

Gore Calls Bush a 'Moral Coward'

Environmental Policies Decried as Driven by Campaign Funds

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Former vice president Al Gore called President Bush "a moral coward" yesterday for allegedly tailoring his policies on global warming and other environmental and energy matters to benefit his allies in the coal, oil and mining industries.

In a stinging assessment of the president's environmental record, Gore criticized Bush for renegeing on his 2000 campaign pledge to regulate carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas blamed by many scientists for Earth's rising temperature, and for launching a "totally meaningless" voluntary program after disavowing a 1997 international accord negotiated in Kyoto, Japan, that imposed mandatory emissions cuts.

Gore also complained that Bush has appointed many industry lobbyists and lawyers to key policy and regulatory posts, that his administration has "routinely" drafted new regulations that favor industry and that the Environmental Protection Agency has slowed the cleanup of toxic waste sites under the Superfund program.

"While President Bush likes to project an image of strength and courage, the truth is that, in the presence of his large financial contributors, he is a moral coward -- so weak that he seldom if ever says 'no' to them on anything -- no matter what the public interest might mandate," Gore said.

"The problem is that our world is now confronting a five-alarm fire that calls for bold moral and political leadership from the United States," he added, in a speech in New York sponsored by the political advocacy groups MoveOn.org and Environment2004.

Gore's remarks drew quick and sharp rejoinders from the White House as well as from industry and conservative policy groups, which dismissed his rhetoric as alarmist and highly partisan. Gore lost the 2000 presidential election to Bush, though he won the popular vote. He decided not to run again in 2004 and recently endorsed former Vermont governor Howard Dean's bid for the Democratic nomination.

"It's clearly a political speech," said White House spokesman Trent Duffy. "The president is focused on doing the people's business -- winning the war on terror, making our homeland safer and bringing back job growth and a strong economy. He has a very strong environmental record, and I'll just defer on the politics to others."

Myron Ebell, director of global warming policy at the anti-regulatory Competitive

Enterprise Institute, said derisively that "because of his reputation as a boring technocrat, most of the public is still not aware of the loony extent of Gore's green ideology."

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.), who contends that global warming is "a hoax," said that "what this shows is that, at times, emotion, politics, shortsightedness and alarmism can overwhelm objectivity."

Although controversy surrounds research on global warming, a panel of the National Academy of Sciences concluded in June 2001 that it is a real problem caused at least in part by man-made pollution building up in the atmosphere and trapping heat like a blanket. At present rates, the trend could well have a "serious adverse" impact on the climate by the end of the century, the panel said.

Gore repeatedly sought to link industry's campaign contributions to Bush with administration decisions favorable to industry. Utility industry officials were among Bush's biggest fundraisers, and Bush received \$1.9 million in contributions from the oil and gas industry alone in 2000, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

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