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Warming Up to Earth Day

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The thirtieth anniversary version of Earth Day promises protests and celebrations in cities worldwide meant to call attention to environmental challenges. Unlike the planet, whose average temperatures stubbornly refuse to rise to meet the expectations of alarmists with computer models, Earth Day, which doesn't actually happen until April 22, is already warming up in Washington, D.C.

On April 10 environmentalist protesters, trumpeting the message that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund promote global warming by financing development in Third World countries, got media and police attention. Seven protesters, including John Passacantando, executive director of Ozone Action, and Brent Blackwelder, president of Friends of the Earth, were arrested. Some climbed fences and cut razor wire installed to protect the premises of the World Bank from the expected protesters. Others chained themselves to a rental truck used in the protests to block rush-hour traffic and were arrested for resisting police. District police advised merchants to prepare for violence in the week leading up to Earth Day similar to what hit Seattle during the recent protests of World Trade Organization meetings.

Not all the Earth Day observances take the form of protests—violent or otherwise. EarthFair 2000, with festivities in Washington, New York, and many other cities around the world, includes educational activities and concerts. In Washington it will be chaired by actor Leonardo DiCaprio and feature performances by Carole King, Clint Black, Keb'Mo', Indigenous, Sweet Honey and the Rock, Ted Danson, Edward James Olmos, Melanie Griffith, and others. New Yorkers got in early with their own EarthFair on April 16, billed as “a one day environmental theme park filled with music, activities, and interactive exhibits.” No estimates were offered as to the amount of energy used to power the event and transport celebrants to it.

While some Americans might think the mild winter and early spring they've just experienced confirm global warming predictions—and might even like the idea after paying smaller heating bills—the rest of the globe's climate isn't cooperating. Temperature records for the globe as a whole put both January and February below the 1979-1998 mean global average temperature, and the records for the last two decades continue to show insufficient warming trend to be distinguished from natural variability. Winter hit early and hard across Mongolia and northern China. The extraordinarily cold weather and heavy blizzards starting in September wreaked havoc for the 2.4 million Mongolians, mostly nomadic herdsman, killing over 1.4 million head of livestock by late March, with an estimated 300,000 more animals dying each week. With food stocks of dried and frozen meat dwindling there, starvation deaths have begun and the Red Cross predicts more to come.

Meanwhile, the April 4 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* included a major research paper by a team of researchers working under the Congressionally mandated U.S. National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change. The researchers said they “found no conclusive evidence to justify . . . fears” of health hazards related to global warming but instead concluded that “the levels of uncertainty preclude any definitive statement on the direction of potential future change for each of [five categories of] health outcomes.” They added, “Although we mainly addressed adverse health outcomes, we identified some positive health outcomes, notably

reduced cold-weather mortality....”

Not every environment-related event in Washington in the week leading up to Earth Day fit the alarmist mold. The newly formed Interfaith Council on Environmental Stewardship (ICES) (www.stewards.net) released on April 17 The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship, endorsed by Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders as well as scientists, and economists. The Declaration, supported by three major monographs integrating theology, ethics, and science to inform environmental stewardship from the three religious perspectives, asserts that many environmental dangers, including global warming, overpopulation, and species extinction, are badly exaggerated. “Public policies to combat exaggerated risks,” it adds, “can dangerously delay or reverse the economic development necessary to improve not only human life but also human stewardship of the environment. The poor, who are most often citizens of developing nations, are often forced to suffer longer in poverty with its attendant high rates of malnutrition, disease, and mortality; as a consequence, they are often the most injured by such misguided, though well-intended, policies.”

In contrast to the World Bank and IMF protesters the week before, ICES spokesmen emphasized that economic development promotes not only poverty relief but also, by making clean technologies more affordable in developing nations, environmental stewardship. They also claimed that many environmentalist organizations have compromised their credibility by politicizing science and promoting exaggerated, emotion-driven fears and policies. In contrast, they asserted in the Protestant monograph, “our focus is on sound science rooted in a value structure that emphasizes honesty and openness to debate and evidence.” Cornwall Declaration signers Chuck Colson, chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries; Rabbi Daniel Lapin, president of Toward Tradition; Dr. James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family; Father Richard John Neuhaus, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Life; Rev. Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Father Robert A. Sirico, president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty; Bill Bright, president of Campus Crusade for Christ International; Deepak Lal, professor of international development studies at UCLA; Dr. Jane M. Orient, executive director of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons; and Rabbi Jacob Neusner, religion and theology professor at the University of South Florida and Bard College.