

## Opening Statement of Senator George J. Mitchell

Thursday, June 10, 1986: U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works,  
Subcommittee on Environmental Pollution; Hearing on Ozone Depletion, the Greenhouse Effect,  
and Climate Change

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I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I commend you for holding this series of hearings, and I look forward to participating with you. I apologize in advance for the fact that I will have to attend another hearing, but I do intend to review the record of testimony very carefully and to participate in tomorrow's hearing, as well.

The problem of global warming is one of immense significance. It is the most serious and more pressing than anticipated. Previously, most of the models forecasting the rate of global warming focused on the air pollutants produced by the combustion of fossil fuels. More recent data suggest that trace gases may increase the rate of warming by a factor of two. This means that warming may be increasing twice as fast as previously thought.

The data produced to date suggests there may be an average increase in temperature of 1°C since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Considering how much warmer this June has been than average, a 1 degree difference may appear to be insignificant, but an average of 1 degree increase could be devastating, so the experts tell us. A 1 degree increase in the average global

temperature would melt glaciers, and such melting would increase the sea level. There are uncertainties in predicting how much the sea level would increase in a particular area. In some cases, it could be an average increase of a few feet; in others, much more. For a coastal State like Maine and to other States along the coastline, such an increase would be devastating.

An average of 1 degree increase in temperature could have major impacts on agriculture. This country's Midwestern bread basket could again become a dust bowl. More heat would mean less water for crops and variations in growing seasons. It is important to keep in mind that this average increase is global in nature. It is not a national or regional problem. If American farmers suffer for lack of water, so will farmers all over the planet. If shorelines along our coast are flooded, so will shorelines everywhere in the world.

The enormity of this phenomenon is staggering, and we have a responsibility to limit emissions of pollutants that trap the heat in our atmosphere. As difficult, as immense, and as seemingly remote as the problem is to our daily lives, we cannot delay. There will be those who argue that more research is necessary to completely understand the phenomenon and to answer every scientific question.

As in the case of acid rain, such complete understanding will come only after we flounder in the weight of our shortsighted policies. This is one more

indication that the benefits of industrialization carry with them the burden of controlling pollutants. These pollutants threaten our lakes, fish, health, and forests today in the form of acid deposition.

We will hear today that these pollutants also threaten the future of our planet, which cannot tolerate such a sudden and dramatic increase in temperature and survive in a form familiar to us.

Solutions are possible and available. The statement released at the conclusion of the Villach Conference in Austria last October addresses the common nature of some of our environmental problems. That statement said in part that:

Climate change and sea level rises due to greenhouse gases are closely linked with other major environmental issues, such as acid deposition and threats to the Earth's ozone shield, mostly due to changes in the composition of the atmosphere by human activity.

Reduction in coal and oil use and energy conservation undertaken to reduce acid deposition will also lower concentration of greenhouse gases. Reductions in emissions of chlorofluorocarbons will help protect the ozone layer and will also slow the rate of climate change. The rate and degree of future warming could be

profoundly affected by governmental policies on energy conservation, use of fossil fuels, and the emission of greenhouse gases.

The testimony we will hear today will demonstrate that such governmental policies are needed; nationally and on a global basis. The testimony I expect we will hear from Federal agencies tomorrow will be that current government policy is to conduct more research, a familiar refrain from this administration on issues of this type.

What is missing in the Federal effort is action. The problem of global warming brings another round of scientists before us decrying the folly of waiting until it is too late to prevent irreversible damage. In the case of acid rain, research has been offered as a substitute for much-needed action. This policy has produced more bodies of water that cannot sustain life, more trees that are dying, and more people who find it hard to breathe.

The policy has produced more studies, not any meaningful change in policy. I hope these 2 days of hearings will help persuade the administration that inaction has its own costs, almost invariable higher than the cost of action.

I represent a State that already has been affected by acid deposition. I want to do all I can to keep Maine, the rest of our country, and our planet from facing potentially more dramatic environmental damage from global warming. The best

way to avoid these undesirable outcomes is to begin taking action now to prevent further damage rather than spending twice as much time and, later, money repairing damage.