes on to write, QUOTE "Unfortunately, very few people in America know the real name of Hurricane Katrina because the coal and oil industries have spent millions of dollars to keep the public in doubt about the issue."

Ross Gelbspan, special projects editor of The Boston Globe. He conceived, directed and edited a series of articles that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1984. He is author of "The Heat is On: The High Stakes Battle Over Earth's Threatened Climate" and "Boiling Point: How Politicians, Big Oil and Coal, Journalists, and Activists are Fueling the Climate Crisis -- and What We Can Do to Avert Disaster."

AMY GOODMAN: Ross Gelbspan joins us now from a studio in Boston. As Special Projects Editor of the Boston Globe, he conceived, directed and edited a series of articles that won a Pulitzer Prize. He is author of The Heat Is On: The High Stakes Battle Over Earth's Threatened Climate. Welcome to Democracy Now!, Ross Gelbspan.

ROSS GELBSPAN: Hi, Amy. How are you?

AMY GOODMAN: Very good. Well, talk about what you are seeing as the connections right now?

ROSS GELBSPAN: It's very clear that global warming does not make more hurricanes, but it makes hurricanes much stronger. And that's because hurricanes take their energy from the temperature of surface waters. In the case of Katrina, it started as a category one, I think 70 mile-an-hour winds when it glanced off South Florida, but as it moved through the Gulf where surface temperatures are about 80 degrees, it became enormously more powerful. I think the winds reached about 170 degrees, and that is a big reason for this incredible devastation that we have been seeing. It's very interesting that also Sir David King, who is Tony Blair's science adviser, made a direct link between hurricane intensity and global warming, and coincidentally, there was a piece of research done by Dr. Kerry Emanuel at M.I.T. that came out just a couple

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of weeks ago that found that tropical storms had become 50% more severe in the last 30 years, again because of rising temperatures.

JUAN GONZALEZ: How do you respond, obviously, to all of the so-called experts who may say, well, it may -- it's true that there's global warming, but how can you pin a particular hurricane's impact or intensity to that general trend? It's almost ? it seems to me like, well, you may have been exposed to asbestos, but how can you prove that the lung cancer you have came from that exposure?

ROSS GELBSPAN: Because we are seeing this increase in intensity all over the place. July was, I think, the second hottest July on record, and it triggered a record number of named tropical storms. So, Hurricane Katrina fits right into the pattern here of what we're seeing. And just to stop for a second, if we look at some other events that have been happening the same year, not necessarily hurricanes, but we had a two-foot snowfall in Los Angeles in January. We had 37 inches of rain in one day in Mumbai, India. We had this horrendous heat wave with 120 degrees in Arizona. We have the Missouri River just about empty because of a prolonged drought. All of these, including the intensity of hurricanes, are signatures of the warming of the planet.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to get your response, Ross Gelbspan, to the latest move of the Bush administration, cutting clean air regulations in this time of massive crisis. Can you talk about what's happening there?

ROSS GELBSPAN: Yeah. Amy, I think it's best understood if you step back and think that the science -- in order to mitigate global warming, the science is very clear. We have to cut our emissions worldwide by 70%, and that threatens the survival of the coal and oil industry. We need a rapid global transition to clean energy. Unfortunately, the White House, under the Bush administration, has become the East Coast branch of ExxonMobil and Peabody Coal. And those companies and those industries are really calling all of the shots for climate and energy policy in this White House. So, the regulations that you are talking about are very weak, and they're essentially being written by the lobbyists from big oil and big coal. And that's really what we're seeing in the bush administration.

AMY GOODMAN: Now, in response to what has taken place, the cutting of the restrictions. They're saying now it's only until September 15, but on clean air regulations, so they say it's to deal with the shortage of oil.

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ROSS GELBSPAN: I can understand that, and I'm sympathetic to that. The explanation I heard is that different states have different requirements for different kind of mixes of gasoline. Some require a component of ethanol and so forth. Because of the shortage, because of the damage to the refineries and the rigs, they're saying suspend those regs for another month or two. Let us just get whatever gasoline out we can, and then we'll go back to these mandated formulas when we're able to do that. So, I'm not unsympathetic to that, if it remains a temporary suspension.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And your response to the growing drumbeat in much of the media now of the commercial or corporate media preparing the American public for increased oil prices as a result of the situation in the Gulf right now in the hurricane aftermath?

ROSS GELBSPAN: I think that you're seeing some gouging going on. I think you are definitely going to see these prices going up. This also is taking place against the background of a larger trend toward depletion of oil, and we're passing what's called peak oil globally, which means we're going to see a very rapid decline in oil supplies. So the emphasis may be short term on the increased price of gasoline. There should be right now a worldwide effort to move toward clean energy, and the United States stands in very stark contrast to what's happening in Europe. As I mentioned, the science says we need to cut emissions by 70%. Right now, Holland is cutting her emissions by 80% in 40 years. Tony Blair has committed Britain to cut emissions by 60% in 50 years. The Germans have committed to 50% cuts in 50 years. French President Chirac recently called on the entire industrial world to cut emissions by 75% by the year 2050. So, I really think that while we're looking at higher gasoline prices in the short term, we really need to be looking toward an economy based on hybrid cars and hydrogen cars, on electricity that comes from wind and solar and tidal power and so forth. We really need to make this transition very rapidly, otherwise we are going to see many more natural disasters and a much more fractured and combative and degraded kind of civilization.

AMY GOODMAN: Ross Gelbspan, I wanted to get your response to a piece that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. wrote: "For They That Sow the Wind Shall Reap the Whirlwind." He says, "As Hurricane Katrina dismantles Mississippi's Gulf Coast, it's worth recalling the central role that Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour played in derailing the Kyoto Protocol and kiboshing President Bush's iron-clad campaign promise to regulate CO₂. In March 2001, just two days after EPA administrator Christie Todd Whitman's strong statement affirming Bush's CO₂ promise, former RNC Chief Barbour responded with an urgent memo to the White House. Barbour, who had served as RNC Chair and Bush campaign strategist, was now representing the President's major donors from the fossil fuel industry who had enlisted him to map a Bush energy policy that would be friendly to their interest. His credentials insured the new administration's attention." This is the current Mississippi governor, who has flown over the devastated area and is talking about what a massive disaster it is, comparing it to the

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destruction of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

ROSS GELBSPAN: Absolutely, and what Bobby Kennedy wrote is absolutely right, and it's an illustration of what I'm talking about. Shortly after he took office, the President reneged on his campaign promise to cut emissions from power plants. He then ordered the EPA to remove all references to the damages of global warming from its website. Vice President Cheney came out with his energy plan calling for 1,900 new power plants, most of them coal. This is the fast track to climate hell. And, of course, the President withdrew us from the Kyoto Protocol, so he is really going in the opposite direction from the rest of the world, and he really is following the dictates of the fossil fuel lobby. There's no question about it.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And what can Americans who are concerned about the lack of attention of our federal government to this issue, what can they do?

ROSS GELBSPAN: Unfortunately, it has to be political action. It's not lifestyle action. Even if we all sat in the dark and rode bicycles, it would not stop global warming, especially given the reliance on coal in India and China and on oil in Mexico and Nigeria and the developing countries. We need to take the lead in spearheading a rapid transition to clean energy. That will happen only through political pressure, and hopefully through pressure on the United States from a lot of the European countries that are already moving in that direction. I would just make a short plug. In my book, *Boiling Point*, that will be out in paperback next month, the last chapter deals with a set of policy strategies that would propel this kind of transition. This is not a technology issue. We have all these renewable sources right now. It's really a political issue. And so, I would urge people to take political action to force this kind of change.

AMY GOODMAN: Ross Gelbspan, I want to thank you very much for being with us, in Boston, author of *Boiling Point: How Politicians, Big Oil and Coal, Journalists and Activists Are Fueling the Climate Crisis and What We Can Do to Avert Disaster*.

RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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