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A Campaign Gore Can't Lose

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By Richard Cohen
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Boring Al Gore has made a movie. It is on the most boring of all subjects -- global warming. It is more than 80 minutes long, and the first two or three go by slowly enough that you can notice that Gore has gained weight and that his speech still seems oddly out of sync. But a moment later, I promise, you will be captivated, and then riveted and then scared out of your wits. Our Earth is going to hell in a handbasket.

You will see the Arctic and Antarctic ice caps melting. You will see Greenland oozing into the sea. You will see the atmosphere polluted with greenhouse gases that block heat from escaping. You will see photos from space of what the ice caps looked like once and what they look like now and, in animation, you will see how high the oceans might rise. Shanghai and Calcutta swamped. Much of Florida, too. The water takes a hunk of New York. The fuss about what to do with Ground Zero will turn to naught. It will be underwater.

"An Inconvenient Truth" is a cinematic version of the lecture that Gore has given for years warning of the dangers of global warming. Davis Guggenheim, the director, opened it up a bit. For instance, he added some shots of Gore mulling the fate of the Earth as he is driven here or there in some city, sometimes talking about personal matters such as the death of his beloved older sister from lung cancer and the close call his son had after being hit by a car. These are all traumas that Gore had mentioned in his presidential campaign and that seemed cloying at the time. Here they seem appropriate.

The case Gore makes is worthy of sleepless nights: Our Earth is *in extremis*. It's not just that polar bears are drowning because they cannot reach receding ice flows or that "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" will exist someday only as a Hemingway short story -- we can all live with that. It's rather that Hurricane Katrina is not past but prologue. In the future, people will not yearn for the winters of yesteryear but for the summers. Katrina produced several hundred thousand evacuees. The flooding of Calcutta would produce many millions. We are in for an awful time.

You cannot see this film and not think of George W. Bush, the man who beat Gore in 2000. The contrast is stark. Gore -- more at ease in the lecture hall than he ever was on the stump -- summons science to tell a harrowing story and offers science as the antidote. No feat of imagination could have Bush do something similar -- even the sentences are beyond him.

But it is the thought that matters -- the application of intellect to an intellectual problem. Bush has been studiously anti-science, a man of applied ignorance who has undernourished his mind with the empty calories of comfy dogma. For instance, his

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insistence on abstinence as the preferred method of birth control would be laughable were it not so reckless. It is similar to Bush's initial approach to global warming and his rejection of the Kyoto Protocol -- ideology trumping science. It may be that Gore will do more good for his country and the world with this movie than Bush ever did by beating him in 2000.

Gore insists his presidential aspirations are behind him. "I think there are other ways to serve," he told me. No doubt. But on paper, he is the near-perfect Democratic candidate for 2008. Among other things, he won the popular vote in 2000. He opposed going to war in Iraq, but he supported the Persian Gulf War -- right both times. He is smart, experienced and, despite the false caricatures, a man versed in the new technologies -- especially the Internet. He is much more a person of the 21st century than most of the other potential candidates. Trouble is, a campaign is not a film. Gore could be a great president. First, though, he has to be a good candidate.

In the meantime, he is a man on a mission. Wherever he goes -- and he travels incessantly -- he finds time and an audience to deliver his (free) lecture on global warming. It and the film leave no doubt of the peril we face, nor do they leave any doubt that Gore, at last, is a man at home in his role. He is master teacher, pedagogue, know-it-all, smarter than most of us, better informed and, having tried and failed to gain the presidency, he has raised his sights to save the world. We simply cannot afford for Al Gore to lose again.

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