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Industry Campaign to Derail Gov Action on Climate Change

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PULITZER WINNER'S NEW BOOK DOCUMENTS OIL AND COAL INDUSTRY'S
CAMPAIGN TO DERAIL GOVERNMENT ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

WASHINGTON, May 5, 1997 (GP) -- The coal and oil industries have mounted a multi-million dollar misinformation campaign to dismiss the threat of global climate change and derail international action, according to a new book by a Pulitzer prize winning journalist.

In his book, "The Heat is On," published by Addison-Wesley, author Ross Gelbspan says the misinformation campaign has successfully delayed any serious action by governments, despite ten years of warnings from scientists, and increasing evidence that global warming is already having a dangerous effect on weather patterns. The book comes out as international negotiations on a binding treaty to cut greenhouse gas emissions enter a crucial phase in the lead up to a meeting in Kyoto, Japan in December.

Gelbspan writes that a key component of this misinformation campaign has been the use of industry-funded scientists in the

media, government inquiries, and speaking tours. Prominent among these "skeptics" is Dr. Fred Singer, of the Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP), who also publicly disputed the science of ozone destruction. Dr. Singer and other skeptics profiled in the book have received funding from oil giants like Exxon, Shell, ARCO, and Unocal to help paint the scientific community as sharply split over climate science.

"By keeping the discussion focused on whether there really is a problem, these dozen or so dissidents - contradicting the consensus view held by 2,500 of the world's top climate scientists - have until now prevented discussion about how to address the problem," Mr. Gelbspan writes. Mr. Gelbspan notes that few of the skeptics have had their research on climate change, if they have undertaken any, peer reviewed or published in respected scientific journals.

The book reveals that in 1991 a group of power utilities and coal companies hired a public relations firm, which then formed the "Information Council on the Environment." The ICE's stated aim was to "reposition global warming as theory rather than fact." The fossil fuel industries have also formed a lobby group called the Global Climate Coalition, which has aggressively sought to undermine negotiations on a binding treaty to cut greenhouse gases.

ICE's formation came one year after 2,500 of the world's leading scientists, who comprise the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), produced a landmark report on the dangers of global warming. In November 1995, the IPCC repeated its warning, declaring that "the balance of evidence suggests a human influence on global climate." Projected rapid climate change "is likely to cause widespread economic, social and environmental dislocation," the IPCC said. The IPCC went on to say that "potentially serious changes have been identified, including an increase, in some regions, of the incidence of extreme high temperature events, floods and droughts..."

Gelbspan notes that since the early 1990s, the insurance industry has faced skyrocketing losses from more frequent storms and hurricanes. Reflecting a growing concern among insurers, Franklin Nutter, President of the Reinsurance Association of America, said climate change "could bankrupt the industry." He added that all policy holders pay for these losses through higher premiums.

"In the aftermath of the catastrophic Red River flooding, 'The Heat is On' has immediate relevance for the American people and our leaders," said Kalee Kreider, Climate Campaign Director for Greenpeace USA. "It reinforces the need for governments to put the interests of long-term economic and environmental stability before corporate profits."

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Kalee Kreider, Greenpeace USA (202) 319-2523; or Debbie Yautz, Addison-Wesley (publisher), (212) 463-8591.

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