

Kennedy School

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT BULLETIN | HARVARD UNIVERSITY | WINTER 2008

TURNING UP THE HEAT

The Kennedy School addresses climate change

Plus:

**Global
Warning**

John Holdren
sounds the alarm

**Fuel for
Thought**

The case for
biofuels

After Kyoto

A new climate
change treaty

**Outside
the Box**

Innovations in
Government

Growing up Green

SINCE GRAMMAR SCHOOL in Lakeview, New Orleans, Vicki Arroyo MPA 1987 felt drawn to environmental causes. She remembers her concern at that time for the safety of the local drinking water. When she heard of the government's plan to raise water rates, she insisted that her mother bring her to Sewerage and Water Board meetings. Arroyo aimed to challenge the municipality to add additional water treatments to justify the rise in cost.

"I really didn't know anybody who was interested in this," Arroyo said about her youthful peers, "and my family really didn't know where it came from either."

Her passion for the environment became a lifelong agenda. She eventually transitioned from her childhood mission for water quality to her adult pursuits in addressing air pollution and greenhouse gases linked to global warming. Among many accomplished goals, she has developed air toxics standards for both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Environmental Quality in Louisiana and has worked as an environmental lawyer.

After years of working in climate change, Arroyo found herself once again concerned for her hometown. Arroyo welcomed several family members, her mother's 85-year-old friend, and six cats into her 1930s bungalow after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their houses in August 2005.

As director of policy analysis at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change in Arlington, Virginia, Arroyo, 44, acknowledges that factors other than global warming also played a role in the devastation of New Orleans. She attributes the destruction to the weakness of the levees and the erosion of protective wetlands as major contributors. Still, Arroyo affirms the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent assessment of the earth's unequivocal warming trend, with humans as primary culprits.

Arroyo considers climate change possibly the most daunting challenge in the world today. The Pew Center's reports project a rise in global temperatures between 3.2 and 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. "We're seeing consequences of global warming that we did not anticipate," said Arroyo, "and we're seeing them faster than we thought." The rate of loss of ice in Greenland, which will lead to a rise in sea



levels, is occurring faster than scientists can duplicate in their models, she added.

Since 1998, Arroyo has supervised work on the science and impacts of climate change, economics, and policy analysis in her role as head of the Pew Center's domestic policy program. She works closely with the center's director of congressional affairs, Manik Roy MPP 1985, PhD 1989 in supporting the passage of legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Pew Center also works closely with 43 companies that are taking action to reduce their own emissions and promote policy on climate change.

State governments have also targeted emissions. Arroyo views certain governors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger of California as active leaders in combating global warming.

California, the world's 12th largest emitter of carbon worldwide, signed an environmental agreement with Great Britain in 2006, and aims to reduce its greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020.

Yet, even with the efforts of business and state governments, Arroyo said the United States is not on the path to reducing overall emissions. Arroyo sees some impetus for creating national policy, which she considers critical to solving the problem. "The state and business actions are driving interest in Washington," she said, "but I think the momentum is also building because the science is becoming more compelling, and frankly, more scary."

Senators Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut and John Warner of Virginia have proposed a bill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that Arroyo finds promising. "People are watching that one very closely," she said. This bill incorporates the same basic mechanism of earlier cap-and-trade bills, where companies with higher emissions can buy emissions credits from other companies that have surpassed their reduction goals.

Even with policy, Arroyo said, people will still need to adapt. "As I've seen from my own family, we'll likely be facing more weather-related disasters in this country, and in others that are even more vulnerable, so we'll need to prepare and cope." — DPK

Man Bites Planet

News coverage of climate change

Climate change had always been a difficult story to infect with urgency, says Cristine Russell, a former national science reporter for *The Washington Post* and now a senior fellow at the Belfer Center researching media coverage of science.

In the more than three decades since reports on changes in the earth's weather began appearing, stories were often buried deep in science sections, or they were focused on whether the phenomenon was happening at all.

That began to change dramatically in early 2006, according to new research by Russell. Coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* nearly tripled between the first quarter of 2006 and mid-2007 (see chart below). Regional newspapers, national news magazines, and television news programs also showed dramatic increases.

The success of Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, in the spring of 2006 and the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report in early

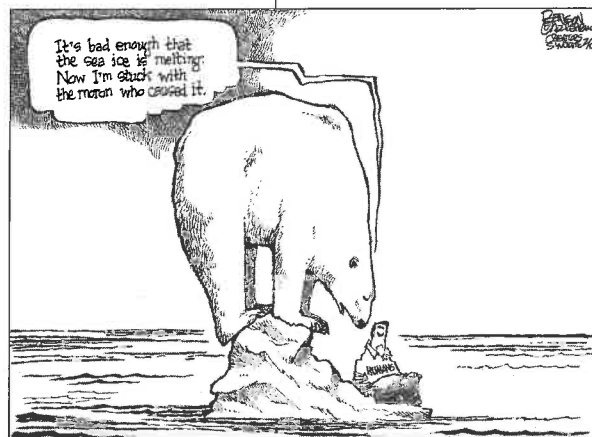
2007 essentially marked the end of the arguments over whether climate change was real and prodded the media to look at the substance of the issue.

"The story jumped out of the science pages," Russell says. And not just onto the front pages — political, business, even travel reporters added new dimensions to the coverage. Striking visual imagery, such as melting polar ice and imperiled polar bears, helped propel coverage in television and news magazines.

The tone of stories also changed. With the realization that changes were already happening, and that others were perhaps not so far off into the future as once thought, coverage was infected with that once elusive sense of urgency.

"It became a story not about whether it was happening, but about why it was happening," Russell says.

Interest appears not to have been temporary, the research shows, and the number of stories continues to remain high. With coverage evolving, Russell speculates, "the next era... will be about what to do about it."



Imagery helped propel media coverage of climate change. Polar bears became a favorite of editorial cartoonists.

