

The Forum

# 'Day After Tomorrow': A lot of hot air

## Film's faulty science paints global-warming propaganda

By Patrick J. Michaels

As a scientist, I bristle when lies dressed up as "science" are used to influence political discourse. The latest example is the global-warming disaster flick, *The Day After Tomorrow*.

This film is propaganda designed to shift the policy of this nation on climate change. At least that's what I take from producer Mark Gordon's comment that "part of the reason we made this movie" was to raise consciousness about the environment.

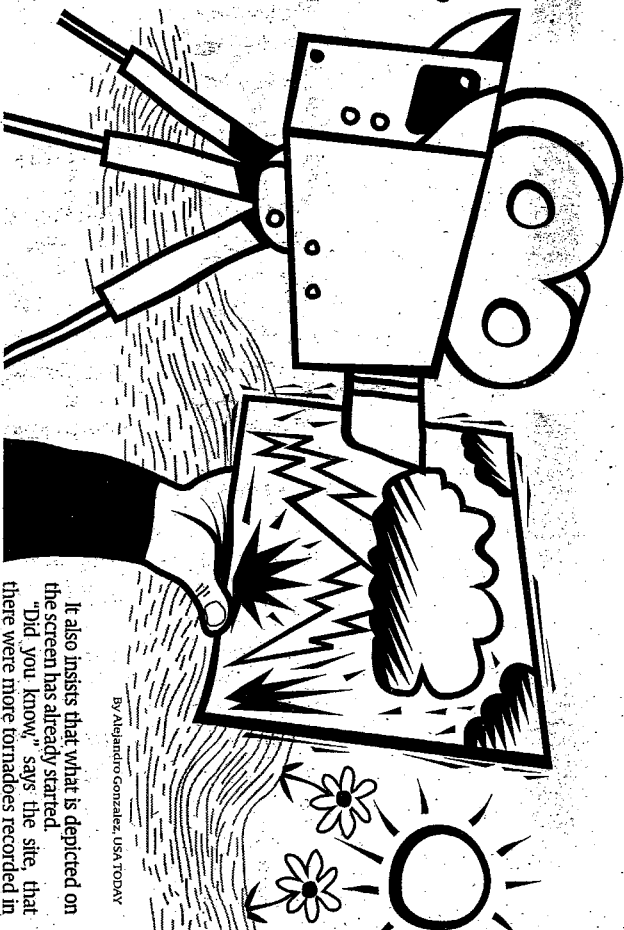
Fox spokesman Jeffrey Godtsick says, "The real power of the movie is to raise consciousness on the issue of global warming."

Nuff said.

Oh, the plot: Global warming causes the Gulf Stream to shut down. This current normally brings tropical warmth northward and makes Europe much more comfortable than it should be at its northerly latitude. The heat stays stuck in the tropics, the polar regions get colder, and the atmosphere suddenly flips over in a "superstorm." The frigid stratosphere trades places with our habitable troposphere, and in a matter of days, an ice age ensues. Temperatures drop 100 degrees an hour in Canada. Hurricanes rage. Belfast folks in Japan are clobbered by bowling-ball-size hailstones. If we had only listened to concerned scientists and stopped global warming when we could.

Each one of these phenomena is physically impossible.

Start with the Gulf Stream. Carl Wunsch, a professor of physical oceanography at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, knows more about ocean currents than most anyone. He thinks the nonsense in *The Day After*



By Alejandro Gonzalez, USA TODAY

*Tomorrow* detracts from the seriousness of the global-warming issue. So he recently wrote in the prestigious science journal *Nature* that the scenario depicted in the movie requires one to "turn off the wind system, or to stop the Earth's rotation, or both."

The stratosphere will become the troposphere when all three laws of thermodynamics are repealed. Hailstones can't reach bowling-ball size because their growth is limited by gravity. Hurricanes can't hit Belfast because the intervening island of Ireland would destroy them.

How do I know so much about a movie that isn't out yet? I've seen the promos, and I've read and reviewed the book upon which it is based, *The Coming Global Shift*, a perform by Art Bell and Whitely Strieber. In Strieber's previous work, *Communion*, he explained that he was told of the Earth's upcoming apocalypse by aliens. And how this knowledge was communicated is much more the purview of an adult Web site than a family newspaper. What's on the movies Web site is worse — nothing but out-and-out distortion.

It also insists that what is depicted on the screen has already started.

"Did you know," says the site, that there were more tornadoes recorded in May 2003 than in any other month?

I looked up federal tornado statistics, and indeed they're going up, and there was a peak in May 2003. Then I determined the number of radar stations and their type. When our first radar-tracking network was established in the 1960s and '70s, the number of tornadoes rose proportionally, then leveled off until the new Doppler radars came online in 1988. It took a decade to put this system in place, and the number of reported tornadoes went up accordingly.

Then I plotted the number of severe tornadoes. If anything, it's going down. So the flashy Doppler radars are merely detecting more weak storms that cause little if any damage.

The Web site also implies that global warming is making hurricanes worse. Christopher Landsea, the worlds most apply named hurricane scientist, has studied the maximum winds in these storms as measured by aircraft and finds a significant decline. Global warming? Some scientists think climate change strengthens El Niño, the large atmospheric oscillation responsible for a variety of weather — both good and bad. El Niños are known to rip apart hurricanes. So it's more likely that climate change is weakening these storms than enhancing them.

Will Godstick and Gordon get their way? They're sure being aided and abetted by MoveOn.org, the liberal advocacy group and billionaire George Soros policy toy. They've got Al Gore front and center, plugging the film. They've got their Web site using the movie to drum up support for legislation by Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions, which only failed by 12 votes last fall. There's a huge drought out West, which a *New York Times* editorial blamed on global warming. The issue is hot enough to influence votes out there.

Remember that humans have slightly warmed the planet some in recent decades, but the correlation between Western drought and warming is zero.

Far be it from me to criticize anyone's freedom of expression. But remember that propaganda can have consequences. McCain's and Lieberman's measure mimics the United Nations infamous Kyoto Protocol on global warming, which many scientists know will do nothing measurable about planetary temperature within the policy-relevant future, but it will cost money.

This isn't Hollywood's first attempt to scare people into its way of thinking. How about Jane Fonda in the 1979 anti-nuclear-power flick, *The China Syndrome*? Twelve days after its release, the accident at Three Mile Island occurred. Despite the fact that it released only tiny amounts of radiation, the politics of that hysteria effectively killed any new nuclear plant.

Analogize the Western drought to Three Mile Island, and you get the idea.

Of how about the 1983 movie *The Day After*, whose purpose was to strengthen the nuclear-freeze movement. It failed.

*The Day After Tomorrow* is only one more day than *The Day After*, and it deserves the same fate. Lies cloaked as science should never determine how we live our lives.

Patrick J. Michaels is senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute and author of the upcoming book, *Meltdown: The Predictable Distortion of Global Warming by Scientists, Politicians and the Media*.