

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## **How Important Was Bali?**

Last month, about 10,000 people went to Bali, Indonesia for a two-week meeting to negotiate agreements to curb global warming. Do you wonder why it took so many people to help solve the problem? Probably, about 150 people should have been able to handle all the negotiations. The rest of people were there representing environmental and business groups, analysts, lobbyists, publicists, and demonstrators. Just think about all the carbon dioxide emissions were emitted for this meeting to take place. And why was it so important? The Kyoto Protocol, of which the U.S. is now the only country among 37 industrialized countries that has not committed to it, ends in 2012 and all the nations represented at Bali must decide on how to go beyond that date. The goal of the Bali meeting is to have a new treaty in place by 2009 that will take effect after Kyoto expires.

The most recent report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that the earth cannot tolerate more than a 3 - 5° F. increase in temperature. In order not to exceed this level, the carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced 60 – 80% of the 1990 levels by the year 2050. If you take into account the increase in population by 2050 and the corresponding increase in energy demand, to achieve this reduction is almost incomprehensible.

In order to stay within the 3 - 5° F. increase limitation, it is imperative that all of the major contributors of the carbon dioxide emissions cooperate on how to make the reductions. The real problem today is that the two largest contributors, the U.S. and China, are not willing to participate. The U.S. (Bush administration) is saying that it would be an economic disadvantage for the U.S. to implement the necessary measures to reduce the emissions. The two largest countries, China and India, were not bound by the Kyoto Protocol because it would hinder the economic growth of the countries. Now it is sort of a stand off between the U.S. and China. Each country is stating “why should we curb CO<sub>2</sub> emissions if they don't?”

Another major event relative to global warming that took place last month was the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Al Gore and a group of scientists. Immediately after he received the award, he rode into Bali like the “Paul Revere of climate change” and condemned the Bush administration for trying to undermine the negotiations. Al Gore is so focused on helping solve the climate change issue that, as of today, he is not considering a run for the presidency – but don't count him out. He may feel that it is so critical for the U.S. to take the lead in solving the global warming problem that no other presidential candidate will make it happen. When you stop to think about it, is climate change an issue of any presidential debates?

The position of the current U.S. administration is to make carbon emission reductions voluntary. It is a start, but it will not solve the problem. The only way that any country will meet its commitment to reduce the carbon emissions is to make it mandatory by establishing a cap and trade system. This means that companies would be allowed a certain quantity of emissions and if the company reduces the emissions to a lower quantity, it can trade the difference. The U.S. would like to reduce the consumption of gasoline, and thus oil, but as long as the auto companies continue to sell gas-guzzling SUVs, the consumers will continue to buy them. Everyone should be using compact fluorescent light bulbs rather than incandescent bulbs. Even though they have been available for many years, they have not caught on and they won't until the U.S. bans the sale of incandescent light bulbs. Our government needs to take action. Let's see if the next president and Congress make the right move and take global warming seriously. As Thomas Friedman stated in one of his columns last month, "It's too late for later".

What will all this mean to the consumer in terms of cost? I will discuss this and some alternatives next month.