

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



Janus Forum panelists spoke on the challenges advocates of climate change face if they don't speak in apocalyptic rhetoric.

Janus Forum panel urges tempered climate rhetoric

By: Dana Teppert

Posted: 4/16/08

As the star of the Academy Award-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on climate change, Al Gore has become a well-known face of the campaign against global warming. Yesterday at the Janus Forum panel, "Global Climate Change: The End of the World as We Know It?," Gore was held up as the face of something else - alarmist environmentalism.

"Gore and many others tell us it's a 'planetary emergency,'" but they have dramatically overstated the nature of the problems associated with climate change, said Bjorn Lomborg, an author who spoke on a three-man panel in Alumnae Hall. "Yes, global warming is real and man-made," he added. But "we need to start cooling our rhetoric. We need to stop talking about this as if it were the end of the world."

Lomborg's argument that the global warming problem has been overdramatized was echoed by the other panelists, Yale economist Robert Mendelsohn and Michael Schellenberger, co-founder and president of the Breakthrough Institute, a progressive think tank.

Lomborg made a name for himself with the publication of his book, "The Skeptical Environmentalist," and was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine in 2004. His presentation repeatedly featured Gore as a representative of those in the environmental movement who formulate climate change as a catastrophe. Lomborg argued that the world does need to cool the planet but that Gore and other environmentalists like him vastly exaggerate the consequences of global warming.

Mendelsohn, author of "The Impact of Climate Change on the United States Economy," projected that major impacts of global warming would not be felt by the planet for another 50 years. "It's the future emissions that are actually most harmful. The emissions your children are going to do," he said. "You actually have time - time to develop new technologies. We have time to come to global agreements to mitigate. We have time to adapt."

Shellenberger told the audience of mostly students that by exaggerating the impact of global warming on the planet, "environmental leaders have set up the problem in a way that is politically impossible to solve." He argued that global warming demands a shift in the current thinking on the problem. The U.S.

needs to move away from pollution regulation and begin to focus on global economic development and energy technology innovation, he said.

"Global warming demands a fundamental transformation of the global economy," Schellenberger said.

The private sector, he said, cannot achieve the current revolution in technology needed to meet the challenge of global warming by itself. The U.S. government must make massive clean energy investments in the future, likely between \$30 and \$80 billion, he said.

Mendelsohn emphasized that the effects of climate change would be felt most strongly by the rural poor living in developing countries.

"You need to realize that climate change is not fair," he said. The countries that emit the most carbon dioxide, the main pollutant associated with rising temperatures, are not the countries that will experience the greatest damage from changes in the climate, he said.

People will adapt to the challenges a warming planet presents, he said. He offered the example of swimmers adjusting to changes in the tides of the ocean in order not to be drowned as a metaphor for the situation.

Both Lomborg and Schellenberger called for smarter options to deal with climate change.

Lomborg criticized the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement among more than 170 countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It would only postpone global warming by a few years, he said, despite its \$180 billion annual cost. "The way forward is through investing dramatically more in research and development," he said.

Schellenberger also spoke on the difficulty of advocating climate change policies that go against the consensus. In response to one question posed by a student, Schellenberger said that both he and Lomborg have been called "climate change deniers" and "delayers." But policy consensus in this country does not allow alternative voices, he said. Anyone who suggests a different plan for dealing with climate change that does not agree with that consensus is told they are denying science, he said.

"It's been one of the most frustrating parts of being involved in climate change issues," he added.

© Copyright 2008 Brown Daily Herald